

Anna-Lisa Klages



CRAFTING POWER

The Situatedness of Artistic Handicraft
and Civic Engagement in Contemporary Uganda

[transcript] GlobalStudies

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Concurrently Bamberg, Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg, Dissertation, 2024, reviewed by Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Dr. h.c. Annette Scheunpflug and Prof. Dr. Tanja Kleibl, date of defense: December 18th, 2024.

The realization of this dissertation was financially supported through a scholarship granted by the Landeskonferenz der Frauen- und Gleichstellungsbeauftragten an bayerischen Hochschulen (LaKoF Bayern). The field research was sponsored by the Bavarian Academic Forum (BayWISS). The Open Access publication of this book was made possible by the Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt (THI).

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <https://dnb.dn.b.de>



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transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover design: Kordula Röckenhaus

Cover illustration: Anna-Lisa Klages

Printing: Druckhaus Bechstein GmbH, Wetzlar

<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839417553>

Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7878-9 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-1755-3

ISSN of series: 2702-9298 | eISSN of series: 2703-0504

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Für Renate und Heinrich-Albert

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Acknowledgments

Oyita ewala, n'otuuka emirembe.
Go 'round the long way and arrive in safety.
– *Lugandan proverb*

My dissertation trajectory took me 'round the long way of in-depth gathering of material, analysis, and literature study. I am deeply grateful for everyone who has guided, advised, and accompanied me en route. First and foremost, I thank my initial advisors, Tanja Kleibl and Kerstin Pinther for their invaluable feedback, for sharing their knowledge and network with me. Their insights and critical reflections profoundly inspired my analysis and sharpened my senses for social injustices. In addition, major thanks go to Annette Scheunpflug for stepping in with openness, pragmatism, and interdisciplinary expertise – as well as with a critical and empathetic approach to resolving extraordinary circumstances.

I further wish to express my gratitude to the Landeskonferenz der Frauen- und Gleichstellungsbeauftragten an bayerischen Hochschulen (LaKoF) for the scholarship that enabled me to dedicate most of my time to my research. I also thank the Bayerisches Wissenschaftsforum (BayWISS) for funding my field trips to Uganda, and for the organization of important research workshops. My thanks goes to Technische Hochschule Ingolstadt (THI) for financially supporting the OA-publication of my research.

I thank Rachel Washburn for the one-on-one methods-counselling as well as the members of the online Situational Analysis (SitA) working group for the inexhaustible peer-feedback. Furthermore, I wish to thank the peers who worked with me in interpretation and writing groups: Steffen Geiger, Deborah Sielert and Tobias Fitzek, Franziska Neureither, Petra Daňková and Yvette Buist.

My research would not have been possible without the immense hands-on support of colleagues in Uganda. Kizito Maria Kasule opened many doors for me, actively supported the organization of a workshop at MTSIFA gallery. In a similar manner, Bruno Sserunkuuma and Nuwa Nyanzi always welcomed and supported me. My gratitude further goes to Dorothy Wanyamba and Barbra Khoba Loyce, who organized and facilitated my field research in eastern Uganda. I also wish to thank

Jemimah Nabende and Danny Nabende Wamakote for their hospitality and Geofrey Manana for keeping us safe on the road.

I thank everyone who has agreed for me to interview them, especially Suzan Echima¹, Isajah Wandera², and Ahmed Habuya³. I thank Comfort Akunda for the transcriptions, and Emmanuel Nateenya, Sailas Okwairworth, and Michael Naftali for the discussions, support, and friendship.

Last but not least I wish to thank those people who were there when I needed moral support, distraction or both, especially Claudia Ruepp, Lorenz Bitsch, and Melanie Hundhausen. I thank Helen and Marc Hudson for showing me that writing a dissertation can be done without losing sanity. Thank you, Michael, for being there for me.

Der größte Dank gilt meinen Eltern, Renate Weseloh-Klages und Heinrich-Albert Klages. Ihr seid noch jeden Schritt meines Weges mit mir gegangen. Dank Eurer Liebe und Eurer Unterstützung konnte ich diesen vollen Zuversicht und Selbstvertrauen gehen, auch in unsicheren Zeiten. Paso por paso.

1 Last name changed

2 Last name changed

3 Last name changed

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAG	AfriArt Gallery
ARAC	Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industries
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEDAT	College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology
DAPU	Disability Arts Project
DP	Democratic Party
DGS	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie / German Sociological Association
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit / Society for International Cooperation
GT	Grounded Theory
Intl.	International
ITC	International Trading Centre
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KAB	Kampala Art Biennale
KRT	Kasubi Royal Tombs
LC	Local Council
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MTSIFA	Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts
MTWA	Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities
NACCAU	National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association Uganda
NAWOU	National Association of Women's Organisations Uganda

NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIAAD	Naggenda International Academy for Art and Design
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PWH	Philosophy of World History
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Reforms
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SitA	Situational Analysis
UN	United Nations
UNACCA	Ugandan National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association
UNCC	Ugandan National Culture Centre
UNCP	Uganda National Culture Policy
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UTA	Uganda Tourism Association
UTB	Uganda Tourism Board
VcA	Viva Con Agua e.V.
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Preface

Although I did not know it then, the journey of this doctoral thesis research began in January 2016 with my first trip to Uganda. I was an M.A. student at Tel Aviv University then, studying Social Work with specialization in Crisis and Trauma Studies. In addition, only a couple months prior I had begun to work for a socio-cultural organization that considered art¹ to be a catalyst for social change. During this first working trip to Uganda, I met with socially engaged artists and artistic entrepreneurs who were united in their firm belief in the transformative powers of art. In their opinion, art could change societies, eradicate poverty, create identity, and (re-)connect the individuals, families as well as communities with their cultural heritage and nature. All actors involved seemed convinced of the rightness of their endeavors, and although at the time I was not entirely sure what exactly they meant by art bearing the potential to *eradicate poverty* or by art *bringing sustainable and positive social change*, it sounded like something worthwhile investing my energies into.

In the months and years to come I would travel to Uganda regularly, and while I went about my work duties, I began to wonder whether art could keep all those promises and premises that were made in development agendas, by project writers and funders, and by individuals who occupied the space of socially-engaged art. Moreover, I began to recognize a pattern which subordinated artistic activities with and of people recognized as handicraft artisans who were framed as marginalized to the ultimate aim of overcoming poverty and inequality. In other words: art, especially ethnically marked artistic handicraft products, was considered as a catalyst for economic growth, which, according to modernization theory that continues to

1 Throughout this book, the terminology surrounding art will remain what Adele Clarke refers to as a “site of intense controversy and competition for the power to define and use” (Clarke et al., 2018: 75). This book is thus also a testimony of my search for situated concepts of art which resonate with the lessons learned from postcolonial thinkers who emphasize on the importance of empirically grounding concepts in the subjective realities of local conditions. As such, the terms used remain located in their temporality and the socio-cultural and political situatedness of this research. They do not seek to be a reference beyond these conditional particularities.

linger around in the realms of international development, would lead towards social change eventually, but not primarily.

In the logic of modernization theory, then, is not surprising that the responsibilities to bring about change remains with those who already live with the consequences of socio-economic inequality. Those who live in poor and unequal conditions need to work themselves out of poverty (frequently with the initial financial support of foreign well-wishers and their charitable activities that aim to equip them with allegedly needed vocational skills) – almost as if being financially poor was their fault to begin with – and certainly as if staying poor is the consequence of not working hard enough.

It was this prevalence of a single dominant narrative of poverty reduction that made me begin to wonder about the roles and meanings of art forms in Ugandan societies beyond its commodification, particularly for and among those groups and individuals who are considered to be *on the margins* and in need of (economic) empowerment. I further observed that especially those art forms which are conceptualized as “local art” at times, and “traditional” or “indigenous art forms” in other moments, were indeed contested objects, as their symbolic and factual meanings were negotiated with controversy and well beyond the disciplines of art history and anthropology. My motivation to pursue this research thus emerged from two angles: from the scientific angle my wish was to understand and reconstruct the associated meanings of those art objects framed as ethnically marked handicrafts in their local particularities and situatedness. Who shapes the discourse on functions and meanings of artistic handicraft products, how and why were my leading questions that acknowledge that artistic articulation is always political as well. As such, a critical study that considers power imbalances in the negotiation of meaning of (cultural) art objects and practices in the postcolonial realities not only contributes to the ever-growing body of academic knowledge. It also makes a case for the much-needed epistemic diversity and interdisciplinarity of empirical research.

From the practical angle, I was astounded by the lack of critical (self-)reflectivity and contextual work evaluation among development actors involved, who operated in the firm philanthropic belief of doing good. However, many did not interrogate the assumed sustainability of their projects, nor the conceptual assumptions about development, art, and society which underpin their work. In my role as project manager of the previously mentioned socio-cultural organization, I was part of this very system. And the more I questioned, the more I realized how knowledge production in development work – and, in consequence, decision making, authorship and, importantly, financial power – continues to remain with people like me: people from the Global North, who “aid” and “support” development in the Global South.

From a praxeological perspective my research deconstructs the epistemic assumptions that dwell on art in development paradigms and discourses. It further demonstrates how grounding them in the local conditions of artistic production

and meaning making counters the dangers of co-opting art through romanticized, paternalistic, or naïve clichés of rural African life and democratization through economic development, which ultimately hinder homegrown and situated development, and position handicraft artists and their art objects on the margins and in need of philanthropic intervention.

Throughout the research process of this Ph.D. project, I would come to understand that the meaning of those artefacts and their agency is strongly linked to cultural hegemony, questions of power, and subaltern articulation in contemporary Ugandan realities. Initially, though, I had no concept that could facilitate the linkages and interconnectedness between actors, actants, and discourses I encountered and understood to be of significance. However, as I proceeded, my attention was drawn to the civil society arena in which all those actors and actants meet, and to the discursive constructions of those who are referred to as the *communities and individuals in need*; the *master craftspeople* and *custodians of culture* spoken for rather than spoken to, and to their artistic products. This, I realized, was similar to the approach taken by Shelly Errington in *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and other Tales of Progress*. She writes:

It was not the invention of primitive art nor its triumph in the Metropolitan that gripped my attention [...], but what was currently happening, literally and symbolically, to the artifacts and lives of people who occupied the space of the “unmodern”, the space of the “primitive”, the “backward”, the economically and symbolically peripheral, in the nation-state imaginaries that replaced the colonial ones. (Errington, 1998: xvii)

This book is the result of my Ph.D. research. In taking a postcolonial approach to qualitative inquiry, I acknowledge that my understandings of the research situation at hand is inevitably partial. Conducting research from a postcolonial perspective further means taking power relations at all stages of the research process specifically into account: empirically, theoretically, and ethically. First, this includes power relations between and within the actors in my research. Second, it includes hegemonic imbalances in knowledge production which I understand as a result of colonization and the application of western, meaning heteronormative, male, Anglo-European, epistemologies in inquiry that disregard other ways of knowing. Third, it addresses power asymmetries between myself, the foreign female, researcher, Ugandan colleagues from urban Kampala, important gatekeepers whom I depended on during the empirical part of my research, and the many people I met and spoke with, particularly those with whom I could communicate through language translation only. Despite constant reflection, as an individual I cannot overcome these structural asymmetries. But I can avoid reproduction. Therefore, the aim of this research is not to speak for other people on their (assumed) behalf, but to make a case for the

much-needed critical assessment of how development actors engage with a people and their material and immaterial heritage.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Situating Artistic Expression in the Social Spheres

The final *field stay* of my dissertational research took me to what might be considered an unusual place to trace and reconstruct the associated meanings of artistic handicraft production and products in the social spheres of contemporary Ugandan realities. It took me to Venice, and more specifically, to the 59th Venice Biennale, in July 2022. It was the biennale of the inaugural Uganda National Pavilion.

It had been a long journey for the Ugandan visual arts and culture world to reach Venice. Assoc. Prof. Dr. George Kyeyune, artist and art historian from Makerere University, associates this long challenging journey with the lack of a local pre-colonial history of fine arts, sculpture, and masks of today's Uganda. During his online presentation at the *Kolloquium zur Kunst Afrikas* at the Free University in Berlin in June 2021, Kyeyune refers to this as one of the major reasons for the challenges of contemporary Ugandan art establishing itself in the international art world today – it is not rooted in local histories (notes from 01/06/2021). While his position is debated with controversy in the Ugandan art world, the curator of the third edition of the Kampala Art Biennale 2018 (KAB18), Simon Njami, proposed a master/apprentice format¹ “to allow for the transmission of artistic skill from international contemporary art masters to young Ugandan, East African and African artists” (KAB, 2018: n.p.), which reinforces Kyeyune's observations of the beforementioned challenges. None of the invited masters of KAB18 were Ugandan artists or artists from the Ugandan diaspora².

For a long time, visual arts from Uganda seemed not *relevant enough* – not for the international art world, nor for the president and his government (one of the motives

1 For a critical reflection on the curatorial conceptual decisions and its lack of finding responses to the political and social realities in contemporary Uganda and the concept of “master” in locally situated realities, see What is a “master”?— Critiquing the conceptual and political framework of the Kampala Art Biennale (KAB18) by curator and art critic Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh (2018).

2 This changed for the subsequent – due to the pandemic virtual – KAB20, which maintained the master/apprentice format was kept, but now also included a Ugandan master: sculptor Lilian Mary Nabulime.

of KAB18 was to demonstrate the relevance of art to the Ugandan government). The decision in favor of a National Pavilion in Venice thus came as a surprise, as Gloria Kiconco describes:

The announcement that Uganda would stage its inaugural pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale didn't land in Kampala, Uganda's capital, with a fanfare. It tickled through the arts scene like a rumor, like a question. A Uganda pavilion still seemed years away. The visual arts community has spent much of the last eight years trying to legitimize Uganda as a cultural producer, largely in response to the president's public dismissal of the entire field as 'useless' – a sentiment echoed by international curators and cultural actors. [...] [I]t took a while to sink in: Uganda had secured a pavilion at the biennale. (Kiconco, 2022: n.p.)

The initial concept of a “collateral event by Ugandan artists and cultural actors in the country and in the Diaspora” (ibid) could not be realized due to a lack of funding and support for the artists. In search of alternative concepts, Shaheen Merali, who initially had been one advisor to the organizers, became the curator of the exhibition. In its final design, it presented the works of two artists: Collin Sekanjugo and Acaye Kerunen.

Now I was in Venice, which is a curious starting point for a dissertation that claims to be written from a postcolonial perspective. I will get to that. I had come to Venice for this: human-sized sculptures, collages, and installations, stitched together, woven, and coiled from sisal, papyrus, raffia, and dried banana leaves (see images 1.1 through 1.5). I had come to see mats and baskets, round trays, and other artistic handicraft and everyday objects I had become so familiar with over the course of this dissertational research. The exhibition titled *Radiance, They Dream in Time* “is an array of artwork in which the placement of the works softens the gaps between craft and fine art traditions” (Merali, 2022: 11), Shaheen Merali writes in the exhibition catalogue. He then continues to inform us that “[b]oth artists’ works are placed within reach of their promise as a universal language, stirring imaginations of a regenerative culture. [...] [Their] organizing principles serve as a common tool through which personal and communal social status are explored” (ibid). This is, he affirms, highly needed. For, in spite of sixty years of (international) development work which produced countless experts and expertise, the work as such and with it the development concept altogether, remains “somewhere between a goal and an inquiry, caught between many philosophical perspectives” (ibid: 11). Despite the expertise on development, according to Sherali, it remains unclear what it includes, when it is needed, how it can be facilitated and achieved best.

In postcolonial Uganda, the question of art versus craft, which particularly Acaye Kerunen seeks to transcend, is closely interwoven with the question of development as well as ecological sustainability. In its political dimension its importance stretches

far beyond the question of the classification of art forms. Historically, wickerwork in forms of basketry and mat making, both woven and coiled, have been technically sophisticated and of significance in what make today's Uganda and its people (Trowell, 1937). The techniques and skills applied differentiated between everyday objects used e.g., for storage, representational artefacts for the demonstration of hospitality (e.g., in form of special mats and trays), and symbolically laden objects used in non-Christian and Islamic worship. Accordingly, wickerwork was both: an everyday and in-between activity carried out at home by family members without particular training, and a highly specialized art practice by master crafts artists who had undergone intensive training (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). Nowadays, the rich knowledges and traditions concerning wickerwork in Uganda have become the point of interest of many development initiatives by western-style and/or foreign-led NGOs, socially engaged artists and actors of the tourism industry. In their distinct ways they all seek to promote wickerwork as a strategy of promoting the indigenous visual arts of Uganda, empower marginalized individuals (especially women) and make development more sustainable by emphasizing the use of organic raw materials. In doing so, they foster particular forms of meaning-making associated with wickerwork products: one that Acaye Kerunen, whose work I have come to see in Venice, associates with a "white tourist gaze" (Merali, 2022: 15).

For her artwork, Acaye Kerunen works with a female wickerwork group, whose perspectives and narrations she finds frequently abandoned in "the native [meaning men-dominated] privilege that resurfaced after independence" (ibid: 15). Kerunen considers her art as a feminist practice and understands that the artistic activities in the group are moments during which the women she works with engage in conversation, singing or chanting. Furthermore, as they share and listen to one another, their lived experiences shape the stiches and knots they make. In doing so, she argues, their experiences are encoded into their artworks. By relating to their narratives, Kerunen then "deconstructs the carefully woven spatial and visually complex objects to recreate uncompassionate collages, sculptures, and wall-based installations. [...] [She] challenges the taken-for-granted nature of the historical and contemporary place of work by women in Uganda" (ibid: 15).

The social, intersectional dimensions of artistic work, the hierarchization of forms of artistic articulation expressed in the continued debate of arts versus crafts, artistic activities related to gender roles and the question of art objects becoming tourist art made to please the aesthetic expectations of a foreign gaze are among the issues Kerunen addresses in her artwork. Interestingly, and possibly also a consequence of a purposefully inductive research design, these issues are among the predominant issues that emerged in my research as well.

Not all elements positioned by Kerunen in her artwork emerged as equally important in my research. My own empirical material, for example, suggests that the issue of *ecological sustainability* in artistic handicraft production must be considered

with great care and differentiation. Not every (wo)man I met was concerned with the naturalness of the raw material he or she was working with. Rather, my research findings suggest that the need for objects to be ecologically sustainable responds to a hegemonic imagination of African authenticity that romanticizes about the supposed naturalness of *'things African'* fused with a rather recent urban ecological consciousness. Among several independently organized handicraft groups for example, polythene materials were preferred over papyrus, sisal, or cane fiber, because of their durability, their haptics, and the aesthetics of their glossy and neat surfaces.

Yet, in its own particular ways, my research resonates with Kerunen's installations, sculptures and collages, with their fragmented pieces, disrupted narrations, and deconstructed promises of economic development through artistic handicraft production. Both my research and Kerunen's art use mapping as an analytical and strategic tool for the visualization of the messy, fragmented, and patched arts-handicraft landscape. Albeit from different angles, positions, and by different means, both tell us of the many meanings of artistic handicraft products and production for cultural, social, political, and paradigmatic development in Uganda. This is particular true for the wall collages Kerunen creates (images 1.3 through 1.5) in which she regards

[A]rt and craft [as] co-exist[ing] to provide a strategic way to map the here as Uganda, a writing as Ugandans [...]. She liberates craft objects by providing a rich transitional surface in which she manages to discuss differences with political meaning including Uganda's history; its stories about borders and women, its smart responses to climate change and its part in East African tribal cultures and languages. This allows the audience to re-interpret not only the long-established artisan expertise of women weavers from Uganda, but also the place of labour within the craft tradition. (Merali et al., 2022: 28–29)

Kerunen's art is a political manifest in which deconstructed artistic handicraft objects become agents in "crafting and mapping outside of the limits of whiteness" (ibid: 29). They purposefully refuse to surrender to the commodification strategies that dominate development agendas and denote the social and political dimension of handicraft production. Kerunen's artistic critique addresses this important issue and emphasizes the importance for empirically grounded knowledges that not only demonstrate the limits and dangers of strategies that subsume everything under the question of its potentials for economic growth, much as I did throughout my research trajectory. By doing so, she and I, although by different means, seek to expand the debate that negotiate meanings of art, civil society, and development situated in local perspectives and realities.

Image 1.1: Artworks from Kerunen Acaye at the Inaugural National Uganda Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale. Mixed materials.



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Image 1.2: Kakare, Acaye Kerunen: 2021. Palm leaves, banana fiber, raffia, stripped reed stems, winnowing tray, harvest baskets and serving trays.



© Anna-Lisa Klages, Uganda National Pavilion, 59th Venice Biennale, 26/07/2022

Image 1.3: Banange, Acaye Kerunen: 2021. Banana fiber, chisel, barkcloth.



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Venice Biennale, 26/07/2022

*Image 1.4: Detail from Banange, Acaye Kerunen:
2021.*



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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, episodic, 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 western³. 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*

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 post-colonial 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 handcraft 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 post-colonial 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-making⁴ – 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 (Akínrinádé, 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 monarchical 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,

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; Oduisa 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 Nkrumahist 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 collective 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, in which discourses, elements and human as well as non-human actors and actants partake in this construction. At the same time, I wanted

to know who is being excluded from this process, how those excluded understand and relate to the situation, and how scientific knowledge production relates to processes of inclusion and exclusion. The ultimate aim of my research is to contribute to the decolonization of knowledge production; both, in theory and in practice.

With this I return to the two angles of motivation that pursued me to conduct this research in the first place: from the academic perspective I aim to empirically reconstruct how theoretical knowledge production is shaped by particular discourses, actors, and actants who willingly or unknowingly favor particular positions and ideas over alternative, minoritized yet equally important perspectives. In doing so, I argue for the need of epistemic diversity in academic work, which acknowledges its disciplinary partiality in spite of its interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, the case studies of my research demonstrate some of the mechanism currently at work in international development that often operate based on assumptions rather than on empirically grounded indicators.

From the praxeological perspective, my research serves as an example of how well-intended interventions can shape artistic practices and their associated meanings among the various actors. It further shows how those associated meanings travel and are, at times, reproduced even in places where other forms of meaning making prevail. Much as international development agendas shape and inform the artistically oriented development actors and practices, local perspectives and associated meaning making too frequently remain overseen and overheard. The praxeological aim of this study is to visibilize the dynamics that dominate in the research situation, which continue to neglect the situated roots of artistic practices and as such hinder the possibilities of epistemic and practical decolonization. It is a plea for critical reflectivity, which in the realm of development work by and large continues to focus on the *other* rather than on the self.

Having chosen for an inductive-abductive research approach and to work from a power sensitive perspective, I needed to remain open, flexible, reflective, and curious at all times. I thus developed the focus of my study over time and based on my earlier empirical findings, which I used to generate more questions. Those new questions and insights then directed the subsequent field stays and the subsequent in-depth analysis of gathered data.

What stayed throughout was the objective of reconstructing the linkages between nowadays endogenous and culturally associated forms of contemporary visual artistic articulation and socio-political alterations situated in the postcolonial realities of Uganda in the 21st century. Therefore, the final research question that guided my inquiry reads:

How is contemporary artistic handicraft production situated in Ugandan civil society?

Alongside this main research question, I developed a set of sub-question that helped me to stay focused on a number of issues / aspects / elements of particular

importance in my research situation broadly conceived. Hence, these sub-questions, too, are the result of a lengthy iterative research process marked by the processuality of inductive data gathering and analysis to more focused and at times deductive triangulation, further interviewing and gathering of secondary data and succeeding analysis. They are as follows:

- 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?

By addressing, discussing, and finding (partial) answers to the research questions, my aim was to critically examine the role of contemporary artefacts and the production processes thereof, which are often addressed representing traditionality or ethnicity (or both). By analyzing their agency and production processes I ask whether they should, rather, be also conceptualized as intimate and vital elements of living for the people who make them but also for those who use them in everyday living, in worship, in rituals and ceremony, as well as for aesthetic pleasure. By analyzing how so-called development actors transform artefacts into souvenir art, I aim to reconstruct the dichotomy that limits both; the consideration of the objects for their artistic, cultural and social value from a critical perspective, and the expansion of the debate on endogenous forms of civil society by considering the agency in doing civil society beyond pre-set boundaries of state and public realm through the consideration of the many spaces in-between, some of which include art making.

In light of the increase in and multiplicity of global crises, with this dissertation I re-emphasize on the importance of situated understandings of the meanings of creative articulation beyond the premises of growth and prosperity for all, beyond depoliticized notions of humanitarian aid through empowerment, and the (re-)primitivization of a people and their forms of visual articulations that limit both: the academic theoretical and epistemological knowledges of art in development and development practice that too frequently reproduces – albeit unknowingly and unwillingly – power imbalances and dependencies and hinders the actual development of homegrown solutions, interventions and, importantly, failures, and as such decolonization.

1.3 Book Outline

This dissertation is composed of three parts. Part one includes the in-depth literature studies on the history of art in Uganda and civil society in the African Postcolony with an emphasis on civil society debates in Uganda. In the former, I particularly emphasize on the role of Margaret Trowell for early understandings and conceptualizations as well as collections and archiving of Ugandan art. In doing so I dwell on the challenges of doing justice to art from Africa without reproducing the colonial heritage that dominated the discourse on the understandings of artefacts and art objects from Africa as objects of spirituality or fetish that represent the primitivity and naturality of western imaginations of authentic African life. Therefore, at the beginning of chapter two I discuss the terms and wordings I use, and how I understand them in my research, before I move on to a more detailed description of art in Uganda during the colonial era, at the time around independence, during the years of dictatorship as well as the re-discovery of pre-colonial roots for inspiration and local materials to use for contemporary art in Uganda today. In closing chapter two, I then focus particularly on artforms outside the realm of 'professional' art, which I have already introduced as frequently being referred to as crafts, handicrafts, cultural crafts, or indigenous art interchangeably, and some of their social, practical and political functions as well.

Chapter three is dedicated to civil society, its current conceptions, and discourses, inclusive of the demands to decolonize and endogenize civil society to the particularities of contemporary African realities. It discusses prevalent strands and trends in civil society in Africa vis-à-vis dominant notions in Uganda, before turning on a brief elaboration on the origins of the concept, its theoretical, cultural, and political underpinnings, and thus to the controversies involved when exporting and re-applying it to foreign conditions. It proceeds with a literature review of empirical studies on civil society in Uganda and introduces the conceptualizations of civil society used in this study, in which civil society is understood as political space embedded in complex relationships shaped by power. In this sense, it is neither necessarily associated with democratization, nor does it necessarily always promote progressive ideas.

The succeeding and final chapter of the first part of this dissertation is chapter four, in which I engage in an in-depth discussion on the epistemological and methodological approaches, the research design and process. I elaborate on the sampling strategies, methods of gathering data, analysis and interpretation as well as on quality criteria. Furthermore, I explain the "theory/methods package" (Clarke et al. 2018: 24) of Situational Analysis according to Adele Clarke (2005), and its further developments by Adele E. Clarke, Carrie Friese and Rachel Washburn (2015, 2018; 2022). Although the reflections regarding my own positionalities as a researcher reappear throughout this dissertation, in chapter four I address and

reflect on this matter explicitly. In closing chapter four, I turn towards the limitations of this research, which, among other things, are indeed related to my own situated positionality, challenges regarding on-site translations and the COVID-19 pandemic, which broke out during my last field stay in Uganda.

The following three results chapters form the second part of this dissertation. The first results chapter presents the main collective social actors (which, with Clarke et al. I refer to as social worlds, and I elaborate on this in chapter 4.4.1) and their understandings of artistic handicraft work and products. As I demonstrate in chapter five, while most social worlds have a broad consensus of what artistic handicraft work and products *mean*, there exist also contestations as well as contradictions in the framings of and discourses regarding the meaning making of artefacts, the artists who make them and their work.

After having provided a more thorough generalized introduction to the situation of inquiry, its main social worlds, invisibilized actors and dominant discourses in chapter five, in chapter six I then focus on the NACCAU, the first case study. Through the in-depth analysis of how social worlds and dominant discourses inform the work, self-understandings, and positionalities of the association, I exemplify how local organizational actors can be both; co-opted by internationalized, neo-liberal notions of commodification of artistic handicraft work in its outward orientation, and a space for mutual support, contestation, negotiation and nuanced differentiation its inward orientation. By displaying the positionality of the NACCAU I reconstruct it as an association ‘in-between’; on the one hand it is dependent on structural support and foreign customers and thus needs to submit to their agendas, aesthetic and economic expectations. On the other hand, its members criticize and seek to oppose those very dependencies through building alliances facilitated by artistic products, which allow for different meanings to be associated with artistic handicrafts and the artists who make them.

With chapter seven I leave the urban spaces alongside the dominant discourses and international(ized) social worlds. I introduce two independent handicraft art groups in rural Eastern Uganda. In this chapter, I focus on the groups’ work and with how, according to my analysis, they derive meaning from it. Their associated meaning making ranges from a “generational responsibility” that enables a rite of passage from boyhood into manhood and introduces young men as prospect political and cultural leaders of the community and husbands who demonstrated their braveness to conviviality (Nyamnjuh, 2017a, 2018). Francis B. Nyamnjuh understands conviviality as the recognition of being incomplete, whereby individuals and groups embrace this incompleteness, which encourages them to reach out to others and to jointly explore ways of complementing one another with the aim of making each other more “efficacious” (ibid 2017: 341) in relationships and sociality – without ever aiming at completion. I close this chapter with the argument that in spite of organizational and structural differences as well as their differences in objective formulation, both

groups introduced here in more detail could be reconstructed and recognized as local civil society actors who use the agency of their artwork to push forward their explicitly or implicitly articulated agendas.

The conclusion marks the final part of this dissertation. It includes a return to the major findings of the empirical analysis and a discussion in the light of locally grounded conceptions of civil society, the meta-narrative of development as well as the need for homegrown conceptions and pluridisciplinarity in meaning making of artistic articulation; be it in the private, the semi-public, or public spaces. Finally, by zooming out of the particular situatedness of the research at hand, implications that move beyond the findings of this research are addressed.

1.4 Theory and Methodology

Introduction to Theory and Methodology

This dissertation builds on a number of theoretical and methodological assumptions that frame and situate the epistemological perspectives I applied throughout the research trajectory. As beforementioned, it is grounded in critical thoughts informed by postcolonial perspectives. These bear three major epistemological assumptions, and all fundamentally inform this research. The first assumption is that colonial hegemony sustained and sustains to exist even after the formal ending of the colonial period. Postcolonial theories acknowledge that colonial historie(s) are closely interwoven with global power imbalances that continue to feed the mechanisms of exploitation of people of the so-called Global South (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006b, 2018; Mbembe, 2001, 2021; McEwan, 2019; Quintero and Garbe, 2013). Second, influential postcolonial works such as *Orientalism* (1994 [1978]) by Edward Said and *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasize how the formerly colonized *Others* are constructed within the frameworks created by the Anglo-European West. In a critical discussion of the term *Colonialism*, John L. and Jean Comaroff (2018) disclose the differences between colonialisms overseas, but also refer to the similarities with the rural and peasant population in the home countries of the colonizers (ibid). The periphery, which was established by the aristocracy to be able to consider itself the center, was applied abroad as well, and since the *Enlightenment* era extended to racialization in the colonies, colonized people were denied their histories, their societal and educational systems, their aesthetic taste, their religious beliefs, and their ways to make sense of the world and all things living upon it (ibid). In the process of their subjectification (Foucault, 1982), the formerly colonized *Others* were and continue to be discursively constituted into subjects by Anglo-American perceptions of truth, which frame the possibilities and boundaries of

articulation (Chakravorty Spivak, 1988) and space of subjection assigned to those individuals and groups (Barry, 2020: 95; Foucault, 1982).

I elaborate on these assumptions (as well as others) and their implications for my research further on in chapter 4, as they bear consequences for the design and the theoretical chapters two and three to follow. While I sought to consider multiple perspectives and voices that display the current theoretical debates and discourses in their complexities, I also acknowledge that my own concepts to make sense of the world around me shape the interpretation and presentation of the literature discussed. In acknowledging that all knowledge is always partial (Clarke et al., 2018) and always situated (Clarke et al., 2018; Haraway, 1988), therefore, I also acknowledge that albeit ongoing (self-)reflexivity and ethical considerations throughout the entire research trajectory, the positionality of myself as a researcher inevitably impact the defined relevance of the literature discussed and the concepts considered important. Spivak (1988), too, concluded that being aware of these structures and processes of inequality she refers to as *epistemic violence*, which favors some theorizations and disregards other forms of knowledge, does not prevent anyone from committing it. Rather, conducting research necessarily includes the conduction of epistemic violence in one way or another.

Chapter 2: Art, History, and Terminology

2.1 Introduction

Artistic Articulation in Uganda

The following chapter takes the empirical situation as the departure point for the theoretical discussion. After briefly introducing the current discourse on the meanings of art and craft in Uganda (chapter 2.1), the first part of the chapter begins with the elaboration on the establishment of the art school at Makerere College by Margaret Trowell (chapter 2.2), which marks the starting point of formal – and as such westernized – art education in Uganda (Kyeyune, 2003). The second part then emphasizes the nexus of artistic articulation, politics and (civil) society in Uganda (chapter 2.3). Here, I zoom out of the Ugandan context and discuss the Cultural Turn in international development and its consequences for the funding, framing and perception of art, especially in countries of the Global South. In the concluding part of this chapter (chapter 2.4), I zoom in again to the Ugandan particularities and discuss the implications of the literature discussion for this research project. I discuss this notion against the backdrop of Margaret Trowell's colonial heritage of reading and framing of art in Uganda. In keeping a critical perspective, I close the chapter by leaving the dominant strands of meaning making of artistic handicraft products. Instead, I turn towards the synthesis of art objects and social practices with civil society (Wendl, 2012), thereby marking the transition to chapter three.

The Question of the Meanings of 'Art'

Jointly with fellow artists and scholars from the Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School (ARAC), Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa and colleagues were unable to identify a “single indigenous African language apart from Arabic that contains any words which can be used to translate the English word ‘art’” (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019b: 32). The word *art* and the concept of what art entails, they conclude, does not have a pre-colonial history in most African contexts. In their view this, however, does not mean that artistic expressions did not occur. Rather, its conceptualizations

and associated meaning making differed so much from the theoretical assumptions about art in European language, that using foreign terms remains an ill-match.

In a similar tone, Suzanne Preston Blier (2018) writes about how “core design features of African forms” (87) have a longstanding history of being imbued with larger sociopolitical features. African forms, whereby Preston Blier refers to clothing, jewelry, furniture, housing, or religious paraphernalia, thus “merge a range of values” (ibid). Approaching African art from the design components within the “larger African milieu”, she continues, enables researchers, curators, artists and connoisseurs to see African art in the larger discourse, as a site of “ongoing individual and societal engagement, a liminal site of empowerment and play that addresses an array of political, moral, and other considerations” (Preston Blier, 2018: 89).

While their observations are similar, the conclusions Preston Blier and Wolukau-Wanambwa draw from their findings differ. Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, alongside colleagues from the “Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School” emphasize that the terms art, art education and art history themselves cannot be denied their epistemological and conceptual groundings in European thought. The members of Another Roadmap School self-describe their work as a decolonial-project, which seeks to “de-naturalise the imposed exogenous vocabularies that are used to frame and hence to control creative expressions and their respective pedagogies in certain post-independence contexts, so as to create spaces where structural (i.e. epistemological) transformations might take place” (ibid, 2019b: 32; Wolukau-Wanambwa and Muwanguzi, 2015). They propose to cease the use of the word art, and opt to use the term “symbolic creative expression” instead (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019b: 32).

Unlike this approach taken from Wolukau-Wanambwa and colleagues, Preston Blier dwells on the multiple meanings of words that describe art and design to point towards the importance of considering related terms and concepts for the analysis of artefacts and their designs. She exemplifies this by referring to the Yoruba language, and shows how African languages possess an array of words that refer to aesthetic and design elements rather than to pictorial indications.

[T]he term *ọ̀nà* not only means ‘design’, ‘pattern’, ‘shape’, and ‘art’, but is also used to reference artistic embellishment, ornamentation, and beauty (Adepegba 1991). The same term, *ọ̀nà*, is also found in the term for ‘artist’, *ọ̀lọ̀nà*, as well as for specific groups of the later— leather workers and embroiderers among these. The Yoruba have a further array of other terms that convey notions of design. One such term to mean design is *ìrò*, ‘imagination’ [...]. Another design-linked term is *ìmò*, ‘knowing’— specifically, that which one experiences firsthand, with one’s own eyes. A related word, *ìtùmò* (*ìtù ìmò*), evokes the unwrapping of (encoded) knowledge. (Preston Blier, 2018: 91)

Here, design is related to imagination and to forms of knowing, which are embedded into the roots of the words used to describe design. The Kiswahili word for design – *kubuni* – also refers to improvisation and invention, which, according to Preston Blier further emphasizes the linkages to the importance of imagination in design work (ibid). Knowledge about incorporated design patterns in pre-colonial African societies was reserved for key members of society, and at times continue to be accessible to cultural leaders and community elders only even today.

In Uganda, dominant concepts of art and formal art education are closely tied to colonial education; by and large through the work of Margaret Trowell, who was a British art educator, missionary, and founder of the first formal art school in tertiary education in East Africa. If the language of art, art education and art history are closely connected to the colonial era, then, consequently, power-sensitive must also consider the hegemonial power of language. Achille Mbembe (2021) argues for the need to *rethink Africa*, by which he means “to write the world from Africa or to write Africa into contemporary social theory” (28). For with decolonization, he argues, it became necessary to “detach oneself from the mental frames, aesthetic discourses, and representations that the West had used to put a stranglehold on the idea of future” (ibid: 44). To do so, Mbembe says, it is necessary to “rehabilitate endogenous forms of language and knowledge” (ibid: 44).

Thus, the word *art*, particularly in a postcolonial situation of inquiry, remains highly contested and at times problematic. And yet, Kerstin Pinther (2022) warns to reduce artefacts to mere evidence of colonial injustices. A reflective and contemporarily relevant history of art in Africa should, according to Pinther, “aim to take the historical and conceptual context of artistic production as a starting point” (32, my translation), which includes the application of adequate art-historical vocabulary. This cannot occur without critically assessing and replacing the coloniality of the artefacts’ original assumptions, but also not without considering them

as created works, as art, as archive and memory, as example of locally situated aesthetics and cultural practices and to be thought through all of their intrinsic complexities and mobilities and hence to be conceptualized through the sum of their potential meanings.” (Pinther, 2022: 32, my translation)

But what makes art-historical vocabulary adequate? – Throughout the trajectory of this dissertational research, I meandered around the labyrinth of terms, seeking to find the most adequate terminology that would be precise enough to convey the complex and multilayered meanings of the objects I was discussing in a relatable way. From using the term *art*, I shifted towards *visual culture* and, succeeding, to *material culture*. While both terms, material- and visual culture, and the conceptualizations of creative and artistic expression they refer to, in and by themselves criticize the more rigid boundaries of the always contested concept art (Evans, 2010), they re-

mained unable to capture the aesthetic language, social, and political meanings of the handicraft objects that were becoming the focus of my research.

Initially I had been reluctant to use the term *craft* or *handicraft* with the aim of not reproducing a hierarchy between and among different forms of artistic expression – namely those art objects indigenous to what today is known as Uganda and other art objects that were not (Kyeyune, 2003). Eventually, and as a consequence of the inductive-abductive design of my research, I began to use the vocabulary that the people who participated in my research used – only to find that there was no coherence either. Rather, it appeared that the terminology and hence concepts applied depended heavily on the situated conditions in which they were used as well as on how (and whether at all) people identified with the art objects. During the interviews, the round-table discussions and in ethnographic conversations, *art* sometimes included so-called indigenous forms of creative visual cultural expression. At other times it included the performing arts, whereby the performative was convivial to the visual and both ephemeral rather than permanent.

The literature on art in Uganda suggests that, indeed, boundaries between the artforms are often artificial in regional contexts, particularly when referring to local art forms also referred to as indigenous (e.g., Kakande, 2006; Kasfir and Förster, 2013; Kyeyune, 2003; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Pinther, 2022). As described above, experts, scholars, and practitioners describe *art* simultaneously as colonial heritage and as endogenous. Some emphasize the importance to include handicrafts and spiritual practices as well as everyday objects into the definition of *art* (e.g., Kasozi, 2019; Kekimuri, 2019; Nakazibwe, 2005; Trowell, 1937, 1957), while others, particularly in recent years and from a broader perspective with regard to regionality, subsume all forms of creative expression under the terms creative and/or cultural industries (e.g., De Beukelaer, 2017; Jones et al., 2015; Oakley and O'Connor, 2015a).

In their decolonization project, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa and colleagues of the “Another Roadmap School” agreed to aim to use the term “symbolic creative expression” (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019b: 32) instead of the word *art* as it is, they argue, more inclusive to many forms of artistic articulation. Because of this inclusiveness, however, at times it is too broad to grasp specific contents of importance for the reconstruction and analysis of the situation of inquiry. Therefore, throughout this book, I will use the terms used by the protagonists of my research, especially when terms in the empirical situation of inquiry indicate positionalities, respond to discourses, or assign roles to groups and individuals. I will do as such both in the theoretical and empirical chapters. Wherever needed, I will critically discuss those terms to not reproduce (colonial) injustices to artistic work. For it is not by accident that the creators of artistic handicraft products in the situation of inquiry are referred to as *producers*, *business people*, *professionals*, *craftspeople*, *master craftspeople*, or even as *custodians of culture*, but hardly ever as *artists*, unless in theoretical academic debates (see also chapter 6 and 8).

2.2 The Establishment of Formal Art Education

Margaret Trowell and the School of Fine Arts

Sometimes I have visited a bush school and asked the teacher what crafts are being taught here, and he has proudly led me in to watch a drawing class at work. Rows of small black urchins [sic] sit huddled together on benches, each with his small slate and squeaking pencil; some with furrowed brow and tongue thrust hard against cheek strive desperately to copy from the board a queer conglomeration of lines labelled 'BOX'; others have obviously given up and have lost interest in this queer pastime. I have no interest in it either; I want to see carving, basketwork, or the rich patterns with which the African knows so well to decorate his shields and stools. But when I ask for these, I am told almost contemptuously that the children do not come to school to learn that; they come to learn the skill of the European. (Trowell, 1937: 2–3)

The quote above is from Margaret Trowell's book *African Arts and Crafts. Their Development in the School* from 1937. It was the same year in which she founded the School of Fine Arts in the Uganda Protectorate of the then British Empire. To me, it serves as a prime example of the ambivalence with which Trowell is regarded nowadays from a critical, postcolonial perspective by artists and scholars from Uganda and abroad alike (Kakande, 2006; Kyeyune, 2003; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Pinther and Weigand, 2018; Preston Blier, 2018; Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a). In *African Arts and Crafts* and subsequent publications on African and Ugandan crafts (e.g., 1936, 1957, 1960; Trowell and Wachsmann, 1953), Trowell stressed the aesthetic and artistic value of everyday objects and artefacts and sharply criticized the *common Englishman* (and, more generally, the common European at the time, I wish to add), who was not appreciative of forms of art outside the normative framework known to him or her. In 1937, his/her taste, according to Trowell, was dominated by three elements: "beauty of form, accuracy of observation, and the appeal of the picture to our inner feelings" (Trowell, 1937: 20). With other words, art was supposed to realistically represent its subject, and to be harmonic in its composition. She further remarks that the majority of art consumers at the time were unable "to understand and enjoy the works of art of another race [sic]" (ibid: 18), for it required an openness of the art consumer to traditions, ideals and worldviews other than his or her own. At a time when colonizers thought that their experiences in the world were the single true foundation of knowledge production, Trowell observed that

we unconsciously bring all the likes and dislikes, all the associations and prejudices, which we have inherited and which are fashionable in the world around is unto our judgment of a picture. Consequently [sic] we have very little common ground in such judgment with people who have grown up in an entirely different tradition and environment. (Trowell, 1937: 18)

This quote indicates that Trowell recognized cultural and societal difference as a consequence of different living conditions and histories, and as such demanded to assess the quality and value of arts from Africa from its situatedness. She saw artistic beauty and a particular aesthetic language in local designs and decorations of objects and artefacts she acknowledged as art indigenous to the cultures of current-day Uganda, and felt a need to protect those techniques, forms and patterns she feared would get lost in the “rather unimaginative mechanical world” (ibid: 19) Europeans had created and exported into their colonies.

Based on her field research, archival work, and observations, she wanted to preserve this material heritage, and thus promoted the idea of establishing *authentic* African visual art (ibid) through formal art education. This very aim serves as a prime example of the ambivalence I indicated above. First, one might now wonder what makes African art *authentic*; is it materiality, form, shape, colors, themes, composition? Who decides this? Second, at what point is visual art from Africa authentically enough to be considered African? Beaded art for example, has a long and rich tradition in many African societies (Oberhofer, 2018). This did not remain unnoticed by Asian and European traders who began exporting glass beads to the African continent in exchange for ivory and other raw materials and slaves as early as the medieval ages, which marked the beginning of colonial trade (Oehrl, 2016).

By the beginning of the 19th century, beads and cowrie shells had become one type of currency. This is true for glass beads as well as beads made from corals and other raw materials, which were of high value albeit its dependency on ever changing fashion trends. One might thus assume that due to their significance, glass beads would have been considered as authentic African. However, by the 19th century, Michael Oehrl (2018) further informs, European ethnographers spurned beadwork for their collections, considering the art works for which European beads had been used as not authentically African.

The third important question – and linked to the previous two – to be addressed here asks *what* and *when* is art? In *Tribal Crafts of Uganda* (1953) for example, the crafts Margaret Trowell presents together with Klaus Wachsmann include objects and items as far as hunting gear, agricultural implements, transport and villages. Is it just to label villages and their structural arrangements as well as their inner setup as a *craft*, a categorization of art from Uganda frequently used by Trowell and – in the applied logic – therefore as artforms? What is the meaning associated with the term, then, and does village include only the architecture and the structural village design (Eglash, 1999), or also the interior of houses, the people, their habits, their whereabouts, and more?

Fourth, the teachers for whom *Arts and Crafts. Their development in the School* was written were missionaries and colonizers, predominantly white, foreign and convinced that *the African* (who appears in singular only) to be taught was of lesser intellect, as the following quote shows:

Accuracy of observation is always to be encouraged but not to be forced to the extinction of all else. If our aim is the building up of an indigenous African art, there is very little to be said about perspective at this stage; in importance it is far below design and colour and vitality. [...] An unsophisticated mind finds it difficult to think of his picture as a whole; he can't see the wood for the trees. (Trowell, 1937: 58)

What were the consequences of this mindset for the ways in which art students were taught, and how does it inform contemporary understandings of indigenous local art? And lastly, teaching arts and crafts, in some critical interpretations of the objectives of Trowell's work, also meant teaching the essence of labor and civilization to young African men who did not display discipline or an acceptable work ethic in the eyes of the colonizers (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a). It is precisely this lack of self-reflection of the "primarily European faculty, particularly in regard to paternalistic attitudes, primitivist guidelines, and colonial power relations" (Pinther and Weigand, 2018: 27) that Kerstin Pinther and Alexandra Weigand, too, criticize. This brings to the forefront the ambivalence we see regarding the person Margaret Trowell and the roles she fulfilled. It marks her legacy and heritage.

What do these observations mean for art education, art and artistic handicraft in Uganda during colonial times as well as today? In order to reconstruct and understand the meanings and forms of engagement with art, its linkages with development and civil society, it is worthwhile to return to Margaret Trowell once more, and to the educational agenda she sought to implement from the 1930s onwards.

The Educational Agenda of Margaret Trowell

Trowell moved to Uganda in 1935 and in 1937 she began to teach art classes to local students – first on the front porch of her house, and later in a classroom format. By 1940, her art classes had been integrated into the curriculum of the higher certificate of Makerere College (Kyeyune, 2003). Her teachings included drawing lessons and craft. In spite of my earlier (and, for that matter, subsequent) criticism, I also must re-emphasize that Trowell's appreciation of the aesthetic and artistic value of woven textiles, wickerwork, ceramic vessels, barkcloth and others was indeed genuine. Genuine, too, was her concern that those artforms to vanish, possibly altogether, due to colonization and the changes its agendas promoted (Kakande, 2006; Kyeyune, 2003; Nakazibwe, 2005; Trowell, 1937).

As an artist, art teacher, and missionary she had been familiar with the ideas of the reform movement, which can be linked with her admiration of "the sophistication of what was then called **objects of daily use**" (Pinther and Weigand, 2018: 12, emphasis as in original). In this sense, Trowell's contributions to acknowledging, appreciating, archiving, and promoting artistic handicraft techniques and de-

signs, for example in *Tribal Crafts of Uganda* (1953) or *African Design* (1960), are widely appreciated and of significance to many Ugandan art historians and scholars today (Kyeyune, 2003). Suzanne Preston Blier refers to Trowell as “one of the first to recognize its [African design’s] aesthetic importance” (Preston Blier, 2018: 87), and it was she, too, who understood that particular oral traditions, including proverbs and allegories, “may inform a design’s symbolic grounding” (ibid: 87).

However, teaching forms of local art was also part of her civilizing mission with which Ugandans were to learn discipline and the value of hard manual labour (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a). In Trowell’s opinion it was not appropriate for Ugandans to learn “the skill of the European” (Trowell, 1937: 2). Rather, she felt, “those [Europeans] who lead must seek to show him [the African] the door that is best fitted to his stage of development and not that which they have found most suited to their own psychology” (ibid: 9). Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa further points towards Trowell’s observation that there were already too many young Ugandans who sought for “white collar jobs” (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a: 2). White collar jobs can be understood as synonym for an office job in colonial administration. Those young men who strove for such “white collar jobs” had been educated at missionary schools belonged to an upcoming elite of the first generation of western-style educated men. By the late 1930s, Trowell feared, they wanted to live a life similar to the *European man*. She however, found this aspiration to be too far-fetched for their mental capacities and state of development (ibid). Like children, she was sure, they needed to learn that innovations are the consequence of hard labour and discipline first. Art education adapted to the local cultural conditions, she believed, would teach those young, ambitious men their place in society.

In her critical analysis of *African Arts and Crafts. Their Development in the School*, Wolukau-Wanambwa argues that Trowell had (Christian) God-obeying mediaeval Europe of the sixteenth century in mind when contemplating an appropriate curriculum for Ugandans at the beginning of the twentieth century (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a). Indeed, in her writings Trowell does elaborate on medieval Europe, but apart from associating pre-industrialized European realities as appropriate for the state of mind of Africans in the 1930s, she also admired this period as superior to the *modern* European mindset. The medieval mindset was superior not in its technological achievements but in purity of heart in the form of Christianity, of admiration for the aesthetics of objects, and the simplicity of peasant life (Trowell, 1937).

An interconnectedness between evangelization, Christianity and the meanings and values of local forms of art is stressed not only by Trowell or Wolukau-Wanambwa. Other researchers such as Angelo Kakande (2006) or George Kyeyune (2003) and Ugandan art connoisseurs who shared some of their knowledge with me for the purposes of this research (in form of interviews, informal conversations and roundtable workshop discussions), too, stress this linkage; albeit in different ways.

Kakande (2006) and Kyeyune (2003) both argue that evangelization demonized local art as barbaric or satanic, and according to interviews with Kizito Maria Kasule and Philip Kwesiga (both 29/08/2018), pushed local art into hiding. However, Kwesiga also emphasized that ancestral worship and local belief systems were the major guarantor for the survival of local art handicraft production. Without ancestral worship, traditional beliefs and spiritual practices, he believes, Ugandans may have lost touch with their material cultural heritage.

Art in Missionary School Education

Within the first decennium of the twentieth century, missionary work in the sense of evangelization of Ugandans had altered the education system entirely; for teaching the bible also meant teaching how to read the Latin alphabet (Kyeyune, 2003). Kyeyune highlights the relation between evangelization and education, stating that “although none of the early missionaries were educationists, there had never been a time when missionary work was not educational” (Kyeyune, 2003: 47). Hence, evangelization led towards the foundation of educational institutions according to British educational concepts. In the process, the local pre-colonial education systems, in which children and youngsters had learned in their homesteads¹, in communities or – especially artists – in workshop formats (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Nakazibwe, 2005; private conversation with Kizito Maria Kasule from 25.08.2018) became considered inferior to the newly established missionary schools, also called *bush-schools*.

Angelo Kakande, George Kyeyune, and others agree that the formalization of the education system according to western concepts had a major impact on art indigenous to Ugandan cultures and its perceptions in the early twentieth century. Art classes remained absent from missionary curricula (Kyeyune, 2003). Kyeyune briefly contemplates reasons for this in human and financial resources, but quickly proceeds towards his main argument why art may have been omitted from curricula. “In Uganda as elsewhere in Africa”, he writes,

Art had always been an integral part of community life. The two were inseparable. Religion was bound up with a whole range of art practices, which included music, dance and drama, myths and legends, poetry and oral traditions. I argue that to introduce art in schools as a subject of cultural reflection at the time when conversion to Christianity was in its embryonic stage would have inflamed cultural tensions and contradictions between Christianity and local life [...]. Since their primary duty was to evangelise, and to deliver the African from ‘heathen’ worship, it was imperative that missionaries watched with caution and regulated disciplines,

1 I use the word ‘homestead’ because it is the term most frequently used in the situation of inquiry.

which would bring into focus traditional institutions and their attendant ideologies. (Kyeyune, 2003: 49).

In Kyeyune's argumentation, art is considered a powerful element that structured the public – and with it the religious, social, and cultural order of and within communities.

In the quote above, community life and religion are used almost interchangeably. Here, Kyeyune interlinks worship with traditional institutions, which become a site of power contestation during colonization. Kakande (2006) remains more differentiated and simultaneously more radical in his argumentation, stating that *bush-schools* led by missionaries went as far as *demonizing* traditional art forms – both oral and material forms – in Buganda. He differentiates their meanings as religious, aesthetic, practical (for everyday use), communicational, or as facilitators of power. He writes:

Although some had magico-religious values, not all traditional African art forms were religious. Some were aesthetic [...] others were functional on a day to day basis [...] some were used to promote community cohesion and productiveness [...], some legitimated and transmitted power [...]. But notwithstanding their socio-political complexity, missionaries demonised, marginalised and excluded all traditional arts from missionary education in Buganda. (Kakande, 2006: 41)

Kakande purposefully separates African art objects and artefacts from associating them solely with religion. While some traditional objects were indeed related to worship, religion other than Christianity, and spiritual rituals, others were functional in their everyday roles, and some were “meant to be enjoyed for [their] own sake alone” (Trowell 1960: n.p., as cited in Preston Blier, 2018: 87), as Trowell, too, recognized. However, conceptually limited frameworks of art objects from Africa as linked to spirituality and practicality only, Kerstin Pinther concludes, continue to be widespread and confine both, the historical and the contemporary meanings of visual arts from Africa (2022).

What Kakande (2006) and Kyeyune's (2003) writings and the narrations they unfold have in common are their observations of the interconnectedness of developments that took place during the era of early British colonial rule in the then Ugandan Protectorate. They both reconstruct linkages between efforts to evangelize the local population of nowadays Uganda with establishment of the so-called *bush-schools* and the re-framing of local art. One important result of those developments was the demonization of visual arts and their performative elements. Subsequently, objects identified by missionaries as local art objects were banned and labeled as “objects of witchcraft and sorcery” (Kakande, 2006: 42), up to the point where con-

verts to Christianity were forced to burn the artefacts and art objects they possessed (ibid).

It is noteworthy that British colonial rulers could have interpreted art objects as powerful actants. At least powerful enough to demarcate their presence in public spaces. At times they were even banned² (Kyeyune, 2003). Neither Kyeyune nor Kakande or other art historians and anthropologists from Uganda and the diaspora whose works I read would disagree that the hegemonial meanings of those objects have not always already been a site of negotiation, contestation, and change (e.g., Kasfir and Förster, 2013; Kasozi, 2019; Nakazibwe, 2005; Preston Blier, 2002; Siegenthaler, 2019). They would further agree that the colonial rule – through its civilizing missions, evangelization, and the introduction of formal, British education – altered the perceptions of local art drastically. While colonialism in Uganda formally ended in 1962 the “particular dynamic that triggered the colonization of the non-European world [...] could no longer simply be undone” (Rottenburg, 2009: 12). As such, the here cited scholars argue, coloniality continues to prevail well into the post-colonial era.

From Missionary Education to the School of Fine Arts at Makerere College

Given the particularities of the Ugandan conditions those developments cannot be understood, let alone reconstructed, without considering and carefully analyzing the work of Margaret Trowell and her contribution to the development of art education and the art scene in Uganda. As stated above, Margaret Trowell was the founder and the initial director of the School of Arts at Makerere College, which was the first art school of higher education in East Africa (Siegenthaler, 2018). And while today more universities and colleges in Uganda have established art degree programs – although mainly in and around Kampala – connoisseurs of the contemporary Ugandan art scene continue to speak of a *Makerere-centric* art (education), as its art school continues to be the epicenter for art education (Garrido Castellano, 2018).

Back in 1937, it was an article about a student exhibition held in London and curated by Kenneth Murray that had inspired Trowell to start teaching art in Kampala (Onuzulike, 2013; Trowell, 1957). Murray, who was an art educator in what is now Nigeria, had brought eighty-five artworks of wood-carvings, terracotta and watercolors of five of his art students to be displayed to be at display at the Zwemmer Gallery in London. While reading the article, she decided that whatever could be

2 Albeit for different reasons, this remained true during the late colonial period as well. Venny Nakazibwe (2005), for example, elaborates on the use and agency of bark cloth in anti-colonial movements of the Baganda, and how the suppression thereof resulted in the development of new forms, shapes, and functions of the textile.

done in Nigeria could be done in Uganda as well (Trowell, 1957). Shortly after, she received permission to teach art to Makerere College students on a voluntary basis on Wednesday afternoons. Initially she taught on the veranda of her own house (e.g. Kyeyune, 2003; Trowell, 1957), but soon was able to move her classes to the rooms of the newly established college, at which Ugandan students, usually the sons of local administrators of British rule in higher positions, came to study for a diploma (Kyeyune, 2003). She heavily criticized their striving for *white collar jobs*. She feared that Ugandans – and other Africans – would be unable to grasp the scope of innovation, endurance, costs and hardships in form of failures that had gone into European inventions and that had ultimately led towards the advanced standards of living of the *White man*:

An extraordinary lack of imagination or wonder; an acceptance of the achievements of the white man as something obtained without struggle or perseverance by the superior race [sic]. An aeroplane is just the white man's bird which he has in all probability always possessed, cotton piece-goods may have grown in bales for all he knows and cares, and the solution of the problem of a rainproof roof will always be satisfactorily met by a sheet of corrugated iron. (Trowell 1936: 79, as cited in Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a: 3)

This conviction contradicts Trowell's acknowledgement of the imagination and wonder of African artists and their designs, whereby she attributes their designs to a "man's personal desire to create things of beauty" (Trowell, 1960: 13). She re-emphasizes this observed "urge to create things of beauty" (ibid: 15), which resonates with a sense for imagination and wonder rather than with the lack thereof.

And yet, Trowell does not contradict herself. While she promotes the acknowledgment of what she refers to as applied art as being rooted in the desire to create things of beauty, and renders those (Europeans) who hierarchize art and refuse to acknowledge the aesthetic aspirations of handicraft artists as shallow thinkers, she does not grant shallow thinking – or thinking at all for that matter – to Africans. Instead, she attests Africans indifference, and achievements of the *White man* as something he has probably always possessed. Africans, by common and very wrong understanding (Chilisa, 2012), could not understand the processuality of industrial and technological achievements. Consequently, the standards of living of the *White man* were deemed inappropriate for Africans. As much as Trowell acknowledged their imagination and skills for the creation of art objects, without hesitation she denied Africans these very attributes when it came to understanding the scope of European achievements.

Her art curriculum reflected this conviction. Although students did learn art techniques in her classes (Trowell, 1937), the quotation at the beginning of this chapter convincingly demonstrates that her main educational interest lay elsewhere:

namely in what she called the *tribal crafts* indigenous to Ugandan ethnic groups (Trowell and Wachsmann, 1953). For Wolukau-Wanambwa (2019a) this emphasis on local art forms is closely linked to the civilizing mission of the local population. Ugandans were taught craftsmanship in order to learn the discipline, preciseness and working attitude of the colonial masters. And while Trowell, much like most colonizers at the time, was convinced that Europeans were further developed and had reached higher – meaning more sophisticated and civilized – standards of living, the analysis of her writings about Ugandan art and art education bring forward two additional notions I find pivotal to consider. One, Trowell was among the first and few foreigners who appreciated and acknowledged the aesthetic value of everyday objects and other art forms outside the frames of conceptualizing art at the time. As such, she worked intensively to understand arts from Africa in their own conditions and beyond normative conceptions of art. At the same time, she was equally concerned that colonization and developments might lead towards the loss of the diversity of local material culture she sought to prevent not only through teaching crafts, but also through collecting and archiving art objects, by exhibiting and by publishing her work (Trowell, 1960; Trowell and Wachsmann, 1953).

The interpretations of the role of Margaret Trowell will continue to remain controversial. However, most perspectives considered for this dissertation do reach consensus in their emphasis on Trowell's immense help with the preservation of local art knowledge that may possibly have been lost otherwise. This contribution is continuously acknowledged by the decision to keep her name as the official title of the art school at Makerere University. It is called Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA) until this day.

The second aspect I want to emphasize is the fact that for Trowell herself the “achievements of the white man” (Trowell, 1936: 79) were not at all entirely glamorous and something to strive for. Europeans, she found, had created a “rather unimaginative mechanical world” (Trowell, 1937: 19) and “grown cold and blasé and lost the gift of entering into the world pictured before us” (ibid: 7–8). As a devoted Christian, she romanticized about medieval European life prior to industrialization and enlightenment (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019a). For her, a healthy peasant population living in synch with Christianity and dedicated to the Christian god seemed far better than the *mechanical beings* they had become during the era of industrialization. Europeans, she lamented, did not know how to stand in front of frescoes on walls and ceilings and “shiver at the anguish of the damned, [how to] wait breathlessly watching the scale of judgment in the hands of the angel [...]” (Trowell, 1937: 7). In her opinion, Europeans, albeit in different ways, too had lost imagination and wonder, and Trowell's aim was to prevent this from happening in the Ugandan Protectorate of British colonial rule.

As part of her agenda, Trowell sought to establish indigenous forms of fine arts using western techniques. Ironically, it would be *her* assessment of art that would

determine the indigeneity of any local art piece (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Trowell, 1937). For the establishment of *indigenous visual arts*, she instructed other (British) art teachers in African colonies to consider that ritual, drama and craftsmanship were, according to her understandings, almost always attached to spirituality; hence of religious significance (for a critical analysis of this assumption, see also: Kakande, 2006). Having this in mind she considered it worthwhile to compare the development of religious drama from early Greek times through the Middle Ages in Europe to understand “what is being done in many parts of Africa to-day [sic]” (ibid: 9). Under these conditions, teaching students arts and crafts was closely related to the evangelization of Africans. Its symbolic meanings could also be linked with Christianity. And teaching students to appreciate frescoes and religious art from Europe, in her opinion, could deepen students’ relation with the Christian god. To her, art was necessary to religion and far more important in the education of children than reasoning for art appeals to people’s subconsciousness that brings forward emotions, aiding the learning process (ibid). The development of Ugandan indigenous visual art, she believed, could embrace and facilitate such notions. Curiously, she did not encourage her students to appropriate any “abstract elements from the regional material cultures in [her students’] art making, most likely due to her fear that such attempts would ultimately lead to ‘soulless’ modernist experiments” (Sanyal and Kasule, 2006: 53), and, as Sunanda Sanyal³ further notes, remained “entirely oblivious of her own mediating presence in this process” (ibid: 54), as she failed to reflect how her ideas, convictions and understandings shaped her educational curriculum.

The Commodification of Art Products

Thus far, I have elaborated on the linkages between art education and evangelization in Trowell’s work. Furthermore, I have addressed her role in collection and archival work of local material heritage. Another important issue that helps to understand the conditions of contemporary artistic handicrafts is their history of commodification. Already in 1937, Trowell discussed the potentials of visual art for economic development (Trowell, 1937: 42–48) – years before philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno coined the term cultural industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002 [1944]), which I will get back to in chapter 3.5. In *Arts and Crafts* Trowell suggested to try and minimize the influence of western aesthetics by showing “them

3 Kizito Maria Kasule wrote a commentary about Sunanda Sanyal’s paper titled Modernism and cultural politics on East Africa: Cecil Todd’s drawings of the Uganda martyrs: [With commentary], which was originally published in the african arts journal. Sanyal and Kasule are thus both referred to as authors here, although the former wrote the paper while the later wrote the commentary only.

[Africans] the best we can of forms of art more nearly akin to their own, such as peasant pottery, good weaving, medieval carving, and so on” (29). She simultaneously surrendered to the logics of modernization by emphasizing the importance of acknowledging local art products by purchasing them. “[W]hat is even more important”, she wrote, “by collecting and encouraging the best that we can find in their own art, [we] teach them to have a pride in it instead of despising it as a thing of the past, which is their [the artefacts] chief danger to-day [sic]” (ibid: 29).

Here, Trowell’s narrative contradicts the narrations of Kakande (2006) and Kyeyune (2003). They both find missionaries and evangelizers and their interpretations of local art objects as them being barbaric and sometimes even satanic one of the major threats to indigenous forms of artistic expression. Unlike Trowell, Kakande and Kyeyune perceive the newly established cultural hegemony by the British colonizers as the single major threat to the survival of indigenous art; not Ugandans favoring imported goods categorized as *modern*. Furthermore, neither of them write of local art forms as being perceived as *underdeveloped* by communities and their members at the time.

Today, well over a century and a half after the evangelization mission in contemporary Uganda began, and almost ninety years after the publication of *Arts and Crafts. Their Development in the School* it cannot be deciphered nor exactly reconstructed *how* local forms of artistic articulation were understood by whom at the time. It is likely that many different meanings and perceptions existed, some of them complementing one another, others full of contradictions. Unfortunately, the vast majority of written testimonies tell the perspectives of the colonizers since, especially in the colonized world, knowledge production and authorship was almost exclusively attributed to them. And other forms of knowing were subordinated as underdeveloped, tribal or primitive (Akena, 2012)⁴.

Back in 1937, Margaret Trowell feared that exposure to the European way of life and especially the exposure to their material culture, innovations and inventions would lead towards the loss of local material culture. And since she held both, discursive and executive power, she transferred this fear into writings about the economic potential of arts and crafts, both to local and an international market, and

4 Current debates are much more diverse: For Wolukau-Wanambwa (2019a) for example, art education in the Ugandan Protectorate was first and foremost about civilizing Ugandans, and establishing a working ethics and moral similar to that of the colonizers. Kyeyune finds Trowell’s work to be an exception to how foreigners treated Ugandan indigenous art and acknowledges her contribution to the collection and conservation of knowledge (2003). Littlefield Kasfir interprets the approach to art education taken by Trowell with the governing strategy of indirect rule which “adhered to the principle of least interferences with existing tradition” (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 141), and led towards her principle of “we start from it, study it, and honour it” (ibid: 141).

linked the sustainability of promoting artistic handicrafts and establishing indigenous art forms with their marketability. Approximately 70 years later, in 2005, the *UNESCO Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* was passed as a response to the fear of the loss of cultural diversity due to globalization (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995; UNESCO, 2005). The narrative applied is strikingly similar, and the 2005 Convention has since established a discursive hegemony that currently shapes contemporary cultural policies, especially in countries of the Global South (De Beukelaer and Vlassis, 2020).

Furthermore, Trowell promoted the notion “that [a] sense of the importance of work well and properly done and loved for its own sake” (Trowell, 1937: 29) must be kept by those who support African art by buying it. Nowadays, a number of recent development initiatives⁵ aim at improving the quality of local artistic handicraft products, which eventually, according to their rationales, increases the marketability of said objects. Alongside the improvement of the marketability, the creative industry and its artisan members then partake in sustainable economic development as they would become independent of foreign funds (e.g., UNESCO, 2015, 2017; UTA, 2019).

It is surprising only at first glance that in *Arts and Crafts*, Trowell further specifies her envisioned market for those *well-crafted objects* as an international, European market. While objects should certainly “be of service in the native village life” (Trowell, 1937: 34), the commercialization of crafts did not, in her opinion, cease them from being art objects. Quite the contrary – she argues that all art or “beautiful things” (ibid: 34) in past and present, anywhere in the world, were and continue to be made for wealthy people of the aristocracy. As indicated above, this understanding that art can and should be utilized for economic development is one of the dominant positions in current debates on the roles of art in Uganda, especially among international development actors, socially engaged artists, and some scholars.

In closing this chapter, we can conclude that art education, for Trowell, did not stop with teaching students in classrooms. Also, adults should turn towards artistic handicrafts, especially when considering the economic potential of a flourishing handicraft scene, as the following quote shows:

In the preceding chapter we discussed craftsmanship from the point of view of the school pupil and decided that one of its chief aims should be to improve the

5 For example, a co-operative between the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA) and the German Society for international Cooperation (GIZ), the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and UNESCO Uganda for one project. Or the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA) of Uganda in technical partnership with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and funding partnership with the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) in another development initiative I analyzed for the purposes of this study to name but a couple.

local standard of living; now we should think out more fully its economic aspect in terms of the adult community. (Trowell, 1937: 42)

The intonations are clear: craftsmanship, in Trowell's opinion, has the potential to improve the quality of life of the local population. Assessing the (then) current conditions, she concludes that most parts of Africa are unlikely to become industrialized in the near future for the simple lack of sufficient power sources. And yet, she assumes that fostering craftsmanship on a large scale can only endure if it will be able to meet the increased (economic) needs of the local market. While the taste of well-off Africans and particularly of Europeans are to be considered – for they, too, she assesses, fancy “things with an African flavour” (ibid: 44) – focusing on the daily needs of community members, here, are favored. Trowell attests *useful* artistic hand-craft products potentially to be the most promising outlook for art objects, as they might be able to meet the changing needs and demands of the local population. In addition, however, making art products for export would mean that objects would have to be of “valuable nature with the very definite characteristics that could not be obtained elsewhere” (ibid: 44).

We do not learn whether and to what extent those *definite characteristics*, in Trowell's opinion, existed. What to me becomes clear in this quotation, though, is that the sovereignty of interpretation of what is of “valuable nature” and “could not be obtained elsewhere” (ibid: 44) remains with foreigners in general and with Trowell in particular – and hence not with the Ugandan artist-artisans. Furthermore, given the frequency with which she emphasizes the need for *well-crafted* products and the fact that Europeans are to “slowly [...] introduce better technique and new forms” (ibid: 38), one can conclude that in her eyes there was indeed much room for improvement of the quality of the products. An improvement only skilled Europeans, like herself, could promote.

2.3 The Nexus of Art, Politics, and the Public Sphere

2.3.1 Artistic Articulation and Politics in Post-Independence Uganda

With the end of World War II, the colonial period and with it the British rule overseas began to crumble. In 1947 India declared its independence. A few years later, in 1952 the Mau-Mau uprisings against British rule in nowadays Kenya begun. Although they officially ended in 1959, four years prior to Kenya's independence, the uprisings – also referred to as the Mau-Mau emergency – are commonly interpreted as having paved the path for independence (Atieno Odhiambo and Lonsdale, 2003; Ogot and Ochieng, 1995). Simultaneously, on the western border of the Kenyan colony, Ugandan anticolonial movements, too, had gained popularity and wider support.

Already in 1921, activists in the kingdom of Buganda had formed the *Bataka Union* (Reid, 2017). Initially it was created to “challenge the growing Asian monopoly on the processing and marketing of cotton; and [...] to fight the oligarchy which had risen to power in the 1890s and whose place in the new political order had been cemented by the 1900 [Buganda] Agreement”⁶ (ibid: 304).

By the 1940s however, the members of the union had come to collectively understand themselves as grandfathers and grandsons, promoting the notion of a “Baganda of many generations [...] linked synchronically and transhistorically in associations without permanent or exclusive hierarchies. They [the *bataka*] deployed understandings of power, identity, and connectedness rooted in specifically Ganda understandings of the relations between grandfathers and grandsons” (Summers, 2005: 428). Although members of the *Bataka Union* were Baganda, their political engagement and demands were not primarily concerned with loyalty with their king, the *kabaka* or with the kingdom of Buganda, but with Uganda as a whole and its relation to the ruling British administration (ibid). Richard J. Reid (2017) translates the term *bataka*⁷ with “clan heads” (119) of the Ganda clans, whose authority was diminished prior to colonial rule by an increasingly centralized form of rule of the ruling *kabaka*’s political networks (ibid).

In the 1940s, the *Bataka* Movement of grandfathers and grandsons mobilized (male) schoolchildren and adolescents, young men and – indeed – grandfathers who all questioned the social and political order. They gathered at private homes where they learned about politics, the management of political engagement and more:

[The grandfathers and grandsons of the Bataka Union] mobilized tens of thousands of Baganda to read newspapers, attend mass meetings, donate money for international lobbying, and petition the *kabaka* with a vigor that turned into an armed insurrection. [...] The activists imagined a new sort of citizenship grounded in local concerns over land, graves, and inheritance. (Summers, 2005: 427)

6 The 1900 Buganda Agreement granted some territorial rights to the *kabaka* of Buganda in return for his loyalty to the British Crown and the colonial administration. For a detailed discussion, please see Joshua T. Mugambwa’s research on British legal authority in Uganda (1986).

7 The associated meanings with *bataka* and their role in precolonial Buganda continue to remain contested and cause confusion. For Summers this is most likely due to a “fundamental difference in political and identity categories between those who thought in English and those who thought in Luganda [the language of the Baganda]” (Summers, 2005: 429). *Bataka*, then, can refer to both clan leaders as individual political subjects and a collective label, which “suggests a degree of collective identification [...] between the self and the leader” (ibid) and connects *bataka* with a hereditary leadership position. For a more elaborated discussion of the meanings see also Summers 2005.

Carol Summers further emphasizes how the *Bataka Union* was not a culturalist movement, but rather a “dynamic, modern mass politics” (ibid: 428). Its members heavily criticized the British administration and its local allies, demanded elections and pursued economic self-help initiatives.

The *Bataka Union* was not the sole anti-colonial movement during the later colonial period in Uganda. In Eastern Uganda, for example, where I met with six independent handicraft groups for the purposes of this research several decades later, people had organized themselves against British colonial rule *and* its Bugandan collaborators⁸ (Reid, 2017). Communities and ethnic groups such as the Bugisu or Langi for example began to form an opposition. While the former organized around what Jean la Fontaine calls “tribal policy” (2006 [1969]: 268) as a means to mobilize loyalties towards the formation of a political pressure group, the latter established themselves as Lango *people*; a “unity of purpose and identity which was used as leverage against the late colonial state” (Reid, 2017: 300). While it has been argued that associations or movements based on ethnicity or religion should not be considered within the realm of civil society; reason being that belonging to an ethnic group was not a choice but something one is born into (Bob, 2011; Chazan, 1992; Eliasoph, 2011), Nelson Kasfir (2017) brings forward two arguments in favor of considering such initiatives or associations as civil society; First, he states that “ethnicity by birth is ethnic, but the choice of belonging to an ethnic organization is not” (2017: 43). Put simply, he argues that some individuals *chose* to define themselves through belonging to an ethnic group, and it is this choice that qualifies such initiatives as civil society.

Furthermore, as in the case with the *bataka* or with the self-mobilization of the Bugisu around traditional systems during the late colonial period, the objectives of the groups and the systems they supported “promote[d] the larger interests of their members” (Chandhoke 2011; 179, as cited in Kasfir, 2017: 44). This wave of opposition gave rise to criticism of alleged *Europeanization*, which was specified as *foreignization* by *kabaka* Daudi Chwa II in his article *Ideology of Buganda* from 1935 (ibid: 53). For Kakande, Chwa II’s reflections of modernity linked with local traditions is similar to contemporary interpretations of modernity of artists such as Fred Mutebi and Bruno Sserunkuuma, who, according to Kakande, understand art to be closely connected to cultural, political and social development of Uganda (ibid).

8 Indirect rule, which the British colonial leaders had established after the Sepoy Mutiny in the British colony in India (Mamdani, 2012) As such, the British cooperated with and co-opted indigenous leaders such as monarchs (Newbury, 2000). In Uganda, the *kabaka* of the Buganda initially benefited from the British presence and was able to use their support to extend his power and influence throughout the region. Although the Buganda Agreement from 1900 diminished the executive and hegemonial power of the *kabaka*, colonial rulers in the Uganda Protectorate maintained a close collaboration with Ganda cultural leaders and its “chiefly oligarchy” (Reid, 2017: 158).

With independence in 1962 and the paradigm shift at Makerere College, the tone and focus of art education, too, changed significantly (Kyeyune, 2003). After the end of the colonial era, *kabaka* Sir Frederick Edward Muteesa II became president of the newly founded Republic of Uganda, and Apollo Milton Obote the first elected Prime Minister (Nakazibwe, 2005). It created a new constitutional system, which, Amanda Tumusiime argues, “trapped traditional leaders and the modern state into a marriage of convenience” (Tumusiime, 2012: 66). This ‘marriage of convenience’ only lasted for about four years. In February 1966, Milton Obote – allegedly fearing that *kabaka* Muteesa II would seek to regain political power over his kingdom Buganda and, eventually, over Uganda as a whole – declared that he was assuming all political powers in the country. He pushed forward a new constitution that was passed in April 1966. The new constitution made him president of Uganda and chief of the military simultaneously. In the course of the events that followed this declaration, many people in charge of royal duties were killed, and the *kabaka’s* palace as well as many artefacts were destroyed (Nakazibwe, 2005). Muteesa II was able to flee to Britain. Succeeding his flight, the Baganda kingdom first, and by 1967 all other kingdoms of independent Uganda, were abolished by the Obote regime. They would remain abolished until their re-establishment – albeit as depoliticized institutions – by president Yoweri Museveni in 1994 (Kasfir, 2017; Reid, 2017).

Art in Uganda Around Independence

Towards the independence and early post-independence era, local, formalized art education and, consequently, artistic practice, too, saw many changes. Already prior to Trowell’s departure from the Makerere Art School and Uganda in 1958, the art education curriculum had seen many adaptations. While in the 1930s and 1940s, local art techniques in form of artistic handicrafts had been taught at least at a rudimentary level at Makerere College, the newly established affiliations with the London University after the end of World War II demanded a change in how art was being taught (Nakazibwe, 2005). Venny Nakazibwe reconstructs how Margaret Trowell had turned towards the institution of her artistic training – the Slade School in London – in order to receive support for the transformation of her classes into the establishment of a Diploma in Fine Arts. It was during this transition period, Nakazibwe writes, in which the desire to equalize the standards of the Diploma with that offered in colleges in Great Britain consequently grew. “[I]nstructional methodology was shifted from experimental approaches to more professional training with emphasis on development of technique. It was during this period that the pedestrian indigenous craft courses were finally discarded” (Nakazibwe, 2005: 270). Local artistic handicraft techniques were now seen as improper at the art school. The new Head of the Fine Arts Department radically westernized the art techniques taught, while artistic handicraft received recognition by the political regime of Milton Obote in the *Uganda Crafts Emporium*, which positioned artistic handicrafts outside the realm

of academic teaching and western-style education systems (Kyeyune, 2003; Miller, 1975).

At the time of independence, Uganda's most important art exhibition space was the Uganda Museum (which had been established by Margaret Trowell) and later, when space became sparse, extended to the three-room art building on the campus of Makerere College (Daler, 1970). In 1964 the newly independent Ugandan government opened the Nommo Gallery – a National Art Gallery, which was supposed to increase the visibility of art from East Africa, which had faced difficulties “to achieve their deserved reputation amongst art buyers and critics, as there have been few opportunities for them to display their works to the discriminating collector” (Daler, 1970: 50). Private art galleries at the time frequently favored the interests of the “souvenir-minded tourist looking for folk art” (ibid: 50) rather than providing a space where artists could realize their visions and display their know-how and creativity.

Women Empowerment and Artistic Handicraft Work

Milton Obote's decision to abolish all local monarchies significantly impacted cultural artistic production outside the Art Department at Makerere College. After having abolished the Buganda kingdom, other social and ethnic groups became aware that they might face a similar fate, and hence began to mobilize. According to Nakazibwe (2005), Obote feared a unitary uprising against his actions, and thus sought to diminish all sorts of political and cultural mobilization that could threaten his power. Therefore, in 1967, he abolished *all* cultural institutions in Uganda, and banned political activities to the furthest extent possible (Nakazibwe, 2005). While Obote invested many resources in the depoliticization of any form of cultural engagement, his regime simultaneously began to systematically promote the marketing of cultural products. In 1966, the Ministry of Culture and Community Development initiated a 'National Handicrafts Scheme', which sought to benefit particularly women's groups and “women's clubs” (Nakazibwe, 2005: 283). It aimed towards the diversification of income generating activities, which at the time rested heavily on agricultural production. Now, the *Uganda Crafts Emporium* was established as well as crafts centers across the country. With the *Crafts Emporium* being the central marketing center for craft products, its members systematically collected handicraft products throughout the entire country (ibid). A catalogue with illustrations and a price list was put together and distributed to increase sales (Miller, 1975). Economic gains played a significant role here. Especially women, Nakazibwe writes, made “use of the limited handicraft skills they acquired through their family lineage, and through the Women Clubs” (Nakazibwe, 2005: 284) and generated a source of additional income by making (functional) art objects.

Ofentimes women became the major breadwinner in the families and were encouraged to migrate to the cities (Tumusiime, 2012). This undoubtedly altered family dynamics and questioned the status-quo of the civic, economic, social and political

role of women in post-independence Uganda. Women were now challenging a “reasonably clear relationship between gender, power and art or craftsmanship” (Reid, 2017: 42) that had existed, as “the production of things of beauty as well as power were in the realm of masculinity”. Richard Reid, too, reconstructs that this status-quo “only began to change in the middle decades of the twentieth century, when women beg[an] to emerge as craftsfolk and artists” (ibid: 42).

Besides creating visibility of women and their agency in public and seeking to establish a material culture aligned with nationhood, the previously discussed *Uganda Crafts Emporium* heavily commercialized artistic handicraft products and the use of traditional production techniques, which were promoted and sold at previously mentioned craft centers and through the catalogue. The latter

picture[d] and classifie[d] several hundred items of weaving, household ornaments and utensils (adopted for European style homes), furniture (for Ugandan homes). Bark-cloth, musical instruments, arms and weapons, personal ornaments and skin goods ... [m]ost of these items [were] of traditional designs [which were] used by Ugandan tribal [sic] groups (Miller, 1975: 65).

In *Art in East Africa*, Judith von D. Miller provides the reader with a comprehensive guide to art from East Africa in the early 1970s, and the cover text informs us that with it she seeks to “serve[] a unique needed function in weaving together the many varied and dispersed elements of the art in East Africa” (Miller, 1975, cover text). Albeit lacking any critical reflections on the impact of the colonial era on art in East Africa and a rather patronizing interpretation of contemporary developments, she is among the very few authors who did write about the *Uganda Crafts Emporium*. Miller emphasizes how the Ugandan government at the time supported the promotion of authentic crafts for sale. Authenticity, for Miller, means that “few foreign-run crafts enterprises or redesigning operations exist[ed] and the government [was] involved only to provide a service, not to influence”⁹ (ibid: 55). However, this perspective entirely discards the impact of Margaret Trowell, the paradigm changes at the Fine Art Department at Makerere College (and later Makerere University), and assumes Ugandan artefacts to have remained untouched by foreign influences until well into the 1960s. It further ignores 30 years of art education, and curatorial decisions of Trowell and others at the Uganda Museum and Nommo Gallery. And yet it remains an important perspective, as it possibly represents a rather common interpretation of art production during the early post-colonial era.

9 Unlike today, where many crafts markets are run by private businesses or associations such as the NACCAU, one of the case studies in my research project, in the early 1970s all commercial crafts markets were run by the national Ministry of Culture and Development.

In addition to the *Uganda Crafts Emporium*, the Ministry established so-called vocational rehabilitation centers, which began to operate in 1965 (Miller, 1975). Their training programs sought to specifically support disabled citizens socially and economically. The funds were provided by Oxfam, the Danish and Japanese governments, and the operation of the project was organized by the International Labor Organization of the UN. Handicrafts produced in said projects included, among others, leather goods, silk-screen prints and desert wood carvings (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2000). Again, it appears that the notion of funding artistic activities for (socio-economic) development was not a singular consequence of the *Cultural Turn* as Polly Stupples (2011) argues, but an approach that received donors' attention as early as the mid-1960s.

During the colonial era, art education, the interpretation of aesthetic value and its roles in Ugandan societies had been strongly influenced by Margaret Trowell, a British artist, art educator and curator. In the early years of post-independence Uganda, artistic handicraft production and products continued to be commercialized as traditional cultural objects by the first Obote regime through the *Uganda Crafts Emporium* and crafts markets, whose efforts sought to stimulate the economic development particularly of rural Uganda outside Buganda (Nakazibwe, 2005). Through the establishment of previously described rehabilitation centers, international actors such as UN-bodies and foreign governments, too, pushed forward their agendas on development, democratization and social cohesion, and instrumentalized artistic handicrafts to fit into those very agendas.

Paradigm Shift at the Makerere Art School

As previously stated, Trowell's return to Great Britain marked the beginning of a radical paradigm shift at the art school. Her successor, Cecil Todd, introduced subjects such as (Europe-centered) world art history, color theory and western-style techniques (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Sanyal and Kasule, 2006). Kyeyune (2003) argues that under Todd art education in Uganda finally favored westernized techniques and aesthetics over local art histories, material culture and locally grounded art. Littlefield Kasfir (1999) on the other hand attests Todd to have been "fully committed to an African modernism based on a knowledge of twentieth-century developments in Europe as well as canonical African art" (146). Rather than being a neocolonialist, she further argues, his positions were more "a form of enlightened 'internationalism'" (ibid: 146). This, she claims, was only understood much later in the 1990s.

Shortly after Todd arrived in Uganda, Sam Ntiro, one of Margaret Trowell's protégés, left the art school, returned to Tanzania and became one of the co-founders of the Department of Music, Arts and Theatre at the University of Dar es Salaam and the Commissioner of Culture for the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania. Much like Ntiro, other former Trowell students, especially Elimo Njau from Tanzania and Eli Kyeyune from Uganda, were dissatisfied with Todd's paradigm shift

regarding art education at Makerere college and left the school shortly after Todd's arrival or even prior to it. They, alongside many other artists and East African intellectuals found their space for articulation, exchange and critique in the newly established *Transition* magazine, which was founded by Rajat Neogy to provide a space for articulation of those more critical perspectives as well as for post-colonial imaginations and utopias (Sanyal and Kasule, 2006). In the 1960s, the Ugandan art scene, albeit clustering around its intellectual capital Kampala, was a space where "every artist, poet, playwright, novelist, gallery director, newspaper journalist and public intellectual [knew] one another, creating a high level of cross-fertilization in the arts" (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 151).

However, the Ugandan discourse on art came to an abrupt end with the coup d'état of 1971, during which Idi Amin Dada Oumee rose to power. Sidney Littlefield Kasfir finds powerful words that capture the consequences of Amin's rise to power for some artists, and it is worthwhile to quote them in full length. "Within a short time", she writes

all public criticism was stifled, and artists and intellectuals who survived – some did not – either went into exile or tried, like other Ugandans, to live by their wits. One effect of the Amin regime was to force the departure of expatriates, as well as politically outspoken Ugandans, from the University. As more and more Ugandans including the University's own vice-chancellor 'disappeared' into Makindye or Luzira prison never to be seen again, Makerere struggled to stay open by employing its own recent BA graduates as teachers. So ironically this reign of terror became a time of opportunity for young artists, particularly if they were able to turn out commissions for the regime. (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 151)

In spite of the brutality Amin used as one of his governing strategies, which led to political instability, insecurity and unpredictability as well as to devastating economic conditions, George Kyeyune (2003) also reminds how

in spite of the capricious violence and economic dislocation of the Amin years, there might be some long-term benefits from the higher degree of autonomy forced upon Ugandan society by the circumstances. The departure of most foreigners made Kampala, Uganda's capital, a truly African city for the first time. The resourcefulness and ingenuity required to survive during Amin years may have instilled a new self-confidence in Ugandans and reduced their 'dependency culture'. Society in general became inward looking and people turned back to their indigenous resources for survival. Crisis in the production of farming implements, hoes for example, which hit the farming sector hard, stimulated a revival of skills in blacksmithing, as well as a revival of consumer demand for aesthetic appreciation of local products. At Katwe, a well-known industrial centre

in the post-colonial period, business in iron smithing not only increased, but also interest in indigenous knowledge was revived. (Kyeyune, 2003: 195)

One of the young artists who had narrowly escaped imprisonment was Francis Nnaggenda (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999). In the 1970s, Nnaggenda was one of the very few Ugandan artists who had not been trained at the art school at Makerere college (Littlefield Kasfir, 1969). Instead, he had left Uganda in 1963 to study art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, which he entered in 1964. Upon his return, though, Nnaggenda's art did not find an audience in the local art scene. Albeit their rootedness in traditional African forms, especially his large sculptures, were doomed too experimental for the taste of expatriates or educated Ugandans, and too easily associated with supernatural powers and potentially sorcery by most rural villagers (ibid).

Nnaggenda lived and worked in Kenya and the United States for several years before he, in 1978, and shortly before the end of the Amin dictatorship, joined the staff of Makerere art school (Nakazibwe, 2005). By that time, Makerere University¹⁰ in general and the art school in particular, were deprived of most of its staff members (who either had been expelled or voluntarily left the country during the Amin years), its materials and resources, which had become sparse or simply impossible to get ahold of.

And yet, in the quotation above Kyeyune describes this impasse-situation as an important turning point for the art scene in Uganda. Nakazibwe, too, associates the establishment of a new curriculum at the art school, which encouraged students to experiment with local materials, artefacts and cultural heritage in new ways, with the devastating political and economic situation at the time. "What was born out of necessity", she writes, "culminated a new genre of visual art production" (ibid: 323). In this transitional period, Nnaggenda became an important role model and facilitator who coordinated and encouraged the changes and adaptations.

In her monograph *Contemporary African Art*, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir notes in the realm of art production that "the new will arise where the old simply does not exist", that is, "where it does not have to compete with a tradition already in place" (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 16). Regarding arts from Africa, she refers to countries without major sites of precolonial image-making, which hence were seldomly represented in museum collections of traditional sculpture. Those places, among which she sees Uganda, she argues "are major locales for the production of new forms" (ibid: 16), for the formation of "new art" must not occur "within a milieu of existing practices"

10 Makerere University was established in 1922 as a technical school. It was granted university status by the British colonizers in 1944 and called Makerere College, University of East Africa thereafter. In 1970 it became an independent national university and is since referred to as Makerere University.

(ibid), which could only produce hybrid images that either reflect upon or comment existing content.

Summary

In Uganda, the development of “new art” began with the establishment of the Makerere art school, which, as Littlefield Kasfir noted in 1969, had been “the greatest single influence on art in Uganda” (8). This development was dominated first by Margaret Trowell’s vision of establishing a new genre of *authentic Ugandan art*, which embraced the symbolic and pictorial traditions of local visual culture and favored content over technical mastery. Her successor Cecil Todd then reformed the art school and introduced western-style theorization, painting, drawing, and sculpting techniques, thereby envisioning the development of modern art from Africa. Furthermore, as art buyers – mostly educated Ugandans or expatriates – preferred to buy artworks that visualized what Littlefield Kasfir calls “the sentimental portrayal of local life” (ibid: 8) and I refer to as “the romanticized imagination of rural life in Uganda”, or cheap handcrafted artefacts on the developing tourist market(s), the space for experimental art remained small. Thus, while the first wave of “new art” was marked by foreign visions and art buyers with particular ideas about authentic art from Uganda, it appears that a second, important wave that enabled the development of “new art” in Uganda was indeed in partial enabled by the economic and political consequences of the brutal Amin dictatorship, whose consequences continued to exceed his rule (Nakazibwe, 2005). Therefore, in what follows I will examine artistic handicrafts from Uganda both in their historical and current situatedness, and the arts vs. craft debate.

2.3.2 Art, Material Culture, and Relationality. Artistic Features of Culture and Socially-Engaged Art

I am happy to be able to say that the Government and people of Uganda are anxious, and indeed determined, to see that their country’s ancient arts and traditions do not fade into oblivion and every effort is being made to preserve them. (Milton Obote, n.d., as cited in: Hanna and Hanna, 1968: 42)

Art in its various forms has the potential to be highly political. The quote above from Milton Obote is a prime example for the politization of art as well as its culturalization. In it, he suggests the revival of the “country’s ancient arts and traditions” to be among the priorities of his government’s actions – the word choice “every effort is being made” barely allows for a different interpretation. It is a quote of a man who had decided to abolish all kingdoms of the newly founded Ugandan nation state only months earlier, and as such not only ancient local political systems (Kasfir, 2017), but also cultural institutions that promoted artistic expression associated with (politi-

cal) power (Khanakwa, 2018; Makwa, 2012), hospitality (Muwanga Senoga, 2021) and spirituality (Muwanga Senoga, 2021; Nakazibwe, 2005) among others.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the establishment of visual arts were – according to the current stand of research – by and large a product of British colonial rule in Uganda. In addition, the region did not have a significant pre-colonial tradition in the plastic arts, except for pottery, either (Littlefield Kasfir, 1969). Among and within its ethnic groups and at royal courts did, however, exist strong traditions in weaving (especially in form of baskets and mats), in textile and fashion design, in pottery and in blacksmithing. As Suzanne Preston Blier (2018) and Margaret Trowell (1960) observed, many artefacts Milton Obote referred to as “ancient arts” were functional objects with a particular aesthetic language rather than art objects specifically made for pure visual pleasure only. Furthermore, many objects become symbolically important during rituals, and as such actants in performance and in facilitating social and political life (Khanakwa, 2016; Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2001; Pinther, 2022).

Wickerwork

In precolonial days, throughout the colonial era to this day, wickerwork, especially basketry and matting, are significant elements of Ugandan material culture(s). Margaret Trowell and Klaus Wachsmann regarded basketry as “probably the most highly developed art in Uganda, in it the tribes [sic] of every racial group have reached a high standard of workmanship [...] and between them they practice almost every known method of basket making” (Trowell and Wachsmann, 1953: 134). In Trowell’s writings and drawings of basketry she provides information about patterns and materials that were woven or coiled into baskets. The colors at the time were frequently black and white or brown and white, at times red as well. One great exception to these color patterns were the baskets made by Nubian women, whose work was and continues to be “a mass of brilliant colour” (Trowell, 1960: 40). Baskets come in all kinds of shapes and forms, with or without lids, or flat to be used as trays. The aesthetic language of the baskets varied according to their functions, which also determined the choice of materials used. Maureen Muwanga Senoga (2021) for example studied how artistic handicraft works support the heritage construction of ethnic groups using the example of the *Kasubi Royal Tombs* (KRT), a site of ancestral worship and a burial ground of several Baganda *Kabakas*.

Floor mats at the KRT for example, are woven by the wives of the current *Kabaka* only, and only woven mats of the finest quality – called *omuukeeka* – find use there. The *Kabaka*’s wives learn how to weave at the palace and artistic handicraft work here is not associated with an everyday activity, but a sacred task only those of closest proximity to the *Kabaka* are allowed to execute (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). The floor mats are a symbol of respect to visitors and therefore are also used in ceremonial gatherings such as traditional weddings I get to in a minute, as well as in private homes. Visitors or family members who have been away for a long time are

welcomed on a patterned raffia mat, indicating their status and relationship to the hosts.

At the RKT plain baskets made from *obukeedo* – banana leaf stalks – and *enjulu* – cane fiber – continue to be preferred over colored and patterned baskets as to not distract (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). Unlike mats, baskets are allowed to be brought into the tombs from outside, and several baskets await the visitor for ancestral worship and offerings made to the spirits of the late *Kabakas* (image 2.2). The offerings are made in covered baskets, by which one basket is used as the holding body of the offerings, a second basket functions as a lid.

The naturality of the objects that facilitate the offerings are in harmony with the overall architecture of the *Kasubi Tombs*, and bear symbolic meaning, as “the materials, technique, shape and uses of baskets signify respect, comradeship, beliefs and a sense of belonging and within the KRT they are found under a thatched roof that itself is derived from basketry skills“ (Muwanga Senoga, 2021: 246).

Image 2.1: Entrance to the main building of the Royal Kasubi Toms with omukeeka mats on the ground and enjulu baskets for ancestral worship placed inside.



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The architectural design of the roofs of the *Kasubi Tombs*, too, are thus inspired by coiled basketry techniques (image 2.3). Only in a much larger dimension. The process of reconstructing the tombs after a fire in 2010 has resulted, among other things, in the *Introduction Guide to the Preservation of Traditional Thatching of the Buganda*

Community in Uganda, which includes the description of creating the ‘inner rings’ of the round ceiling in the shape of an “inverted basket shape” (Moriset, 2020: 11). In spite of their size, they, too are coiled, although the raw material here are reeds tied together with sisal rope. By 2010 only a handful skilled thatcher had remained; it is a widely recognized skill, and to become a thatcher includes almost a decade of workshop trainings as apprentice (ibid). As most roofs are no longer thatched using the coiling technique, it is a skill only few artisans continue to possess.

During my field stays, the plain *enjulu* baskets were frequently referred to as “Buganda baskets”. One of the reasons is their close relationship with worship at the *Kasubi Tombs*, but also, as I have learned, with their functions in ancestral worship in people’s homesteads (e.g., round-table discussion on ‘indigenous knowledge systems’, 28/02/2019). A third reason for this name that closely associates one basketry type with a cultural and geographical region is the lack of availability of *enjulu* – cane fiber – in drier regions as in eastern Uganda. It does not grow as readily in Eastern Uganda, for the swampy areas needed for *enjulu* are few, and the land upon which *enjulu* grows frequently privately owned, making it an expensive raw material.

Image 2.2: ‘Inner rings’ of the roof of the main building of the Royal Kasubi Tombs, reeds tied with sisal rope.



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Kwanjula

As the *Buganda baskets* suggest, there are special baskets used for special occasions. One of such special occasions is *kwanjula*¹¹, a ceremony whereby the bride to be introduces her groom to her family. In return, historically, this ceremony allows for him to learn about the family background of his future wife (Kaduuli, 2010). In historical societies in several Ugandan regions, *kwanjula* was the sole and hence essential ceremony that united two individuals and their families. Nowadays it is frequently followed by a western marriage ceremony as well. More than it was about uniting two individuals, *kwanjula* was about uniting two families (Kaduuli, 2010). For this purpose, the groom would bring gifts to his future in-laws, presented in one, or multiple, (decorated) basket(s) called *bibos*. These processes of bonding and uniting are the essentials of a *kwanjula* ceremony. The filled basket(s) is a sign of respect, appreciation and sharing (ibid). *Bibos* are carried by female family members of the groom's family, who line up and move in rhythm to the drums being played while they deliver the goods for the bride's family (image 2.4). After all gifts have been presented to the bride's family, the protagonists and their families are asked whether they wish to eat together, which symbolizes the acceptance of the gifts and with it the unification of the families. During this ceremony, the couple would seek "family blessings and social recognition of a marital relationship. It confers upon the couple a new social status and confirms them as responsible people in society" (ibid: 7).

During *kwanjula* ceremonies, everyday handcrafted objects in form of baskets become symbolically loaded with social and political significance. Therefore, their entrance into the scenery is embedded in performative elements: female family members of the groom lined up in one single line place them in front of the bride's family members, who remain seated at their tables. The women are usually dressed in *gomesis*¹² (especially designed dresses considered traditional and worn by women on important occasions), which underlines the importance of the moment, its end being marked by the *mwogezi*'s (the moderator or spokesman of the ceremony) question: *ebintu tubirye?* – should we eat?

Kwanjulas today are criticized by several parties for having become too commercialized, swallowed by the logics of neo-liberal economic thoughts (Kaduuli, 2010). Rather than showing appreciation for the parental achievements in having educated

11 Kwanjula means to introduce in Luganda, the language of the Baganda. In other languages the introduction is called kwandhula (in Lusoga, the language of the Basoga). The Bagisu, people of Eastern Uganda increasingly apply Lugandan traditions, and merge them with the local giving-away ceremony, which marks the traditional, here meaning pre-colonial wedding ceremony.

12 Today, *gomesis* are frequently considered as 'traditional Ugandan women attire'. Its origins, however, could only be traced back to 1905 when its designer Caetano Gomes, an Indian man from Goa, first introduced it. It became popular only almost another decade later, when in 1914 the wife of the kabaka Daudi Chwa wore it at his coronation (Reid, 2017)

their daughter to become a responsible woman by presenting gifts such as “salt, bark cloth, drinks and meat” (ibid: 41), nowadays the groom’s presents may include gasoline, crates of soda or beer (or both), *gomesis* and *kanzus* (dresses for men, likewise worn on special occasions and during festivities), fruits and vegetables, envelopes with cash, a suitcase filled with presents for the bride (symbol to her moving into her husband’s home), and can, depending on the socio-economic status of the groom also include a refrigerator, a motorcycle or even a car (although it appears that more often than not, cars are rented for the occasion and then returned to the car dealer afterwards) (ibid). As such it is no surprise that the aesthetic language of the *bibos* has changed as well. While historically, *kwanjula* baskets were plain in color and similar to those that can still be found at the *Royal Kausbi Tombs* and in shrines used for ancestral worships, directing the attention to what might be inside the basket, contemporary baskets aesthetically seek to demonstrate wealth and class, which is associated with the color white in combination with glossy decorations in rosé, gold, blue or green, adapted from western style weddings (see also image 7.5; Erlank, 2014).

On the morning of to the actual *kwanjula* ceremony, baskets play another – albeit equally bonding – role. The future brother-in-law – *omuko* – of the groom brings a basket filled with some coffee beans and alcohol, which “symbolizes friendship or ‘omukago’, literally meaning ‘we have bonded’” (Ssenkaaba, 2016: 174). Whether for *kwanjula*, at the KRT or in ancestral worship, baskets facilitate relationality between and among family members and ancestors. Like woven mats they are a symbol of hospitality and respect, and as such of importance for the organization of social life. In everyday life and/or ritual they are frequently not recognized as art, but they do help to establish, maintain and negotiate public social and cultural life, as I demonstrate elsewhere (Klages, 2022). “‘Traditional’ art forms”, I write,

may, at first sight, not appear as significant in contemporary society and in their aesthetic value. [However] the [...] findings [...] indicate that so-called ‘traditional’ art forms are pivotal actants [...], as many societal structures, (power and speaking) positions, (gender) roles and notions of aesthetics are [...] negotiated through [them]. (ibid:228)

In the paper I draw on the findings from explorative interviews I conducted during early stages of my research, during which I was told that not enough attention was dedicated to artistic handicraft works. The skills of making them was considered to not be valued enough by Ugandans – “almost like greeting” – as greeting may be the foundational principle of every social encounter in one way or another, but it is seldomly valued as such; as a facilitator and enabler of social relations.

Unlike the interlocutors in my explorative interviews, Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuuzza considers what she calls indigenous forms of musicking and dancing as well as the material culture embedded as “intimate and vital aspect of living”

(Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2014: 126) among the ethnic groups of Uganda. This, however, changes, according to Nannyonga-Tamusuza, when they *become* an art form. In using the example of the *baakisimba* dance of the Baganda, for Nannyonga-Tamusuza this occurred when *baakisimba* became a cultural dance, performed by professional dancers on stages who emphasized on the performance rather than on spontaneity, the conviviality and the groundedness. For Nannyonga-Tamusuza art here means detachment, for in the moment *baakisimba* “became an art [it] ceased to be an intimate and vital aspect of living among the Baganda as before” (ibid: 126). Her concept of art addresses the questions *what* is art and *when* is art, and adds an important perspective to the discussion, as it – at least indirectly – defines the meanings of cultural and artistic practices by assessing its importance for the people who have developed and continue to practice it, and the social and political assumptions it holds for them.

Socially Engaged Art with Local Material Culture

Besides wickerwork products, Uganda’s material culture includes pottery, blacksmithing, barkcloth, beaded jewelry and particular dresses for rituals and ceremonies (Kasozi, 2019; Kayamba and Kwesiga, 2016, 2017; Makwa, 2012; Nakazibwe, 2005). Lilian Nabulime (2011; 2014) and Joan Kekimuri (2019) also include seeds and beans as well as healing practices, which the latter considers as indigenous art forms and/or as everyday objects and practices with deep spiritual and cultural meaning. Others, too, consider them pivotal for understanding local art histories and contemporary, culturally embedded art, for example for the work of Xenson (2016) and Acaye Kerunen (Merali, 2022).

In addition to the Kerunen and Xenson, artist and researcher Lilian Nabulime explored the potentials of soap sculptures with nails, seeds and (coffee) beans as well as other everyday objects she placed inside to speak about HIV (Nabulime and McEwan, 2014). Similar to Xenson, she used seeds and beans because of the associated cultural meanings, which allowed people she gathered in groups to speak about their experiences and fears, thereby overcoming taboos and hence promoting HIV/Aids awareness with the aim of preventing further spread (Nabulime and McEwan, 2011). Unlike Kerunen and other artists such as Fred Mutebi (Siegenthaler, 2019) or Sanaa Gateja (Kasozi, 2019) who work *jointly with* handicraft artists and use their products in form of barkcloth (Mutebi), sisal and woven objects (Kerunen) or rolled paper beads (Gateja) in their artistic productions, Nabulime uses culturally encrypted objects to foster communication. The soap sculptures – alongside a number of basket-based installations – were made especially for the purposes of raising awareness and seeking to find avenues to prevent the further spread of the HIV virus. As such, they differ both in form, aesthetics, and function from the large wooden sculptures Nabulime usually makes.

This idea – to use ‘culturally embedded art forms’ in socially oriented art projects – also dominated the *Design, Health and Community Project* in 2007 (Guille, 2012). In this collaborative arts-based research project, scholars from the art school at Makerere, the Durban University of Technology from South Africa and from Northumbria University from the United Kingdom, worked together with women affected by the HIV/Aids epidemic, who were invited to share their experiences in basketry and on barkcloth wall-hangings (Guille, 2012; White, 2009) with the ultimate aim of selling the products so that the women artisans could gain an income (Klages, 2022). The *Design, Health and Community Project* sought to combine a social (enabling communication about experiences with HIV/Aids) and an economic objective (generating income) by making art products that were (1.) considered local and familiar to the women artisans, (2.) cheap in material costs and (3.) identifiable as indigenous to Uganda by their customers who received an object that was relevant in terms of its situatedness as a cultural and as a social object. Many socially-engaged art projects I studied throughout the trajectory of my research tap into the very narrative of combining the support of artistic engagement and production with a socio-economic cause. In doing so, they submit to current development agendas of (women) empowerment, poverty eradication and sustainability, and frame art as *a tool* in order to address pressing societal issues (see also chapter 5.2.2).

2.3.3 The Emergence of International Development. Art as, for, and in Development

According to Sunananda Sanyal and Kizito Maria Kasule (2006), the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, marked an epoch during which art students in Ugandan tertiary education institutes began to vividly explore their pre-colonial material cultures as a source for inspiration for their artistic practice – creatively, intellectually, and emotionally. This was particularly boosted by the decision of president Yoweri Museveni to reinstate the monarchies in 1994 – albeit as cultural institutions without any executive political power (Reid, 2017). Although deprived legal political power, ceremonies and rituals, dress and actions do shape the self-perception of the people who identify as belonging to a particular kingdom. As such, the cultural practices and objects become indeed political and at times result in open conflict with government policies as I will exemplify when elaborating on the initiation ritual *Imbalu* of the (Ba-)Gisu of Eastern Uganda in chapter 7.3.

While art students and cultural leaders thus (re-)explored the histories of their material cultures, others continued to dwell on the socio-economic and commercial potential of promoting culturally embedded art production instead. As we have seen throughout the previous chapters, the promotion of artistic handicraft production in Uganda’s colonial and post-colonial history has ever been informed by the idea of commercializing ethnically and culturally marked art products. When the new

president Museveni opened the border to foreign aid organization in the 1980s, the *Cultural Turn* in Development was on the rise, and important international actors such as the World Bank or the UN, had just discovered the potential of culture as a possible pillar in and for development (Soini and Birkeland, 2014; Stupples, 2011).

The Cultural Turn in International Development

Museveni had come to power by overthrowing his predecessor Obote in 1986. In the following years, Museveni came to be known internationally as the liberator of Uganda, and hopes in countries of the Global North were high. Accordingly, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Uganda rose significantly from a little over \$10 per capita in 1986 to almost \$40 per capita by 1990 (see figure 2.3), in spite of an overall decrease in foreign aid to countries of the Global South and to East Africa in particular in the 1990s (Stein, 2009).

Around the same time, culture received a significant increase in the practical discourse on international development and international cooperation (Labadi, 2017). The available literature does not address direct linkages between the Cultural Turn and development initiatives in Uganda in the late nineteen-eighties and the early nineteen-nineties. Yet, it is evident that local developments did not occur in isolation from international development discourses. Therefore, I will now proceed to discuss the Cultural Turn in international development more broadly, before I return to Uganda, the country of my case study. With Clarke et al. (2018), this process of *zooming in and zooming out* of important elements in particular research situation helps to understand what constitutes the particularities and historical elements of the contemporary manifestations of the situation.

Polly Stupples (2011) finds that towards the end of the Cold War both the political left as well as the political right concluded that prominent development theories of modernism and globalization of the post-colonial era were not able to hold up to their premises and turned to new theoretical concepts that would accommodate successful development policies and initiatives. By the 1980s, she further states, many actors in the field of international (development) aid became disillusioned with the seeming ineffectiveness of measurements taken and monies spent in countries of the so-called Global South (Stupples, 2011). One possible solution to this problem, then, was found in considering local, endogenous and communal cultural customs for a more sustainable and successful implementation of mainstream development projects (Labadi, 2020a; Schech, 2018). From this perspective, the turn towards culture in seeking ways to improve the effectiveness of development aid can be interpreted as a result of (self-)critical evaluation of roughly 20 years of development work.

Sarah Radcliffe (2006) and other critical authors who focus on post-colonial dynamics in cultural studies or politics (e.g., Labadi, 2020a; Munck, 2010; Neverdeen Pieterse, 2010; Okereke and Agupusi, 2015; Schech and Haggis, 2000), however, take

a different stance. With regard as to *how* the Cultural Turn came into the development discourse debates, Radcliffe writes that during the 1980s “development thinking was increasingly challenged by Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial writers and activists, and began to reconsider its own specific institutional, historical, and cultural locations” (Radcliffe, 2006: 3). According to Radcliffe, considering culture was thus not a result of (self-)reflective activities, but rather strongly articulated and empirically grounded reasoning of critical perspectives, which visibilized the Euro-American focused situatedness of perceptions of progress in all its facets as embedded in “Western capitalist political economies and the cultural histories of European colonialism” (ibid 2006: 3). The Cultural Turn in development, as Radcliffe and others understand it, came to be because it was practically impossible to avoid it.

Elisha Stephan Atieno Odhiambo (2002) promotes yet another perspective regarding the question as to why development actors turned towards culture in finding reasons why development aid did not improve the livelihoods of individuals in African countries as intended: “Recent discourses among the developmentalist phalanx have once again foregrounded African culture as a problem of development” (Atieno Odhiambo, 2002: 2), he writes. The Cultural Turn here is neither the result of self-reflection nor a consequence of scientific reasoning, but rather an external (meaning western) explanation as to why development work failed to modernize African countries; their culture simply did not allow for development. This may remind of the ‘cultures of development vs. culture for development’ debate I will further discuss, but addresses a different issue altogether, as Atieno Odhiambo explains: “this development discourse [...] mostly defines modernity as what Africa is not. To put it bluntly, [...] neoliberalism needed to find a reason for their failure outside the policies themselves. Hence the reemergence of the discourse on culture as a barrier to development” (ibid: 2). Here, the turn towards culture becomes a strategy to avoid the critical (self-)reflection by constructing the *culture* of the subaltern African *Other* as a problem that needs to – but may simultaneously be impossible to – be overcome.

More recently, Sophia Labadi (2020b) questioned whether the Cultural Turn in development occurred at all. For had it occurred, she asks, should development practices not have changed fundamentally by now? Should ownership of development projects not be distributed equally among partners? Most development projects, she finds, inclusive of those that purposefully include cultural or artistic activities or focus on the promotion and preservation of art and cultural sites, keep the executive and hegemonial power where the funds come from. As such, not much has changed – or *turned* – since the alleged Cultural Turn.

The question regarding the Cultural Turn in international development thus remains complex and multifaceted. The positions discussed here are but a small selection of the large body of literature, which remains a topic in and by its own. Yet,

there are three implications that are important to highlight as they are important for my study and the questions it addresses:

(1) While in the discourse on *culture* in development there is much debate on *how* culture was “put into development discourse” (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995: 176), there is surprisingly little discussion about what *exactly* culture *means* under the conditions of development. “Culture tends to be treated as if it is, or conforms to, a *structure*, analogous to the state or nation” (ibid 1995: 176, emphasis as in original) Jan Neverdeen Pieterse writes, and this structural reading of *culture* disregards or over-looks “the point that culture is an *arena of struggle*” (ibid, emphasis as in original). This observation is of high importance for my study, in which the negotiated and dynamic meanings of visual, material cultural expression, are the subject of inquiry. In addition, culture is a rather tricky word and concept to define, as it

refers to the ordinary, everyday process of human life and the human mind – subjectivities, identities, values, systems of belief, kinship, patterns, modes of livelihoods – and also the forms of signification that circulate within a society. Words, images, material objects all function as signs or symbols which enable communication between social actors, and their circulation is influenced by states, institutions, corporations and other structures. (Schech, 2018: 291–292)

According to Susanne Schech, culture thus includes the ways individual life, society and politics among a particular group of people is organized at a given moment in time. As such it is structural. However, it is also institutional, as it is shaped by particular actors inclusive of organizations, who might use culture to serve their interests. It is dynamic, too, as the described elements that make culture circulate and thus move within a society. Material and visual culture, then, are materialized symbols of a particular culture at a particular moment in its particular conditions, and yet again, those symbols, too, can be manipulated and altered. But how, then, does this all relate to *development*?

Christiaan de Beukelaer (2017) demands for a separation between ‘culture in development’ and ‘cultures of development’, whereby culture in development is regarded as the development of e.g., the cultural and creative industries, and cultures of development as “cultural patterns that inform action [...] to gradually, selectively, and partially alter practice in order to foster development that is in line with the cultural context” (588). Schech’s conceptualization of culture can be linked with what Neverdeen Pieterse here refers to as cultures of development which then is interwoven with culture in development. Given the dynamic nature of both aspects of culture, it can be easily understood how the meanings of culture and its associated implications, can be site of struggle and contestation (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995; 2010), even more so when the arena is internationalized and globalized.

(2) If there is no consensus on the meaning of culture in development, then, consequently, there must be at least fuzziness about what culture in development and cultures of development are about. Radcliffe (2006) refers to five main reasons that respond to different notions of “culture as a key concept in development thinking. These [...] include the failure of previous development paradigms; perceptions of globalization’s threat to cultural diversity; activism around social difference (gender, ethnicity, anti-racism); the development success stories in South-East Asia; and the need for social cohesion” (Radcliffe, 2006: 3). According to Radcliffe, they are not found together in the sense that there are no linkages between the beforementioned perceptions in policies and practice. For example, the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* was adopted as a response to the threat of decreasing cultural diversity especially in countries of the Global South due to globalization (De Beukelaer and Vlassis, 2020). Among others, the 2005 Convention proposes the establishment for an *International Fund for Cultural Diversity* dedicated to so-called *developing* countries to make their creative industry more competitive internationally, thereby positioning the creative industries within (economic) development discourses (see also chapters 5.2.4 and 6). Anita Kangas, Nancy Duxbury and Christiaan De Beukelaer (2017) are among several critics of this separation into multiple dimensions that are presented as either social, economic, political *or*, as a result of more recent paradigm shifts, environmental.

Development actors and policy makers who apply culture in their work may thus refer to entirely different notions and functions of culture, albeit without explicating it. Scholars such as Lourdes Arizpe (2004) point out that culture has implicitly always already been part of international development. Or rather, the way development is and has been understood has always already been part of culture (Errington, 1998). The main difference, then, is that culture, possibly in part as a result of the Cultural Turn, was now made explicit.

In spite of all fuzziness and contradictions with regard to what exactly culture entails, the Cultural Turn promoted the idea of culture’s agency in development, which, among others, resulted in limited funding opportunities for art within the scope of international development (Radcliffe and Laurie, 2006; Stupples, 2011; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017). While it can be argued that Radcliffe’s listing of *only five* main reasons may be under complex in elaborating as to why the cultural turn came to international development research and practice, for example by disregarding more critical perspectives and especially those from the Global South (e.g. Atieno Odhiambo, 2002), disregarding the sustainability aspect (Kangas et al., 2017), or the economic potential associated with the commodification of cultural heritage (Lafrenz Samuels, 2020; Meskell, 2015), in the empirical situation of my research, some significant policies and practice initiatives – for example the beforementioned *Design, Health and Community Project* – were developed partially in response to those very reasons Radcliffe summarized. Despite some paradigmatic changes towards

sustainability and environmental protection in international development, they continue to be quite relevant for the reconstruction and shaping of contemporary framings of cultural – inclusive of artistic – practices in the realms of civic engagement, socio-economic development, empowerment and cultural heritage, to name but a few.

(3) Ironically, the Cultural Turn in Development, which sought to have brought awareness of cultural underpinnings to normative conceptions to the development arena, did not reflect how it centered around international organizations, their funding strategies and their headquarters in countries of the Global North such as New York City (UN, UNDP), Paris (UNESCO), Washington D.C. (World Bank), or Geneva (WHO, UNHCR, IOM). As such, it placed the Cultural Turn with development actors in the Global North, and so did large parts of the scientific literature about it as well (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995; 2010; Stupples, 2011; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017). Since the Cultural Turn in international development is oftentimes associated with channeling funds from the North to cultural activities in the South, it disregarded development efforts, initiatives and agendas from within countries of the Global South. One such example could be the *Uganda Crafts Emporium I* introduced in chapter 2.3.1, which promoted local artistic handicraft production, aiming at national and international markets. The president at the time, Milton Obote, sought to create a sense of national identity among Ugandans through its peoples' material cultures, to commercialize it locally and abroad, and to strengthen the role of women as public actors (Miller, 1975). Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, too, used cultural practices and the arts for the development of nationhood, cultural identity and diplomacy of newly independent Ghana; within its borders as well as abroad (Wolf-Phillips, 1987). Both cases demonstrate that funding for arts and culture did emerge prior to what is considered the Cultural Turn in international development, albeit with different aims and different approaches applied.

The debate around the Cultural Turn was and in part continues to be centered with development actors from the Global North, and it oversaw that in early post-independence years, countries such as Uganda had indeed conceptualized and framed (community) development alongside and with culture. Newly independent Uganda for example had established a Ministry for Culture and Community Development and a National Culture Centre (UNCC) in 1964 (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006). It was turned into the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in 1995 by current president Yoweri Museveni.

Considering the heritage conventions from 1972 and 2003 alongside the plentitude of alleged functions and (economic) potentials associated with material culture as identified by local and foreign actors, one might come to think that the space for artists and artisans in Uganda alike to create *the new* art where *the old* – to borrow from Littlefield Kasfir (1999) –, here meaning the local artistic handicraft, remains situated within the arenas of vocational occupation, economization, authenticity,

heritage construction, poverty eradication and increasingly, tourism, is highly restricted. As such, artistic handicrafts become a political issue – one of contestation and competing discourses for the upper hand on meaning making of the local material culture. This contestation is both scientifically discursive and practical, and runs the risk of focusing on urban centers and international actors rather than on the particular conditions of art making in Uganda.

The academic literature, it appears, not only fails to consider the multidimensionality and simultaneity of culture in development as Radcliffe (2006) and Kangas et al. (2017) suggest, but also keeps a narrow perspective when studying the Cultural Turn in international development, as they largely focus on development actors from the Global North while paying fewer attention on actors from the South or on South-South cooperations. In part this neglect bears similarities to the discourse on civil society in Africa, whereby the rise of civil society in African countries is frequently associated with the end of the Cold War and as exported to the continent to foster democratization (Obadare, 2011). What indeed was exported to Africa was the western civil society language and conceptions thereof, which frequently equalize civil society with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, much like culture and cultural practices were part of development schemes in African countries prior to the Cultural Turn, civil society, too, – of course – existed prior to the arrival of theoretical concepts from the North in the late 1980s (ibid), albeit in different ways, with different objectives, and in different conditions. Both examples remind of the importance of considering the situatedness of phenomena, paradigms and *turns*, and to pay particular attention to the perspectives that are not considered – in development practice as well as in policy making and in academic writing about both.

In the available literature on funding for the arts and cultural activities in Uganda, the impact of the Cultural Turn has not yet been explored. However, cultural institutes such as the French Alliance Francaise, the German Goethe Institute, the British Council as well as organizations such as the Dutch Prins Claus Fund which are among the major funders of art in Uganda shaped and were equally shaped by the Cultural Turn (Stupples, 2011; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017). In addition, the UN World Decade on Cultural Development which is frequently linked with the Cultural Turn (Labadi, 2020a) addressed issues such as the “acknowledgement of the cultural dimension of development”, the “affirmation and enrichment of cultural identities” or the “promotion of international cultural co-operation” (UNESCO, 1999: 4) which influenced development agendas and discourse positions until this day. The Cultural Turn, I argue, is a historical element that co-constitutes the contemporary discourse (Clarke et al., 2018) on sustainable development in Uganda and is thus relevant for the empirical reconstruction of the situatedness of contemporary artistic handicraft production in the realm of civil society.

2.4 Conclusions

Art, Crafts, and Everything in Between

In this chapter I introduced the situatedness of art, art education and artistic handicraft in contemporary debates on art and craft in Uganda. I further displayed how, at least since the early twentieth century, artistic practices, and art education in today's Uganda have been interwoven with colonization and evangelization through which new hierarchies were established and through which especially people living in rural areas were downgraded, inclusive of their ways of living and meaning making, social and political structures. Especially the legacy of Margaret Trowell, the founder of the art school at Makerere College (now Makerere University), continues to impact the discourse on art in Uganda. While she challenged Europeans to think outside their normative assumptions about art from Africa and to consider cultural and societal differences when viewing artistic handicraft objects, she also promoted the idea of a local peasant society with appreciation for manufactured everyday items produced by local artisans that would foster the economic development of the Ugandan Protectorate.

After her return to Great Britain in 1958, her successor Cecil Todd began to modernize the art school to the dismay of Trowell's protégées around Sam Ntiro, Eli Kyeyune and Gregory Maloba, who, one after the other, left the art school after the curriculum was altered significantly. At the same time, Ugandans worked towards independence. During anticolonial and independence movements, the establishment of cultural identity, at times symbolized through particular aesthetic features such as wearing barkcloth, had become important for the development of individual and collective identity. After independence, Uganda's first president Milton Obote sought to use culturally significant symbols, artefacts and art objects for the creation of a national identity through *the Uganda Crafts Emporium*. Craft centers and markets were created alongside a catalogue, which was distributed among high commissioners and in embassies abroad, and for the first time it was particularly women who were encouraged to become handicraft artists.

Throughout all those developments, the separation of visual arts in higher art education and artistic handicrafts as a part- or spare-time activity – one being art and the other being craft – grew. It was during the brutal dictatorship of Idi Amin during which the lecturers left at the Makerere art school began to re-explore working with local raw materials in larger numbers as paint, tools and painting grounds were difficult to get and became very expensive. During this period, Francis Nnaggenda became a leading artists and lecturer in Uganda, for he was among the few artists who had already explored the use of unconventional materials in his large sculptures. This development reached a peak during the nineteen-nineties and after Yoweri Museveni had come to power. His regency led towards an influx in official development assistance (ODA) in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties, a rise in

the number of (western) NGOs and project funds, and in 1995 towards the re-establishment of the monarchies as cultural institutions.

Around the same time, several young artists began to seek inspiration by studying their own cultural history, and sought to bridge the gap between indigenous or traditional/historical art objects, musicking and dancing and contemporary visual art. Yet, the relationship of indigenous art forms in contemporary art for formalized trained artists continues to remain challenging. For several artists and in art-oriented social projects, artistic handicrafts and culturally relevant symbols and everyday objects considered indigenous, are used when working with people with a low income and little or no formal education, with refugees, or individuals and groups considered as underprivileged because of other demographic markers. Those initiative generally aim at socio-economic empowerment of the people understood to be underprivileged.

However, artists do not necessarily make use of what is considered traditional or indigenous artistic methods in their own artistic practice. Artists such as Acaye Kerunen, Fred Mutebi or Sana Gateeja, who work together with handicraft artisans and further use the handcrafted products in their artworks, continue to remain few in numbers. The difficulties in maneuvering and integrating the 'indigenous' with the 'contemporary', equally regarding both as art with cultural and social importance also to people outside Uganda's art world, continue to play an important role in the Ugandan discourse on art and craft, on history and contemporaneity, on socio-cultural responsibility and individual desires to express oneself freely.

The Cultural Turn in Development, in the scientific discourse primarily situated among international organizations that shape development organizations and among funding organizations historically primarily located in countries of the Global North, brought forward different notions of the meaning of culture in, for, and as development. For this study, the questions of *authentic* artistic cultural expression, of heritage protection and promotion, and of sustainability within the negotiated (civic) spaces of the *new art* and the *old art* as well as the references to Margaret Trowell and her conceptualizations of art and craft are important sensitive concepts. Therefore, in what follows, I turn to the discussion of those civic spaces within which such negotiations are partly situated.

Chapter 3: Civil Society, Uganda, and Power Dynamics in the Postcolony

In the succeeding chapter 3, contemporary concepts of civil society (chapter 3.1), which are discussed against the backdrop of their particular socio-historical situatedness are introduced. It is displayed how mere applications of said concepts without adaptations can lead to highly differing analyses of civic articulation in Uganda (chapter 3.2). To exemplify, I refer to the *Bataka Union* as a short literature-based case study. Moving beyond the case of the *Bataka Union*, I then provide a literature review on civil society in Uganda mostly conceptualized as non-governmental organizations (chapter 3.3). In closing the chapter, I merge the debates on artistic articulation and civil society and highlight some of its implicit and explicit linkages (chapter 3.4). Doing so, I demonstrate how artistic expression through artistic handicraft production and products can become a space for counter-hegemonic articulation, which mark the transition to the empirical part of this dissertation.

3.1 Introduction

The Situatedness of Civil Society in Present-day Uganda

I closed the previous chapter with two questions: *what* is art and *when* is it? Based on Nannyonga-Tamusuuzza's observation that once something becomes art it ceases to be an intimate and vital aspect of living, one could simply separate art from cultural practices of significance. Upon closer look, however, I understand her observation as a revelation that the discourse dominating conceptualizations of art do not sufficiently respond to the conditions and the situatedness of local artistic expression. Therefore, we might ask where art remains an intimate and vital aspect of living, and how such moments are fostered by and through its agency. This would mean considering the social aspects of art production (Wendl, 2012), and to ground it in the situatedness of local conditions (Haraway, 1988).

In addition, the previous chapter has also shown that the questions *what* and *when* is art is not a subject matter that is debated and decided within the art world only. In postcolonial Uganda as well as in other countries of the Global South, this

question is co-negotiated (some would argue co-opted) by development actors such as the UN agencies and their (development) agendas, by foreign countries that provide funding for the arts through cultural institutes (in Uganda in particular by the British Council, the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Francaise), or through project-funding (e.g. by the GIZ or the Enhanced Integrated Framework), biennales (2020 for example co-funded by the EU, the Swiss arts council and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), and residency programs (e.g. the British Council and the Dutch Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, which jointly fund 32° East Ugandan Arts Trust), by actors of the tourism sector and by private philanthropic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Alongside governmental bodies, art education institutes, art associations and artistically engaged social organizations, artists, art collectives and informally organized (handicraft) groups as well as cultural groups are the actors in this arena in which meaning-making, discursive, hegemonic, and executive power are contested. As such, negotiations about *what*, *when* and *how* art becomes a subject matter of political dimensions that addresses issues such as author- and ownership, heritage construction, and the (im-) possibilities for homegrown answers to questions of art and development.

Against this background it is worthwhile, if not pivotal, to consider artistic meaning making and cultural practices from social, political, and developmental angles. This space of socio-political contestation, which comprises the hegemonic struggles between state and non-state actors, is frequently referred to as civil society (Ferguson, 2006).

Mainstream literature on current notions of civil society broadly conceived discusses three major strands that seek to define it (Anheier and Toepler, 2010; Edwards, 2009, 2011b). The first and dominant strand is heavily informed by French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) (Ehrenberg, 2011). It understands civil society as (1) the realm of associational life that decentralizes administrative power and, in doing so, controls it. Civil society here is a certain *type* of society (namely of NGOs). The other two strands define civil society as (2) the public sphere and (3) the *good society*, respectively (Edwards, 2009, 2011b). The *public sphere* theories build upon German philosopher Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831) and view civil society as the sphere of public debate, which includes, among others, various forms of civic engagement and an independent media. Lastly, *good society* theories evolved around the notion of civil society being a *normative concept*; a kind of society where individuals and groups should and would live freely and reasonably. All three concepts position civil society as a space somewhere between the family and the state, between the private and the public, and a space where reason wins and democracy is strengthened. Its major aims are attributed to the protection of liberties and freedoms of individuals in, with, and from the state (Edwards, 2011b; Ekeh, 1992).

The concept of civil society was debated fiercely and vividly during the 1980s when scholars, journalists and politicians of the *West* sought to understand the po-

litical opposition movements in countries of the former Soviet Union that would eventually lead towards the end of the Cold War (Edwards, 2011a; Ehrenberg, 2011). If the non-violent civil society movement in the former Soviet Union was powerful enough to overrule its authoritarian regime and the ever-present state (Buttigieg, 1995), so it was assumed, it would also have the capacities to enhance and foster democratization in African countries (Obadare, 2011). In consequence, civil society as a democratization concept was integrated into development agendas (Ekeh, 1992; Kleibl, 2021).

In Africa of the 1980s, researchers, philosophers, activists, and so-called development experts were coming to the conclusions that modernization theory and its conviction that democracy was the consequence of economic development¹ – had not led towards stable democracies in the postcolonial era (Ekeh, 1992). Instead, many African countries were ruled by authoritative regimes. In the hope for a more successful strategy, civil society, as a theoretical and practice concept, gained popularity in the discourse around development in Africa (Obadare, 2011). Ebenzer Obadare even writes of the time as “days of enchantment” (ibid:183). “[T]he attempts at developing African societies from above through the strengthening of African states” (Ekeh, 1992: 197), was now replaced with the imagination of “developing Africa from the underbrush of society [which] will yield important results, at least for the expansion of democracy in Africa” (ibid: 197).

This can be observed in the influx in publications using civil society terminology from the mid-1980s onwards, when its associated relevance for democratic development in Africa increased exponentially (Akínrinádé, 2004; Ekeh, 1992; Obadare, 2011, 2014). Unfortunately, and despite the alleged *Cultural Turn* occurring in international development at the same time, the historical situatedness of the conceptualizations of civil society as a western political construct remained largely unthought of. This was, as Peter Ekeh points out, highly problematic:

In order to fully capture the possible strengths and weaknesses in the conceptualization of civil society in African societies, there is need for its comparative study in the light of historical perspectives that inform political developments of state and society in Africa and Europe. This is so because the danger exists of misapply-

1 This assumption led towards large investments in form of loans into the state bodies of African nation-states. Empirical evidence strongly suggests that development aid, especially in form of loans, increases inequality and poverty instead of reducing it (for a review, see Mahembe and Odhiambo, 2019). Experts such as Dambisa Moyo (2010) assume that development aid is a strategy of the Global North to keep Africa dependent. Others emphasize how even debt-relief may not have liberating effects on African nation states. It usually comes with conditions that include privatization, economic liberalization, and deregulation, which limit the possibilities of political independence (Omotola and Saliu, 2009).

ing Western political constructs to African circumstances, especially when their analyses concern such history-soaked concepts as civil society. (Ekeh, 1992: 188)

The aim of this research is to reconstruct the situatedness of artistic handicraft production in Ugandan civil society in order to understand how the actors involved conceptualize artistic handicraft practices, and how they shape meaning making associated with ethnically, culturally, socially, economically and politically marked artefacts. Therefore, in the following chapter I dwell on the perspectives that theorize political developments of state and society in Africa and conceptualize civil society increasingly more nuanced and according to locally significant terms (e.g., Kamruzzaman, 2019; Kasfir, 2017; Kleibl, 2021). In setting the scene, I briefly introduce the historical conditions of civil society in the Global North (chapter 3.2), before I elaborate in more depth and detail on the civil society discourse in Uganda (chapter 3.3). In closing, I specifically address the linkages between artists and artistic production in the hegemonic spheres of civil society and its implications for the empirical part of this research to follow (chapter 3.4).

3.2 The State, the Public, and the Private Problematizing Dominant Civil Society Conceptions

Michael Edwards (2011), Palash Kamruzzaman (2019), and Ebenzer Obadare (2014) point out how much of the contemporary civil society discourse continues to be dominated by studies of formal organizations. These include mostly (urban-based) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) (Obadare, 2014), which build heavily on Tocqueville's association of civil society with *free associations*. Free associations are free because they are independent from the state, and, at least theoretically, able to control it from gaining too much power (Ehrenberg, 2011). At the same time however, free associations can only exist where the state grants them their very existence (Woldring, 1998). In other words, the Tocquevillian civil society concept can only flourish in an environment where all actors involved consent to the idea of mutual control. Civil society organizations need to be free from state control in their content production to be able to articulate criticism and confront the state. It cannot control state actions unless the state allows for it to do so.

In light of what is frequently referred to as 'shrinking spaces for civil society', civil society and non-governmental organizations are faced with regulations that limit the scope of their actions (Smidt, 2018; Omona and Romaniuk, 2021). In Uganda, the 2016 Non-Governmental Organisations Act introduced a new regulatory and registration framework for non-governmental organizations which, it is argued, may have been purposefully designed to hamper organizations from

retrieving legal registration (Isgren, 2018; Omona and Romaniuk, 2021). In addition, the Ugandan government has restricted foreign funding for local civil society organizations (Smidt, 2018).

While the spaces for civil society organizations may be shrinking due to governmental restrictions, the Ugandan government, too, is partially dependent on non-governmental organizations as they provide employment opportunities, deliver medical care and education, or direct money flows into the local economy through project funds, taxes, or mobility of their staff and volunteers (Hammet and Jackson, 2018). Retrieving funds from foreign and international civil society organizations is also one of the strategies proposed in the 2040 Agenda for economic prosperity (Uganda 2040 Vision), although funding strategies appear to defer governmental agencies for reasons of non-affiliation with governmental policies and for the circumvention of funds disappearing in governmental offices (Springman, 2020; 2022). Yet, the development industry itself needs significant percentages of the granted funds to maintain itself, hence dedicating smaller shares to e.g. poverty reduction efforts (Ulrich et al., 2024). While it appears that the current Ugandan government seeks to limit political advocacy work of civil society organizations, at times it does consider positions and insights from associations. Ellinor Isgren (2018: 183) summarizes this space for civil society advocacy to be “not *apolitical*, but not *too political*”, either.

The association with civil society being the realm of non-governmental organizations that focus on service provision is considered to be prevailing in the national discourse on civil society until this day (Mamdani, 1995; Isgren, 2018; Hammet and Jackson, 2018), which, as Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly (2018: 136) argue, led towards civil society taking on a “self-proclaimed ‘non-political’ character”. Several scholars consider this being closely related to the Ugandan history. Daniel Hammet and Lucy Jackson (2018) and Noel Kiiza Kansiime (2019), for example, link it with the NRM efforts to decentralize the government and to increase local political engagement, albeit set within carefully determined boundaries. They observe a “historical resistance to critical civil society and efforts to co-opt this sector to support national development policies (ibid: 148), a strategy that becomes immanent in the 2016 Non-Governmental Organisations Act (2015: 1), in which it is stated that “[i]t is well known that the [NGO] sector compliments Government service delivery through the provision of services like health, education and water among others”.

Several associations and organizations (partially) oppose the focus on service delivery and highlight the importance of advocacy work of civil society organizations (Isgren, 2018; Kasiime, 2019; Kontinen and Ndidde, 2023). However, especially Kasiime and Kontinen and Ndidde highlight the challenge of accountability of civil society organizations engaged with advocacy work in Uganda and, related, the question of legitimacy of civil society actors who are often more accountable to their funders

than to the people they represent and whose legitimacy is closely linked with how they are able to negotiate to meet the interests of the parties involved.

These examples demonstrate how civil society, state and funders of civic activities mutually co-constitute one another as they are shaped and reshaped by their historical and structural particularities. Building on a critical perspective influenced by Gramscian thought, Isgren (2018: 181), proposes to “approach civil society as neither isolated from wider structural conditions nor free from internal tensions. I follow Mohan (2002) in taking heed of Mamdani’s (1996) call to examine ‘actually existing’ civil society and its historical formation”. With Sam Hickey (2005) and Neil Webster and Lars Engberg-Pedersen (2002), in this research project, I understand civil society as “political space” which is embedded in “power relations that shape [] complex relationships” (Hickey, 2005: 996). In this sense, civil society is not always already associated with democratization, nor does it necessarily always promote progressive ideas.

To empirically grasp notions of civil society beyond state-NGO relations, scholars such as Kamruzzaman (2019) and Obadare (2014), too, emphasize the need to shift beyond the rigid boundaries of formalized organizations. Obadare understands this shift to serve two major functions. First, it re-appropriates the civil society idea to the African context. This, he argues, is needed in order to detach it from the prevailing conditions that were so essential for its developments in the Global North. Second, it applies the language of civil society to “nontraditional subjects” (2014: 2) and thus extends it to “orature and viral messaging” which “opens up new possibilities of seeing those same subjects, while also revealing new modes, spaces, and possibilities of formulating subjectivity and organizing resistance in Africa” (ibid: 2).

Kamruzzaman builds on Gramsci’s conceptual notions, whereby civil society simultaneously serves as the site of (civil) resistance *and* of the established order (Kamruzzaman, 2019: 6). He emphasizes its political roles, and the “various forms of altruism, associations, activisms, religious charity, gender diversity, movements, protests, [and] anti-establishment campaigns fighting global hegemony” (Kamruzzaman, 2019: 5) that shape its discourses. In both cases the concept of civil society is complex and multifaceted, its actors diverse and their aims plenty (though not always serving democratic aims). While both conceptualize civil society as an arena of political contestation, it does not automatically address the state, which, at times is not recognized as the most important political entity in the postcolonial era (Ekeh, 1992; Kasfir, 1998a; 2017). Whereas the relationships between the postcolonial state, its citizens, and the primordial public in many African countries significantly shapes its civil societies, they remain widely underrepresented in more conventional notions of civil society, in part because of their own historical and temporal situatedness.

The Toxic Brew of Unreflected Political Theorization

In the contemporary civil society discourse, William Friedrich Hegel's conceptions of civil society as the outer state of need and reason whereby citizens act in their interests and for specific purposes but from unequal conditions continue to be widely discussed (see, for example: Ferguson, 2006; Klein, 2010; Obadare, 2014; DeLue and Dale, 2021; Kleibl, 2021). However, as Steven DeLue and Timothy Dale (2021) note, in Hegel's social theory, the industrialized European societies of the 19th century marked the 'end of history'. Europeans, especially in Great Britain and Germany, he believed, had reached the highest state of development (Kleibl, 2017). Applying his theory to African societies (with their different societal structures, histories and mechanisms he did not bother to understand), he framed Africans in the state of "the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state" (Hegel, 1957: 93, as cited in Kleibl, 2017: 24). Tanja Kleibl further follows Enrique Dussel (1993), who understands Hegel to have been the founder of Eurocentrism in development, which led towards immense injustices that prevail to this day.

However, Hegel was not the only political theorist who considered colonization, its injustices and violences inevitable. Alexis de Tocqueville's understandings of civil society as the realm of free non-governmental association are foundational for contemporary conceptions (Edwards, 2011a; Ehrenberg, 2011; Kamruzzaman, 2019; Obadare, 2014). He, too, considered colonialism and the colonial state as legitimate (Kohn and McBride, 2011), a "heroic enterprise" (Kohn, 2008: 260) even. Albeit a firm believer in rule of law and equality in front of it, he was also convinced that "exceptional measures" (Tocqueville, 2001: 116, as cited in Kohn, 2008: 256) and martial law for the handling of the indigenous people of the French Colony Algeria and beyond were indeed appropriate and needed.

This is as problematic as his convictions – and consequentially the ontological and epistemological underpinnings, which tint his concept of free and voluntary associations – remain largely unreflected, potentially because they happen to fit into liberalist notions of development (Kleibl, 2017, 2021). But what exactly are those free associations according to Tocqueville, and why are they so central to him for a functioning civil society?

Civil Society as the Realm of Free Associations

Alexis de Tocqueville grew up in France in the post-revolution period. He believed that the revolution had been the consequence of social and political processes in France which had been developing for over two centuries, as well as the country's administrative and governmental centralization (Woldring, 1998). For him, governmental centralization was elementary because lawmaking and foreign relations needed to be similar within nation states. In addition, governmental centralization

was necessary for the control of free associations that, if uncontrolled, could cause “social struggle” (ibid: 364).

In a Tocquevillian sense, government regulates free associations much as free associations regulate government. Free associations include industries, private businesses, educational and religious institutions. The majority of all people, he believed, strive for material well-being, and they do so voluntarily and in free associations. It was precisely because of these narrow, parochial and self-centered interests that “Americans [sic] had learned to defend liberty without surrendering to democratic excess”, John Ehrenberg (2011: 24) writes. Tocqueville promoted a notion of “civil society as localism, voluntarism, and association” (ibid: 24), and as fragmented to particular interests based on materialistic well-being. For Tocqueville, equality and democracy would prosper in an individualist society, an understanding that resonates well with liberal theorists such as Hobbes, Locke, and Smith, but also with modernization and liberalization theories that continue to be important in development frameworks.

Tocqueville did examine racial inequalities (Tillery Jr.; 2009; Stokes, 1990). Yet he is criticized for not having considered the widespread inequality in his civil society concept, nor the acknowledgement of “how inequality of condition might inhibit voluntary activity for those with neither the time nor the resources to spend on it” (Ehrenberg, 2011: 24). This results, according to Ehrenberg in a liberal civil society that ultimately reinforces inequality and privilege.

Searching for Equality or the Need for the Democratization of Civil Society

Although Karl Marx did not relate to Tocqueville’s concept of civil society, he saw civil society in deep need for democratization (Ehrenberg, 2011). He did, however, very much criticize Hegel’s civil society notions (DeLue and Dale, 2021; Duquette, 1989). For Marx it was clear that people needed liberation from structures and inequalities that denied them “the full expression of their capacities” (DeLue and Dale, 2021: 246). Both, state and civil society, needed to be transformed. This transformation meant to emancipate political theory from “politics to economics, from the state to civil society, from the formal to the substantial” (Ehrenberg, 2011: 22–23). Furthermore, Ehrenberg writes that for Marx “democratizing civil society [required] abolishing [bourgeois political understandings and institutions] and moving towards an ‘association’ that [transcended] the chaos, antagonism, inequality, and arbitrariness of market society” (ibid: 24).

For Marx, civil society includes all aspects of commercial and industrial life which expands civil society beyond and above the state. Particularly in his later works, civil society holds a duality, as it is both the “base and superstructure” (Hunt, 1987: 275) in the sense that it has a phenomenal content and an ideological form. The former holds the entirety of “the relations of commodity exchange and circulation

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 omission 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; Kansime, 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 urgency 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 urgency 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 Foundation² 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 concepts 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 chiefs 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-optation 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.

In spite of the paucity of explicitly interdisciplinary literature linking the two, the here presented studies often address how art and society are implicitly co-constitutive of one another and that the analysis of one must indeed consider the other as well (Wendl, 2012). At the *Royal Kasubi Tombs* for example, weaving mats and baskets for offerings and ancestral worship are directly linked with the social status of the women weavers. The shapes and products are associated with purity, neatness, and history among other things, and producing them is an honorable task (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). The meaning of the art products here cannot be separated from the highly-skilled women who produce them and who are the wives of the ruling *Kabaka*. Nor can they be separated from the place they are produced for and used. The baskets convey messages of aesthetics and cannot be understood without the complex network of social and political relationships surrounding them.

An empirical conceptualization of civil society that builds on the understanding of civil society as a political space embedded in complex and dynamic power relations allows for the consideration of artistic production processes and its products in the analysis of civic relations for both the understanding of mechanisms of power and opposition in a society. Here, artistic expression especially in everyday material cultural expression can be a space for the negotiation of consent, for the establishment of counter-hegemony in a Gramscian sense, and for the contestation of everything in between.

Against this background, an empirical analysis that specifically investigates the situatedness of artistic handicraft in civil society does not only address an important gap in academic knowledge production. It also allows for a critical assessment of co-dependent and dominating discourses on art, (sustainable) development, poverty eradication, and empowerment by investigating *who* shapes those discourses and *how* the involved actors navigate through expectations and aspirations, through questions of cultural ownership and heritage (construction), among others. In focusing on Uganda in particular, in the empirical part of my dissertation I build on the preceding two literature-based chapters and discuss handicraft artists and their activities against the backdrop of a civil society framework. Thereby I particularly consider artistic handicraft and its spaces outside the realm of institutionalized art production.

Chapter 4: Constructing Postcolonial Situational Analysis

Grounded Epistemologies, Non-Human Agency, and Visibilizing Overseen Positions

The following chapter is dedicated to the introduction of the methodological underpinnings that informed, structured, and guided my research process as well as to the elaborations as to how they are appropriate and suitable for the research project at hand. Here, I further elaborate on methodical decisions with regard to methods of gathering data and sampling strategy applied, methods of analysis as well as the process of validating the findings.

I do so by first situating myself as researcher into the research project (chapter 4.1) to address relationalities between researcher and researched, inquiry in conditions of inequalities that (re-)produce epistemic violence and how they shape the data gathering processes through theoretical sampling.

In the succeeding sub-chapter (chapter 4.2), I introduce Situational Analysis as a research methodology. I do so by first situating Situational Analysis into postcolonial thoughts. Next, I dwell on the possibilities of Situational Analysis for the analysis of visual material culture and nonhuman agency (chapter 4.3), before I elaborate on how I used Situational Analysis in my research (chapter 4.4). Thereby, I introduce mapping as an analytical strategy and describe how I maneuvered through the analysis of my empirical material with mapping, memoing, and accompanying coding or sequential analysis. In closing this chapter, I address several important limitations of my research (chapter 4.5) before I then proceed to the second part of this study and the findings from my empirical study.

4.1 Introduction

About Situated Subjectivities

In the contemporary scientific discourse, conducting research in a foreign country, especially when it is composed in a North-South dyad and hence frequently embed-

ded in structural inequalities, is not considered an innocent endeavor. Much has been published in more recent years about its implications for academic knowledge production, ethics, and the positionality especially of the researcher from the Global North (e.g. Torres Edejer, 1999; Zhang, 2016; Walsh et al., 2016; Iphofen and Tolich, 2018; Green, 2019; Brasher, 2020; de Sousa Santos and Meneses, 2020; Bendix et al., 2020; Phiri, 2021; Iroulo et al., 2022).

Prior to embarking on this research trajectory, I had been sensitized to power imbalances through my work with minoritized people and my studies. Yet, I had thought of myself as critical and self-reflective enough, and hence *well equipped*, for conducting research in a foreign country. Not in any foreign country, but in a country whose borders exist as the result of European colonization – in a country where the pre-colonial indigenous infrastructures, social, and juridical systems were first destroyed and later half-heartedly replaced by European ‘civilizing’ missions and concepts of progress, labor, welfare, military, and governance (Clapham, 2020). This is in a country where first German and later British colonial governments installed western education, imported western political theory, and spread their faith and ideas about the meaning of life, purpose, and society, and where to this day many NGOs, investors, donors, and policy makers continue to believe in this notion of progress, which – from their perspectives – is universal, without considering the coloniality of this thinking. For it was in the process of colonization that Europeans and later also North Americans turned *their* forms of knowing into *universal* ideas (Clapham, 2020; Errington, 1998).

The criticism of this notion of white, male Anglo-European superiority is as almost as old as Hegel’s social theory (see also chapter 3.2) which was so foundational for the development of Eurocentrism and the racialization of people (Dussel, 1993). It can be found for example Sojourner Truth’s (now) famous speech from 1851 “*Ain’t I a Woman?*” which she delivered at the Women’s Rights Convention at the Old Stone Church in Akron Ohio, USA:

[T]hey talk about this thing in the head; what’s this they call it? [member of audience whispers, “intellect”] – That’s it, honey. What’s that got to do with women’s rights or negroes’ [sic] rights? If my cup won’t hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn’t you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full? (Truth, 1851: n.p.)

Truth, who freed herself from slavery and later became a traveling preacher, was a human rights activist and opposed the notion that women were of lesser intelligence than men; furthermore, she rallied for women of color. In doing so, she connected women’s rights with the rights of people in slavery. With *Ain’t I a Woman?*, Truth juxtaposed Hegel’s social theory at a time when it was widely used to justify colonization, racialization, and exploitation. This is only one example, but it demonstrates

how universal claims were always already merely one among several ontologies and epistemologies, and illustrates the importance of highlighting pluriversality in conceptualizing knowledge.

About a century later (in 1951) under entirely different circumstances in late colonial Uganda, an elderly man, Paulo Lukongwa, was interviewed by anthropologist Martin Southwold. The latter could not believe Lukongwa, who insisted that “more than half a century of colonial development policies had brought almost nothing to his country” (Summers, 2014: 21). In his field notes, Southwold noted down the conversation, which went about as the following:

Writing was new wonderful, he [Lukongwa] admired, and he gave European colonizers credit for cars and bicycles that made travel faster. But otherwise, nothing was new. Martin Southwold [...] suggested that clocks were new, and Lukongwa pointed out that they'd had roosters to wake them up. Surely the gramophone was progress, Southwold asserted, and Lukongwa responded that when they had wanted music, they called people to play – and what was more, those people had danced. No gramophone – or radio – did that. Reaching, Southwold noted that the radio also brought news. Once, Lukongwa asserted, they had all had spirits living in their houses that passed on local gossip. Thus people then had plenty of news. [...] Lukongwa completed his explanation that ‘God ... has given us all the things we need; and he gave the Europeans cleverness so that they could make things for themselves ... But you Europeans disobeyed him and came here to Africa to take away our land. You are ... robbers! Look at that Governor (Andrew Cohen), what a bad man he is, always trying to take away the people's land.’” (Martin Southwold, visit with Paulo Lukongwa, 31 August 1955, as cited in Summers, 2014: 21)

As it turns out, Martin Southwold had not only wrongly assumed that the *progress* Europeans had brought would have been highly appreciated by Ugandans, but in this conversation with Paulo Lukongwa, he further learned how concepts of land ownership and governance were defined rather differently locally than what he had known and assumed to be right.

Research, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues in her widely recognized essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), is deeply embedded in structural power manifestations established by both: prevailing Anglo-American epistemologies and patriarchy. According to Spivak, it is impossible to omit to reproduce epistemic violence¹ in research even if one is aware of it. After all, she writes, all scholars today are educated in a western or westernized academic system and thus cannot overcome the prevailing structural frameworks in their thinking entirely.

1 For more detailed information on the mechanisms and the genealogy of epistemic violence but also on constructive notions how to constructively work with it, I refer to Claudia Brunner (2020).

Epistemic violence occurs on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Brunner, 2020). It ranges from the *Colonialidad del ser* – coloniality of being – (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), which considers concrete experiences of exclusion because of outer, often visible markers on the micro-level. It further includes what Walter D. Mignolo calls the *geopolitics of knowledge* (Mignolo, 2002) which considers the ways knowledge is constructed, legitimized, and delegitimized on the meso-level and, on its far end, it includes the macro-level into which both mechanisms feed. Anibal Quijano calls this the *Coloniality of power*, a power, control, and hegemonic structure that reinforces the epistemic violence on micro- and meso-levels (Quijano, 2000).

A (by-)product of colonialism, epistemic violence is thus embedded epistemologically and methodologically into the methods of scientific knowledge production. While it may not be possible to overcome epistemic violence in its entirety from within the academic system (Spivak, 1988), it *can* be made visible (Neureither and Klages, 2023). Since Situational Analysis methodologically – through both its theoretical framework as well as its methodical instruments – addresses structures, relationalities, and processes of injustices (Gauditz et al., 2023), it was chosen for the analysis of empirical data (see chapters 4.2 and 4.4.1).

During the development of Situational Analysis – initially introduced as an extension of (Constructivist) Grounded Theory – Adele Clarke specifically considers how epistemic violence renders certain positions and peoples invisible in academic research (Clarke et al., 2018). Clarke et al. propose eight dimensions for the methodological reflection and consideration of epistemic violence with the aim of promoting epistemic diversity grounded in empirical situations and in their particular spatial, historical, philosophical, social, political, economic, and ecologic conditions (ibid). This includes (1) the empirical construction of the situation of inquiry, (2) the consideration of the situatedness of any phenomenon in research, (3) resisting oversimplification by focusing on differences and complexities. They further highlight the importance of (4) analyzing power (relations), (5) reflexivity, (6) the consideration of discourses and how they shape subjectivity, (7) the promotion of epistemic diversity through the acknowledgment that there are multiple ways of knowing, and lastly, (8) the interdependencies between “concrete experiences of suffering and social structure, culture, and social practices or policies” (Charmaz, 2011: 362, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 359). I will further elaborate on them in the subsequent chapter 4.2.

One central tool for the integration of epistemic diversity is reflexivity. It is a necessity for decolonizing and post-colonial strategies in research, because “it acknowledges the embodiment and situatedness of researchers and their positional grounding in the research” (Clarke et al., 2018: 358). Clarke et al. further state that “you, individually or as a team, matter in infinite ways in your research, and the more you are aware of this the better” (ibid: 354). Any researcher in any study – empirical or not – is, with Clarke, *co-constitutor* throughout the entire research process. They are

“designer, actor, interviewer, observer, interpreter, co-constructor of data, writer, ultimate arbiter of the accounts proffered, and to be held accountable for those accounts” (35). For Clarke, Friese, and Washburn, considering one’s own positionality in research also includes addressing the privilege behind well-meant attempts to speak “on behalf of” (Clarke et al., 2015: 139) or of “giving unmediated ‘voice’ to the unheard – from ‘their own’ perspective(s)” (Clarke et al., 2018: 37). Being able to speak on behalf of others means that I, the researcher, am listened to, which not only positions me as a mediator and interpreter but also demonstrates how my own positionality is powerful enough to be heard.

Furthermore, *giving voice to the unheard* frequently results in narrow accounts. Clarke et al. point out how important it is to ask ourselves as researchers whose perspectives matter in our research. “What is sanitized and dressed up?” (ibid: 37), Clarke et al. ask, and, importantly, “who/what is omitted or silenced by researchers themselves? Wittingly or not?”. To overcome such simplifications that run the risk of reproducing our *a priori* assumptions (see also Kassimir on *a priori* assumptions about civil society actors in chapter 3.3), researchers are urged to “grasp variation **within** data categories, the range of variation within data, complexities, contradictions, multiplicities, and ambivalences that manifest individually, collectively, and discursively” (Clarke et al., 2015: 138, emphasis as in original). With Situational Analysis, Adele Clarke proposes a theory/methods package that explicitly takes power asymmetries, heterogeneity, and complexity into account. It considers a plentitude of actors, non-human actants, as well as elements, artefacts, and discourses as pivotal for the analysis of any ‘research phenomenon’ she refers to as ‘research situation’, building on Donna Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges (1988). It acknowledges that everything is always situated in the particularities of its conditions, and as such is also always incomplete and processual.

While she, Washburn, and Friese propose a set of well-thought-through theories and methods, they also emphasize that everything is always partial and situated, and hence they invite researchers to ‘add’ theoretical roots to the package or to adapt methods if needed (Clarke et al., 2022). It demands for the method(s) to be adapted to the situation of inquiry rather than making the situation fit into a methodological framework. Their theory/methods package builds on epistemological assumptions that are explicitly feminist, and implicitly postcolonial (Neureither and Klages, 2023). Hence, working with Clarke also means acknowledging that research is always political and a site of power, making it a suitable approach for the empirical study at hand.

The Process of Gathering Data and Sample

As I previously stated, in a Situational Analysis research project, the situation of inquiry is both: the starting and the, analytically saturated, ending point of inquiry.

Early versions of a conceptualization of a situation in the sense of SitA are frequently informed by coursework and/or literature reviews (Clarke et al., 2018) or by personal engagement in or with the situation. Since my motivation to conduct an empirical study on the situatedness of artistic handicraft production in civil society derived from my working experiences with an NGO in international development, my initial understanding of my research situation was based on literature reviews, project reports, and my anecdotal empirical glimpses. To ground my research interest more into the empirical situation and to focus on elements and dynamics considered relevant for the local discourse by local actors, I conducted six expert interviews and one focus group discussion during an explorative field stay, and a brief, two-day archive search at the Africana section of the Makerere University main library.

All interviews I conducted during this explorative field stay were conducted in English, audio recorded and transcribed by myself. I then turned to initial coding strategies (Charmaz, 2014) and wrote early memos as I coded. Both strategies helped me to get to “know the data” and to “digest” it (Clarke et al., 2018: 106), which is considered an important prerequisite for mapping (ibid) and more in-depth analysis.

Throughout the course of the trajectory of the research at hand, I worked abductively in an iterative process of gathering new data through theoretical sampling and analysis (Strübing, 2007) through mapping, memoing, and at times coding or sequencing, until no new elements, issues, major discursive positions, or social worlds and sub-worlds emerged. At this stage the empirical data was considered saturated or sufficient (Dey, 1999; Charmaz, 2014).

Overall, the sample comprises of 24 interviews which are audio recorded and transcribed either by myself or Barbra Khoba Loyce, one of the two research assistants who worked with me. It further includes four audio recorded round table discussions held in English with a few excursions into Luganda, transcribed by Comfort Akunda, the second research assistant. In addition, I conducted and audio recorded five group discussions out of which four were conducted in Lugisu/English with simultaneous translations by Barbra Khoba Loyce and Dorothy Wanyamba, and one exclusively in English. All of them were audio recorded and transcribed by Barbra Khoba Loyce. In addition, I wrote 33 field protocols, recorded 8 ethnographic audio memos of interviews that were not audio recorded (generally because they emerged spontaneously during observation sessions, over coffee or joint meals) out of which I transcribed 3. Barbra Khoba Loyce, too, wrote 8 field notes.

The visual material included 3 posters I photographed as well as 76 photographs of the NACCAU crafts village, taken at the 2020 *Pearl of Africa* Tourism Expo, at the Banana Boat handicraft store and during the field stay in the Mbale region. I also included website screenshots out of which 12 were screenshots of visual website material, 4 of YouTube videos and 6 press releases (see also chapter 4.4.).

Through theoretical sampling, the following reports or policy documents and one project proposal were included into the sample as well: the Uganda 2040 Vision,

the 2006 Uganda National Culture Policy, the Uganda Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2006), the Uganda Handicrafts Export Strategy (2006), the 2005 UNESCO convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, or the successful project proposal by the NACCAU and the UTA. All press releases and visual material available online which was produced for the UNESCO *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* project was also included into the sample.

Lastly, I conducted 5 follow-up interviews via WhatsApp. Those include 3 audio-call interviews which were not transcribed and 2 written interviews. The WhatsApp interviews were shorter and more focused with the purpose of discussing and validating (preliminary) results of my analysis, closing gaps in the data, or clarifying and situating findings (e.g. on the role of the *kumusoola* tree, see also chapter 7.3).

4.2 Research Paradigm and Epistemological Parameters

Postcolonial Thoughts in Situational Analysis

Knowledge is never impartial, removed, or objective, but always **situated**, produced by actors who are positioned in specific locations and shaped by numerous cultural and other influences. (McEwan, 2019: 47, emphasis as in original)

Postcolonial theorists argue that contemporary realities are a palimpsest of the colonial era, with relationalities between and among collective actors, organizations, or human-environment-interaction being shaped by the colonial experience of all involved. Empirical inquiry informed by postcolonial thoughts seeks to decode this palimpsest to understand the underpinning structures of the contemporary, postcolonial realities, and specifically address mechanisms that reproduce structural inequalities. Through its analytical focus on power dynamics, situated relationalities as well as discursively negotiated knowledge production, Situational Analysis proposes various methodological avenues to pursue qualitative research from postcolonial perspectives (Clarke et al., 2018; Neureither and Klages, 2023).

Postcolonial theory is not a clear-cut theoretical concept. Rather, it is a construct of numerous, at times conflicting positions and theoretical assumptions. Unlike other theories, postcolonial theory has no clear origin – contrary to the name's suggestion – and there is no consensus on whether postcolonial theory should be referred to in the singular or the plural, either (Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2020). Many scholars trace its origins back to the critical work of the *Subaltern Studies Group*

in South Asia. Building on Gramsci's notion of subalternity and cultural preparation², they aim to (re-)write history from below. In this sense, postcolonial theory(s) emerged "out of the study of fiction written in the ex-colonial countries (McEwan, 2019: 46). Others argue that the works of Edward Said (1994 [1978]), Homi Bhabha (2011 [1994]), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) are foundational for the establishment of postcolonial studies and theorization (Neureither and Klages, 2023). However, others find that the origins lay in the anticolonial movements and their critical articulation about colonization and imperialism and as such are much older than the works of Said, for example, or than the *Subaltern Studies Group*. For them, the origin of postcolonial theorization dates back to the *Négritude Movement* and hence to the 1930s (Rabaka, 2015).

I refer to postcolonial theories, because their origins are multiple and situated in the particularities of diverse colonial experiences. And while there may be parallels in the colonial experience among formerly colonized countries, this experience varies greatly depending on the time of colonization, the natural resources of the colonized region, and the colonizing country as well as on the local social, political, and cultural infrastructures (see also chapters 2.2 and 3.3). What postcolonial theories have in common, then, is that they conceptualize history as a process of entangled relationalities between formerly colonized countries and formerly colonizing countries (Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2020). In this sense, considering postcolonial perspectives in empirical inquiry means taking up the challenge to study colonialism and imperialism as phenomena that significantly impacted historical processes transnationally and to trace their continuities into the contemporary.

Central Aspects of Postcolonial Theories

Postcolonialism does not simply refer to the post-independence era of formally colonized countries. According to María do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan (2020: 24, my translation), it "must be considered as a form of resistance against the colonial rule and its consequences" that began before independence and continues to impact all aspects of life and living until this day.

2 Antonio Gramsci used the term *subaltern* in the letters he wrote while being a political prisoner in fascist Italy (1926–1935). During his imprisonment he wrote the widely received prison notebooks in which he developed important theoretical fragments around the notions of (cultural) hegemony, civil society as well as the role of organic and traditional intellectuals in maintaining and altering the prevailing social order (Gramsci, 2011 [1992]; 2011 [1996]; 2011 [2007]; 2015 [1926]). Alongside the concept of *cultural preparation*, they were important sensitizing concepts during my research and for the development of my understandings of civil society as political space embedded into power relations (Hickey, 2005), whereby it is both: the site of resistance and of the established order.

The process of colonization, its hegemonic structures, and mechanisms as well as the consequences thereof are complex and multifold – as is the process of decolonization. Since, for postcolonial thinkers, colonialism did not end with the independence of formerly colonized countries, postcolonial theories analytically search for and seek to render visible the mechanisms that support the maintenance of hegemonic power relations which prevent actual decolonization (Mignolo, 2002; Quijano, 2000). The process of decolonization is considered ongoing but not necessarily as linear and advancing. It is a process of constant negotiation and contestation that centralizes the struggle for epistemic independence of formerly colonized countries as much as it considers the neo-colonial interests of formerly colonizing countries that seek to keep their privileges of access to (natural) resources (Botha et al., 2021; do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2020).

One central aim of postcolonial research is the (self-)critical investigation of latent and explicit manifestations of hegemony in all dimensions of life and living. In qualitative inquiry, postcolonial thoughts question the legitimacy of knowledge claims of Anglo-American conceptualization, inclusive of notions of art, civil society, development, and progress:

In the context of a solidifying colonial expansion (late eighteenth century to World War I), the Europeans' story about themselves became a story about Man's climb from a low and tribal existence to his culmination in European civilization. The idea of progress was a brilliant solution to the problem of the Other; this narrative located artifacts, and the people who produced them, at the bottom of the scheme. (Errington, 1998: 14)

Following Sherry Errington, the idea of progress tells the story of historicization from a European perspective, with sciences and technology forming the high end of development. However, had Europeans not exported their ideas about progress across the globe, other definitions of the notion might have prevailed. Had the idea of progress not been a European invention but the idea of Australian Aboriginals, Errington argues, the parameters that measure progress surely would have looked differently:

If Australian Aboriginals had invented the idea of progress, complexity in kinship might have been at the top of the evolutionary ladder, while the impoverished and pathetically simple bilateral kinship systems of Euro-America would have been at the bottom. [...] 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' favorite example of the primitive. (ibid, 1998: 20)

Errington's observations are not only relevant regarding concepts such as progress or civil society (see also chapter 3). The term *Eurocentrism* and the ideas it stands for are prime examples of how one singular dominant strand of thinking, equipped with sufficient coercive and hegemonic power, can determine what knowledge is and what it is not. While Eurocentrism has never been not criticized, it did establish a set of normative standards in academic research that are so deeply embedded into its structures that they are particularly challenging to overcome (Brunner, 2020).

Yet, more and more scholars, especially also from the Global South, do find avenues to break with the status quo. They propose different approaches to research from their particular situatedness and promote epistemic diversity across disciplines in research (Denzin et al., 2008; Denzin and Giardina, 2019). While some emphasize decolonized, pluriversal approaches to inquiry (Reiter, 2018), scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008 [1999]) and Bagele Chilisa (2012) have proposed indigenous approaches to research that emphasize the positionality of a particular people. These methodological approaches are informed by local understandings of reality, knowledge, and value beyond the dominating conceptual frameworks that are often considered Eurocentric. Rather than primarily gathering scholastic knowledge and advancing the academic discourse, they look at research from a local perspective to deliver added value, especially to those participating in the research. Indigenous methodologies understand the research subjects as co-researchers and as experts (Chilisa, 2012) and favor participatory action research or arts-based methods with transformative potential over more conventional methods (Denzin and Giardina, 2019).

The lesson of Bagele Chilisa's *Indigenous Research Methodologies* (2012) in particular deeply influenced my thinking about conducting empirical research in post-colonial societies and raised my awareness of structural power imbalances between me and the people who agreed to participate in and support me with my research. However, considering my own positionality as a rather privileged, non-indigenous researcher as well as the aims of my research, it did not seem appropriate to use an indigenous research paradigm for my own study. My indigeneity, so to say, lays elsewhere. Reading Chilisa sensitized me on my epistemic boundaries and simultaneously on the importance of particularly considering power imbalances, situated complexities, and constituting elements that co-determine possibilities and limits for everyone involved.

With Situational Analysis (SitA), Adele E. Clarke proposed a theory/methods package that methodologically reflects on epistemic violence in a research situation and introduces strategies to visibilize moments of silencing actors and positions in empirical inquiry (Clarke, 2005). SitA purposefully considers the activist potential

of empirical inquiry (Gaedicke and Schwertel, 2023). As a feminist³ sociologist, Clarke considers the struggle for more social justice as a central aim for which she strives in her work (Clarke et al., 2018). To her, research practices are political practices per se, as through them it is decided whose positions matter and are worthy to be articulated in results chapters or journal articles. Furthermore, Clarke recognizes how research methods carry a set of assumptions about the world, values, and truth. Therefore, methods relevant to critical research must be reflective and “relentlessly empirical,” rather than “inherently preconfiguring what matters” (Clarke et al., 2018: 358).

Over the course of years, SitA has been successfully used in indigenous research projects as well as in studies using a postcolonial approach (Clarke et al., 2022; Genat, 2009; Kleibl, 2017; Salazar Pérez and Canella, 2015; Santoro, 2013). It is not a distinctively defined post- or decolonial methodology but a methodology compatible with indigenous interests in empirical research and thus is a suitable research approach that facilitates the consideration of my positionality as a non-indigenous researcher and the situatedness of my research in (post)colonial Ugandan realities.

Before I turn to the eight dimensions of SitA that make it particularly relevant for postcolonial approaches to inquiry I already introduced in the previous sub-chapter, I will now turn towards some of the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of SitA first. For Clarke et al., “accountability in research [...] is of signal importance” (Clarke et al., 2018: 70). Accountability includes transparency also regarding the epistemological assumptions embedded into the research methods I used for gathering data as well as for the analysis.

Situational Analysis. Power, Complexity, and Relationalities

SitA, as understood by its developers, is not only a method for data analysis but comes as a methodological package that extends to the research design and combines several social theories that ground Situational Analysis theoretically and epistemologically. In what follows, I will first introduce the theoretical framework that informs SitA and then elaborate how they were relevant for my research.

Derived from Straussian Grounded Theory (GT), Clarke positions SitA as gaining its foundational theoretical resources from (1) interactionist sociology and American pragmatist philosophy (Clarke, 2005). Next, (2) Anselm Strauss' theory of social worlds and arenas with their focus on the conditions of social interaction on non-fungible grounds is of high importance. Alongside its explicitly (3) feminist perspec-

3 For Clarke, Friese, and Washburn, feminisms are considered in plural. Being deeply influenced by Donna Haraway's feminist theory paper on 'Situated Knowledges', they understand that “nothing comes without its world, so trying to know those worlds is crucial” (Haraway, 1997: 37, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 70).

tive, Clarke added new theoretical perspectives drawn largely from post-structural and postmodern theories strongly connected to the works of (4) Michel Foucault and of (5) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. After having initially positioned SitA as Grounded Theory after the Postmodern (2005) and then the Interpretive Turn (2018), Clarke, Friese, and Washburn now conceptualize SitA as methodologically independent from but epistemologically rooted in GT (Clarke et al., 2022; Washburn et al., 2023). For SitA's theoretical underpinnings, Clarke et al. find the analytic centrality of (6) nonhuman actors and actants in Science and Technology Studies (STS) highly relevant extensions to the epistemological roots of GT.

(1) Straussian GT is epistemologically grounded in symbolic interactionism which has its origins in the Chicago School of the 1920s and 1930s and has its roots in American pragmatism. In broad lines, already pragmatism perceives reality as “fluid and somewhat indeterminate, and as open to multiple interpretations” (Charmaz, 2014: 263). It is considered a theory of knowledge that links facts and values and positions scientific truth as changeable, not terminated, and relative. Thereby, it judges its truth through an assessment of the practicality in empirical practice and acknowledges the partiality of human knowledge (Almeder, 1986; Charmaz, 2014).

Symbolic interactionism views human actions, both individual and collective, as a construction of self with the environment, meaning situation and society. It builds on the widely recognized and astoundingly pragmatic Thomas Theorem “[i]f men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas, 1928: 572). Accordingly, symbolic interactionists assume that individual and collective actors constantly interpret actions that provoke re-actions. Reciprocity between interpretation and action then affect and constitute one another (Charmaz, 2014). The reciprocal processes make it a dynamic theoretical perspective that understands people as active beings. A perspective that emphasizes the way activities are accomplished and offers a “framework of premises and concepts for viewing social realities” (ibid: 262).

One of the central aims of this study, which focuses on the question of the situatedness of artistic handicraft production, is to understand and reconstruct how individuals in their social worlds and in competition or coalition with other social worlds negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft production and products (sub-question 1). Here, I focus on the relationalities between perceptions and their consequences for action, on social and symbolic interaction. To do so, the following premises about reality construction on micro level introduced by Herbert Blumer (1969) and extended by Cathy Charmaz (1980) were used as sensitizing concepts in my research:

The first premise is that humans act towards things based on the meanings that things have for them. Charmaz specifies that those meanings are interpreted through shared language and communication. As such, they are frequently sub-

jectively observed and objectively given. Second, the derived meaning is a result of social interaction among individuals that is mediated by a “continually emerging processual nature” (Charmaz, 2014: 25). Third, the meanings themselves are constantly manipulated through an interpretative process by the individual in response to his/her/their encounters with human and non-human things. According to Charmaz, this process becomes *explicit* when conditions change or when an individual’s behavior is coded as problematic in a given situation.

However, power sensitive perspectives, including postcolonial scholarship, argue that focusing on social and symbolic interaction without considering conditional factors may limit the depth of the analysis, as they facilitate possibilities and limitations of individual and collective articulation (Spivak, 1988). For the development of SitA, Clarke considered *conditions* are pivotal and co-constitutive elements for social interaction. Therefore, she adapted the symbolic interactionist conditional matrix (Strauss, 1978) to a situational matrix and integrated Strauss’ social worlds/arenas theory (Clarke et al., 2018) which helped me address structural conditions analytically.

(2) The influence of social worlds/arenas theory in SitA manifests visibly in the social worlds/arenas maps – one of the four analytical maps Clarke developed (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2022). With social worlds/arenas maps, the way social worlds and their sub-worlds negotiate meaning and discourses in a shared arena of interest, their sites of encounter and contestation are analyzed (Clarke, 1991, see also chapter 4.4.1). However, while the analysis of social worlds “focuses on meaning-making amongst groups of actors – collectives of various sorts – and on collective action – people ‘doing things together’ (Becker, 1986)” (Clarke and Star, 2008: 113), it also considers how these

worlds work[] with shared objects. [...] The framework is relentlessly ecological, seeking to understand the nature of relations and action across the arrays of people **and things** in the arena, representation (narrative, visual, historical, rhetorical), processes of work [...] and many sorts of interwoven discourses. The social worlds framework is particularly attentive to situatedness and contingency, history and fluidity, and commitment and change. (ibid: 113, emphasis as in original)

The social worlds/arenas theory positions individuals and their actions into a “human ecology” (ibid: 114) which carefully considers how groups interact with one another in and with the natural environment based on the particular conditions of the environment. This is co-determined by the available infrastructure (virtual, offline, textual, or technical). Infrastructure is understood as “frozen discourses⁴ that

4 Discourses here refer to George Herbert Mead’s concept of universes of discourse as “commitments that stem from work and material contingencies” (Clarke and Star, 2008: 116) which Anselm Strauss translated into social worlds (Strauss, 1978), not to the concept of discourse

form avenues between social worlds and into arenas and larger structures” (ibid.: 115). Social worlds/arenas theory thus urges to consider not only the contemporary but also the history as informing present-day interactions and dynamics. It focuses on the processuality of relations and on the agency of things non-human, structures, and elements that co-constitute action and interaction (Clarke, 1991; Clarke and Star, 2008; Strauss, 1978). Considering the history vis-à-vis the contemporary understandings of as well as the analysis of the relationship actors form with artistic handicraft products and production was pivotal for the analysis of discourses that impact the meaning making processes, the second sub-question that guided my research process.

(3) The social worlds/arenas theory and its consideration of structure and things non-human that are co-constitutional works well with Clarke’s feminist, anti-racist perspective and her understanding of research as political activism (Clarke et al., 2022). SitA seeks to visibilize social injustices, particularly through promoting complexity and epistemic diversity as well as local epistemologies (ibid.). Feminisms pay particular attention to the execution of power and hegemony that suppress women and people considered female, disregard their perspectives, and invisibilize their political and social agency through patriarchy (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]; Butler, 2015 [1990]). By pluralizing feminisms, Clarke acknowledges how female experiences are far from universal, too. For her, it is immanent that all universality claims – in reference to Antonio Gramsci – are to be considered “as hegemonic strategies seeking to silence or erase other perspectives” (Clarke et al., 2018: 10).

For example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) demonstrates how multiple forms of marginalization make it impossible for the *subaltern others* – again, in reference to Gramsci – to participate in public debate and articulate themselves in society. In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, this *other* is a woman in India who is subject to othering processes through racism established by colonial rule and subject to patriarchal suppression based on gender within the local social order. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined these forms of multiple discrimination intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which has become increasingly important in postcolonial thinking and analysis. Intersectionality acknowledges that multiple forms of marginalization based on gender, class, race, religion, age, and ability manifest in very particular ways that are more than the sum of their components (Crenshaw, 2022). Epistemic diversity and inclusivity are thus crucial for Clarke, which translates into the methodical requirement to map “**all** actors and discourses in the situation regardless of their power in that situation [...] [b]y **not** analytically recapitulating the power relations of domination” and to move “beyond what could be called the ‘master discourses’ (Hughes, 1971)” (Clarke, 2015a: 138, emphasis as in original).

analysis which prevails in European (especially French) phenomenology and in post-structuralism.

Considering the discourses that make it (im-)possible for particular social groups to articulate themselves publicly and make their positions heard in the civil society discourse on the functions and meanings of artistic handicraft fits very well with my third sub-question: What are the articulation possibilities of artistic handicraft artists in Ugandan civil society?, and hence was an important sensitizing concept for the analysis of my empirical data.

(4) Much like Anselm Strauss departed from centering the knowing subject and moved towards social worlds and hence the conditions that co-constitute social interaction, Michel Foucault, as argued by Clarke et al., focused on “the social’ as constituted through discursive practices and on discourses as constitutive of subjectivities” (Clarke, 2015b: 90). Foucault’s main research focus was the analysis of power – neither as a theory nor as a methodology, albeit his work directly influenced both theorization of power and the development of methodological strategies in inquiry. Yet, his main interest in studying power came from the idea “to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (Foucault, 1982: 777). According to Foucault, discourses and the *gaze* are particularly important for what he calls subjectification or, put simply, for becoming subjects (Foucault, 2020 [1979]). “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals,” he writes and explains how

it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. [...] The success of disciplinary power derives no doubt from the use of simple instruments; hierarchical observation normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination. (ibid: 164)

Although it may not have been his objective, Foucault did develop a power theory whereby the *gaze* and dominant discourses mutually reinforce each other and “produce subjects/ subjectivity through surveillance, examination, and various other technologies of the self – ways of producing ourselves as proper disciplinary/disciplines subjects” (ibid: 80). SitA is thus particularly careful to examine the ways through which subjectivity can be achieved in the situation of inquiry – a process that, with Foucault, always occurs by *submitting* to the dominant discourses. However, because of its strong feminist, anti-racist, and social justice-oriented understanding of inquiry, SitA purposefully does not rest there, but demands researchers to find and “turn [] up the volume on minor[itized] discourses” (ibid: 225) in the situation of inquiry instead.

Clarke et al. (2018: 209) propose that a write-up of a SitA project may include “some aspects of ‘the big news’ about the project and some carefully selected and curated ‘close-up shots’ of the [...] analytic stories”. My experimentation with the so-

cial worlds/arenas map and the positional maps in which I decisively mapped minoritized social worlds and minoritized positions as well as the theoretical sampling with regard to the choice of the case studies in rural Eastern Uganda were highly influenced by the request to move beyond dominant discourses (see also chapter 7).

(5) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) describe the rhizome as a system that is a-centered, non-hierarchical, and defined by relations rather than an organizing structure. Hence, the concepts of rhizomes are of particular importance when analyzing the relations of all human and non-human actors and actants in the situation of inquiry. In SitA, this occurs especially in the form of (*messy*) situational and relational maps (see chapter 4.4.1).

The metaphor of a rhizome that spreads out horizontally below the surface, connecting many points to one another without having a main root or a center to speak of, further decentralizes the knowing subject in inquiry in favor of considering relationalities as the main focal point of empirical inquiry. In citing Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Clarke et al. find “it [the rhizome] pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21, as cited in Clarke et al., e.g., 2022: 60; 2018: 92). Deleuze and Guattari further state how “the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily links to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs and even nonsign states” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 21). The concept of rhizomes and assemblage both embrace complexity and contingency, “messy as life itself!” (Clarke et al., 2015: 78–79).

Unlike rhizomes, the concept of assemblage has never been fully conceptualized, leaving it somewhat “obscured” to this day (Nail, 2017: 21). For Clarke et al., assemblage is a concept that brings together heterogenous entities in loose relations. An assemblage accepts the ever-changing dynamics of things and relations alike, leading the co-developers to conclude that all analyses, too, can only ever be partial and temporary.

(6) The final important theoretical root of SitA is its considerations of *nonhuman* actors and actants (ibid: 85). While it has become clear that this is a compatible element of many epistemological assumptions Clarke included in her theory/methods package, it is particularly emphasized upon in actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 1987). While the social worlds/arenas theory, Foucault’s power theory, and the theoretical concept of rhizomes and assemblages all emphasize the significance of things non-human for the analysis of relationalities, ANT affirms that (nonhuman) elements have agency and therefore can be(come) actants, actively co-constituting situations (Clarke et al., 2018). While this may be easy to imagine in STS, wherein machines keep humans alive or algorithms ‘decide’ which results will be shown in a Google search, art history and anthropological research, too, have indicated how

material can convey messages about social status (Erlank, 2014; Nakazibwe, 2005) or facilitate transition into adulthood (Khamalwa, 2012).

The shift towards the inclusion of the nonhuman in inquiries of the social sciences and humanities has been referred to as the *Nonhuman Turn* (Grusin, 2015), which further questions and deconstructs the division of active subjects and passive objects in favor of opening up avenues that enable to analyze the agencies formed by human and nonhuman actors and actants (Bennett, 2015) as well as power relations and networks (Clarke et al., 2018). For the study of the agency (sub-question 4) of artistic handicraft products, it is an important theoretical concept which, in my empirical data, was at times linked with the raw materials used or the expression of affection through the products (see also chapter 6.3 and 7.2).

Although Situational Analysis was not explicitly designed for research from a postcolonial perspective, its acknowledgment of knowledge as always partial, its theoretical underpinnings that break with post-positivistic scientific methodologies and its conceptualization of research being political make it an appropriate approach to address and to answer my main research question which subsumes all sub-question: How is contemporary artistic handicraft production situated in Ugandan civil society?

Making Situational Analysis More Explicitly Postcolonial

While SitA may be implicitly postcolonial, its theoretical underpinnings rest entirely in western academic history. The points of reference and the theoretical spaces it negotiates refer to scholars such as Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce, and others. Of course, the names of those men are important points of reference that, in part, help subjectify a scholar who self-positions as belonging to a particular school of thought (e.g., Chicago School of Sociology). The school may be critical to the point of rejecting the status-quo, and yet it remains within the established academic system. Speaking with Foucault, it renders those outside of these norms invisible and unheard until they submit to those positions of authority accepted in the academic discourse. Speaking with Spivak, it does not grant visibility to everyone who submits to the normative frameworks, either. Speaking with Clarke, this is precisely the reason why research should also focus on minored positions and discourses. However, the precondition of “turning up the volume on minor[itized] discourses” (Clarke et al., 2018: 225) is that those positions and discourses rest within the boundaries of the established framework (Minga, 2021).

Thus, despite promoting epistemic diversity, Situational Analysis and its developers cannot overcome epistemic violence because, by needing to establish SitA within the established academic frameworks, the developers – with Foucault – also need to submit to the discourse of academia in order to become a subject (Neure-

ither and Klages, 2023). Through its reflectivity and its turn towards discourses and the nonhuman, SitA makes these processes visible and hence makes epistemic violence debatable (Clarke et al., 2018; Neureither and Klages, 2023). The following eight dimensions presented by Clarke et al. (2018) are particularly relevant for postcolonial research.

The first dimension is that SitA is “relentlessly empirical. [...] [F]irst and foremost, the analysis constructs the broad situation of inquiry itself empirically” (Clarke et al., 2018: 358). This important dimension is equally confusing because it understands the situation of inquiry as both a starting and ending point for analysis. Clarke et al. are convinced that we all bring *a priori* knowledge to the research situation, especially the researcher about his/her/their project. When I first embarked on this research trajectory, I had an interest in studying the linkages between artistic articulation and civil society because I had observed, through my work, that many people, projects, and even development agendas ‘spoke’ about it, but somehow, they never specified what exactly they meant and how those linkages manifest (see also chapter 4.4.2). Ideally, and in the inductive GT tradition of ‘going with the data’ (see also Charmaz, 2014), at this early stage of research I would have considered all forms of artistic articulation prior to empirically deciding which one(s) were most relevant. Having a background in and having worked mainly with the visual arts, however, in part pre-determined my later focus on visual and material culture. This is inevitable in any research project, but it demonstrates how important it is to include researchers on the analytical maps, especially on the situational maps (Clarke et al., 2018).

The second dimension builds on and extends the first dimension. It entails the consideration of the situatedness of any phenomenon in research. It asks about the conditions of actors, actants, and elements in the situation and which *a priori* assumptions they ‘bring to the table’. For example, as a researcher, I bring my training, academic discipline(s), norms, and values to the research situation. Thus, it is important to ask who and what is in the situation of inquiry with what interest and under which conditions (Clarke et al., 2018). In addition, Franziska Neureither and I (2023) argue that SitA can only be made explicitly postcolonial if the assessment of the situatedness includes the consideration of coloniality as well. We propose to do so by also asking questions, such as “[w]ho and what is connected to colonial history in the situation? Which elements point towards colonial continuities, and what are their symbolic meanings?” (146).

Considering the situatedness helps to resist the urge to (over)simplify. For Clarke et al. (2018), focusing on complexities and differences is the third dimension that makes SitA suitable for postcolonial inquiry. It asks that researchers overcome binaries, use a range of different data sources for the analysis, and focus on the relations between actors and elements, their conflicts, and passive and active consents.

As such, all four maps are designed to capture messiness and complexity through which differences can be analytically extracted more easily.

The fourth and fifth dimensions are interwoven and emphasize the importance of the third dimension. They are (4) the analysis of power and (5) the consideration of discourses and how they construct subjects and subjectivity. In the first edition of her handbook *Situational Analysis. Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*, Clarke introduces a three-dimensional positional map (see also chapter 4.4.1). Positional maps render the positions frequently taken in the research situation. They demonstrate how issues of major concern are discursively negotiated and further demonstrate which positions are not taken or remain invisible in those ‘major discourses’. Adding a third dimension to this map allows to also visualize ‘minoritized’ positions and discourses which are invisibilized by the prevailing power structures.

The sixth dimension is (self-)reflexivity, which I have already discussed at length at the beginning of this chapter and will continue to do throughout the chapters to come. Reflexivity includes ethical considerations “beyond regulations” (von Unger et al., 2014; von Unger, 2016: 87). It is closely related to the promotion of epistemic diversity in the situation of inquiry, which Clarke et al. consider the seventh dimension (2018), for example, by explicitly turning towards pluriversity (Mignolo, 2002; Reiter, 2018) or by focusing on embodied knowledge as is common among indigenous societies (Chilisa, 2012). The eighth and final dimension turns towards methodical tools that “reveal links between concrete experiences of suffering and social structure, culture, and social practices or policies” (Charmaz 2011: 362, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 359), which, according to Clarke et al. have the capacity to uncover colonial legacies which “remain lively [...] in torqued imperial modes of social life” (ibid: 359).

In our paper, Franziska Neureither and I (2023) discuss these eight dimensions at length and propose additional strategies for how to make SitA more explicitly postcolonial. The strategies we propose are in part due to our own work with SitA or the result of a reflection process that considers the limitations of our research projects (see also chapter 4.5). One additional and important dimension, which Clarke et al. (2018) do not elaborate upon, is that SitA is methodologically and methodically sufficiently diverse to be able to also consider visual and material culture in its analytical process. This opens new avenues for interdisciplinary inquiry (Kalenda, 2016), which becomes increasingly important for understanding the complex relationalities between people and artefacts, cultural heritage and visual culture, labor and creative expression, and discourses that enable or limit the possibilities of situated articulation (Wendl, 2012).

4.3 Visual and Material Culture in Situational Analysis

Kerstin Pinther and Alexandra Weigand write how, in an African situatedness, “non-material qualities are bound with material ones, [and] certain materials are reserved for privileged groups or people, and skeuomorphic principles can be found, for instance, in wickerwork, various weaving techniques and architecture” (Pinther and Weigand, 2018: 8). Venny Nakazibwe (2005) showed how, in Uganda, barkcloth has an always had cultural, political, and social functions and how they have shifted over time. Other scholars have reconstructed how art production in Africa was closely related to social status (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999), and how art products were and are interlinked with political power and agency (Odutsa et al., 2019; Reid, 2017). Art products and their production (sites) thus have social and political components, and a situated analysis of art needs to consider those – alongside cultural, economic, and ecological factors.

Clarke, Friese, and Washburn (2018) assume that visual elements are significant “in most if not all situations of inquiry” (269). Whereas Pinther and Weigand, Nakazibwe, and Littlefield Kasfir move from the visual and material to the social and political for a situated analysis of art and visual and material culture, Clarke et al. argue with Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell and understand “visual culture as embodied in social and cultural practices” (Heywood and Sandywell, 2012: 4, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 269). They find that visual and material elements contribute richly and densely to social life. While the points of departure may be different, both positions are similar in that they understand the visual and material to be influential for the social and political and vice versa.

This is, at least in part, the result of the coming of visual studies, “after the disciplines of art history, anthropology, film studies, linguistics, and comparative literature encountered poststructuralist theory and cultural studies” (Dikovitskaya, 2006: 1). This “encounter” resulted in a cultural turn in the humanities which began to consider culture as a “cause of – rather than merely a reflection of or response to – social, political, end economic processes” (ibid: 1). By conceptualizing culture with Raymond Williams as a ‘way of life’, Margaret Dikovitskaya tells us, culture became “the object of inquiry of cultural studies, which encompassed the ‘high’ arts and literature without giving them any privileged status” (ibid: 1). It also enabled the study of visual hegemonies and the establishment of “discourses of resistance to such visual hegemonies” (Clarke et al., 2018: 273), for example by Stuart Hall, but also by artists in Africa who refused to submit to the prevailing discourses in institutionalized art spaces (Pinther et al., 2015).

The analysis of art in general, but especially in Africa, needs to consider its situatedness and its conditions of production and dissemination (e.g., Clemens, 2015; Dikovitskaya, 2006; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999; Preston Blier, 2018). This includes the “so-

cial and historical contexts of both the *production* of images and of *spectatorship* – expectations of viewing” (Clarke et al., 2018: 274).

Furthermore, visual and material culture – which I, following Ludmilla Jordanova (2016), understand as merging – are not mere products of human creation but also convey “claims to realism” (Clarke et al., 2018: 272), which shapes the conceptualization of reality. Visual and material culture products “that surround us constituting everyday life not only reflect our worlds but actively construct them” (ibid: 274). Analytically, Clarke et al. conclude, no matter whether we link the social to the visual or the visual to the social,

we need to be alert to the many different kind of work visual materials can be doing in a given situation [...]. Visual materials can be colonizing, racializing, gendering, sexing, classifying, stunning, muting, distracting, subjecting, cherishing, preserving, cluttering, and so on. And, most challenging analytically, they can be doing multiple and contradictory things at once. (Clarke et al., 2018: 274)

By building methodologically on Visual Culture Studies, Clarke et al. propose methodical strategies to integrate the analysis of visual and material culture into a SitA research project as either “researched on their own and/or as part of integrated multisite research projects” (2018: 270). They propose to consider four main levels of an image in analysis: (1) its content, (2) its referents, (3) its situatedness, and (4) its roles and functions (Ball and Smith, 2017).

Analyzing Visual Material with Situational Analysis

Doing so directs the researcher from more descriptive to more interpretive levels. Being able to analyze a product’s referents, for example, requires an in-depth understanding of the situatedness of the object in terms of contemporary and historical references. “You may not even know that some element in the image carries symbolic weight – that the element is actually referential. Like an ethnographer, the visual analyst must become an insider to the creation, dissemination, and reception of an image while also being an outsider” (Clarke et al., 2018: 279).

To do so, Clarke et al. (2018) propose intensive memoing about visual and material objects and their discourses. The first memo is called a (1) locating memo. It is succeeded by a (2) big picture memo and a (3) specification memo(s). The authors propose to imitate a GT line-by-line coding memo, which is translated to segment-by-segment coding of the material.

The first visual material I analyzed was a leaflet on *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* (Image 4.1). It is one of several materials that were produced by the UNESCO and the Uganda National Commissioner for the UNESCO for and about the *Strengthening*-project (see also chapters 5.2.2 and 6.3).

When I first chose to use this leaflet and other related visual and narrative material I found on the UNESCO project website, I had not yet begun to understand how powerful the UNESCO discourses on sustainable creative development and cultural heritage would become⁵. What I did know by then is how it was also through the agency of the *Strengthening*-project that the NACCAU was considered an expert in Ugandan cultural crafts and came to be seen as an expert on its material cultural heritage. Furthermore, it was through the *Strengthening*-project that Nuwa Nnyanzi and Bruno Sserunkuuma toured Uganda to train ‘master craftspeople’ how to “strengthen[] [their] artistic, design & marketing skills” (Project Leaflet). In my first locating memo, I wrote down why I had opted to include the leaflet and how it fits into my research situation.

In the next step, I looked at the big picture, thereby focusing on the visual components of the product. In the case of image 4.1, I used the opportunity to present it in a research methods workshop with Andreas Wernet on Objective Hermeneutics (25/06/2021). In a group, we discussed the first impression of the image on the cover page of the leaflet. The basket in the image remained unrecognized by workshop participants. In the succeeding discussion it became clear that the blurriness of the image prevented them from relating the color patterns to any object which suggests that a viewer might need to know the artefact at display in order to see it. Editing choices invisibilize the basket to the point where it becomes unrecognizable. The blurriness of the image, which hides the artefact from viewers, strongly correlates with the conflictual title: “Strengthening the [...] Skills of [...] Professionals” (Workshop Memo from 25/6/2021).

Based on the joint work, I then moved to what Clarke, Friese, and Washburn call a specification memo, whereby I focused on elements such as selection, framing, featuring, viewpoint, light, color, focus/depth, presence/absence, intended/unintended audiences, composition, references, remediations, and relations to other elements/visual productions (Clarke et al., 2018: 282–283). In the final step of my analysis, I mapped the elements from the visual and narrative material produced around the *Strengthening*-project in a messy situational map, which I later used for a comparative analysis with the micro-maps I created for the two handicraft groups I decided to focus on (see also chapter 4.4.1).

Material Culture in Situational Analysis

The methodical steps provided by Clarke, Friese, and Washburn were immensely valuable for the integration of visual material, such as the project leaflet or visual components of project reports, online shops of social businesses and/or NGOs, as

5 See also Labadi (2017; 2020c) for a detailed elaboration on the linkages between the UNESCO, cultural heritage, aid, and sustainable development

well as posters promoting cultural events which negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft products locally and internationally. For selected handicraft products, I sought to proceed similarly. However, as I proceeded with the analysis (see sample description in chapter 4.1), I came to understand that some of the essential material cultural elements – artistic handicraft products – can be reconstructed as a boundary object in my research situation (see also chapter 4.4.1), which made it impossible to analyze by locating, big picture and specification memos. Instead, I decided to follow the artistic handicraft objects discursively and physically and asked how the various social worlds conceptualize and position them instead (see especially chapters 5–7).

Image 4.1: Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda Project Leaflet front page, retrieved on 12/07/2020

THE 2005 CONVENTION

Ratified by 146 Parties (and counting), the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is the first international treaty that provides a policy framework to create dynamic creative sectors. Parties are developing sound policies and measures to support every stage of the value chain, involving not only the culture sector, but reaching across, economic development, employment, finance, education and many more.

The core of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is to recognize the real nature of cultural goods and services. Films, music, books and the myriad of other contemporary creative expressions produced by artists and creative professionals are more than mere commodities. They also carry meaning and values, shape opinions and foster mutual understanding.

The diversity of cultural expressions can be promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed. The Convention therefore promotes the rights of artists including their economic and social rights and artistic freedom as well as the promotion of gender equality in the culture sector.

VALUE CHAIN

Creation
Production
Distribution/ Dissemination
Access/ Employment

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Intellectual property (IP) protection is a key contributor to the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions. The 2005 Convention and IP protection are largely mutually supportive.

FOUR OVERARCHING GOALS

GOVERNANCE FOR CULTURE	GOAL 1	RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	GOAL 3
CLIMATE ACTION	GOAL 2	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	GOAL 4

For more information, please visit:
<https://en.unesco.org/creativity/>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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 #supportcreativity

Uganda National Commission for UNESCO
 Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
 Republic of Uganda

STRENGTHENING THE ARTISTIC, DESIGN & MARKETING SKILLS OF UGANDAN WOMEN PROFESSIONALS

4.4 Doing Situational Analysis

Thus far, I have introduced the theoretical and epistemological roots of Situational Analysis and displayed why and how it is compatible with my inquiry from a post-colonial perspective. In addition, I have elaborated on how SitA methodically con-

siders visual and material culture analytically. In brief, I have demonstrated how SitA fits well into my research design, which is interdisciplinary, critical, and inductive. In the following chapter, I will move away from theoretical aspects and toward research practice. As such, this chapter marks the beginning of the transition toward the second, empirical part of this dissertation. I will begin by introducing the methods I used to gather data and address relevant ethical considerations. Both will continue to re-appear throughout the chapter. Next, I will turn to the major analytical tools of Situational Analysis: four kinds of maps Clarke developed (situational, relational, social worlds/arenas, and positional) and positioned alongside GT methods, such as theoretical sampling, constant comparison, coding, and memoing. In the final part of this chapter, I then turn to my own research process and describe how I moved from an explorative design to a focused case study format.

“All Is Data” and Methods of Gathering it

Barney Glaser, one of the developers of Grounded Theory, once proclaimed that in empirical qualitative inquiry, “all is data” which means that “exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, what ever [sic] the source, whether interview, observations, documents” (Glaser, 2007: n. p.). This is not limited to what is said but also includes “how it is being and the conditions of its being told [and] all the data surrounding what is being told” (ibid). SitA follows the notion of *all is data*, and its developers consider the what, the how, and the surrounding of data as part of the situation and hence data as well. This being said, *all is data* has implications for the methods used to gather data which in SitA projects should not be limited to interview or observation settings only. Rachel Washburn, for example, stated that listening to a radio show could reveal important data which would then be included on a situational map (Washburn et al., 2023). In the research project at hand, visual discourse material used for promotional purposes (e.g. for arts festivals or online sales of artistic handicraft products on NGO-websites) or informational purposes (e.g. a project leaflet or press releases on the progress of the *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* Project, see also chapter 4.3) became very important data. While in the latter case theoretical sampling led to the inclusion of visual material, in the former case the poster was photographed during a visit at the NACCAU crafts village and was initially considered because of its visual reference to artistic handicraft products.

However, despite “all” being data, every research project has specific moments dedicated to gathering data. In my study, this included the three field stays in Uganda and based on the analysis of the material gathered there, online research for specific documents (e.g., UNESCO declarations or the Uganda 2040 Vision), for project documentation, or to follow the movements of handicraft products and their accompanying stories. In some cases, I conducted follow-up phone or WhatsApp

interviews for clarification or discussion on specific concepts that I sensed were conceptualized differently among relevant actors yet remained unspecified in my initial data. One such example is the concept of tradition.

The developers of SitA emphasize the importance of data triangulation to avoid premature closure (Clarke et al., 2022). Therefore, I used a variety of methods to gather data. I began, however, by using one of the methods most commonly applied in empirical inquiry: explorative expert interviews. An interview can be considered a “construction site of knowledge” (Dikovitskaya, 2006: 3). Explorative expert interviews in particular are frequently used at the beginning of a research process – often to get an idea of the knowledge that has already been produced on a particular subject matter (Helfferich, 2019). This was part of my intentions as well. In addition, I sought to ground my research interest empirically by finding out whether it was considered relevant by experts who know the Ugandan art world much better than I did. Furthermore, experts would be in positions powerful enough to share their opinions about my ideas.

Since I wanted the interviews to be as open and explorative as possible, I decided to work with a list of topics I wanted to address and to follow the flow of the conversation. Thus, after introducing myself and my research interest, I only used six impulses that roughly structured the interview: intersections of art and development, art forms perceived to be culturally/socially/politically relevant, the impact of colonialism, and the value of art for ordinary Ugandans today. At the beginning of the interviews, I first asked my interlocutors about themselves and their areas of work. I used prompts such as “tell me a bit about yourself and maybe a few words about the institute, if you can?” (Interview with A, AICAD from 27/08/2028: 1–2). To ask about perceived linkages between art and society I formulated impulses such as the following two examples: (1) “I want to go back to the very beginning, when you opened, and you spoke about how parents used to perceive art or art education as something not favorable for their children [...]. How has that, in your opinion, [...] changed over time?” (Interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma from 23/08/2024: 204–208), and (2) “So, from what it is that you’ve been saying, what I understand [...] is that the regimes of the late nineteen-seventies and eighties have had significant impact on the development of artforms and local materials being used by artists.” “Yes, yes.” “How has that – influenced art practices in Uganda until today?” (Interview with Venny Nakazibwe from 29/08/2018: 111–118).

Throughout the course of my research, I conducted 24 interviews. Whenever I spent a lot of time with people I also interviewed, I asked them whether I could use the content of other conversations for my research as well. Sometimes, even when I had formally met someone for an interview, I decided not to record it because I felt it would disrupt the conversation flow. In those cases, I took notes and recorded a summary of the conversation after it was over, and then transcribed the recorded summaries considered most relevant. Intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2014) was

essential for gathering data, however, especially at a later stage of my research, I gathered more significant data through ethnographic conversations than through recorded interviews which is considered important, especially in intercultural research settings (Court, 2018).

During my last field stay, I combined interviewing and ethnographic conversations with participant observation. This means that I spent five days at the NACCAU and with the NACCAU members during their activities (twice), joined them at a tourism expo (one day) and during negotiations with customers (two days). This was not always an easy task because both NACCAU members and customers ascribed to me the role of (fellow) customer which resulted in shop owners frequently inviting me to come and look at their shops and (potential) customers turning to me for authentication of prices and products. At times, those moments were discomfoting for, yet they are also a manifestation of the simultaneity of power and impotence. I wrote 5 protocols of my participation sessions, which were important moments of reflexivity.

I took 27 photographs of the main physical sites, artefacts, handicrafts, and the production process. I considered the objects in the photos for analysis, but, with one exception (two graffiti, see also chapter 6.2), only based them on the verbal narrations of the people who were affiliated with them.

While in Uganda, I also took 4 photos of flyers and posters that referred to handicraft products visually or by the choice of wording or used prompts (visual and verbal) that referred to indigeneity or cultural heritage. In order to conceptualize further my research situation, I visited two local film festivals, four art spaces, three craft shops, and the Mt. Elgon National Park where the spirits of the ancestors of the Bagisu are believed to live (see also chapter 7.3).

While in Germany, I gathered more data online in form of 12 website screenshots, 8 Screenshots from YouTube videos and 6 press releases and considered all Ugandan policy documents that referred to material and/or visual culture (4 in total) and collected website or social media screenshots from NGOs and social businesses until the issues addressed became redundant and no new concepts could be reconstructed. I continued moving back and forth between gathering more data and analysis until I could not add new elements/positions/social worlds to the maps. At that moment, I considered the process of gathering data sufficient enough (Charmaz, 2014). Here, SitA returns to its GT roots and considers the circular process of induction and abduction as (temporarily) saturated (Clarke et al., 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is often associated with informed consent and the principle of 'do no harm' in empirical inquiry (Papademas, 2004; von Unger et al., 2014). However, ethics should be a guiding principle throughout the entire research trajectory. In

critical inquiry, they begin with the question of whether I, the researcher, am in the right position to conduct the particular research of my interest and to assess the objectives I am pursuing (von Unger, 2014). Research ethics, Hella von Unger emphasizes, “are an integral part of the research process and are not limited to institutionalized regulatory procedures” (von Unger, 2016: 87). Researchers need to consider a wide range of ethical questions, she further argues, inclusive of the following:

How do we as researchers see our roles and responsibilities? How do we position ourselves in the field including vis-à-vis powerful actors? What is the purpose of our research? If we aim for critical, participatory, and transgressive forms of qualitative research, what are the ethical implications and how do we manage the pressures from mainstream academia? In what way and to whom do we identify ourselves as researchers in the field – what information do we reveal about ourselves and our intent? What if we study a situation in which people are suffering great need – may we help? [...] What if participants tell us ‘secrets’, are we to use them in our analysis? (von Unger, 2016: 89)

Furthermore, literature discussion, too, has ethical implications linked with sociology of knowledge. In German academia, for example, scholars based in the Global North are cited with more frequency than scholars based in countries of the Global South (Das and Or, 2024; Iroulo and Tappe Ortiz, 2022), resulting in a representation bias that reinforces voices already overrepresented in academia.

In art history, the publication of images of African objects and visual material without clear African Provenance can result in ethical dilemmas (Homann et al., 2020), as can both: using full names of research interlocutors, artists, and artisans – or anonymization. While social sciences in general tend to emphasize the importance of anonymization in inquiry (von Unger et al., 2014), power sensitive inquiry – including indigenous and decolonial research – emphasizes the need to re-establish author- and ownership among those who have been silenced by prevailing epistemologies (Wilson, 2008). This is also rendered pivotal in the study of African art histories where artists have remained anonymous for too long and have not benefited from the interest in their artworks (Zaya, 1996). In addition, the potential benefits for research participants should be maximized which is another argument in favor of disclosing the name of participants (Papademas, 2004).

Because ethical aspects need to be considered constantly, I have decided to address ethical issues throughout my study and not limit it to an ethics-chapter. All of the ethical questions mentioned here were significant in my research, but it was the question of anonymization that became of pivotal concern. Having a background in Social Work, my initial impulse was that anonymization was rather important to maintain. Throughout my research, however, it became clear to me that this was simply not always possible, nor was it desired by several people whom I interviewed.

Jackie “the Kalange” Katesi, for example, was an artist in residency at 32° Arts Trust in Kampala at the time I interviewed her. During her residency, she specifically focused on framing a narrative for her art and linking it to her biography. Nuwa Nnyanzi, vice-chairperson of the NACCAU uses every opportunity to make the NACCAU and his work with the association visible, and using all the expert knowledge of people such as Kizito Maria Kasule, Justine Nabaggala, Venny Nakazibwe, or Philip Kwe-siga without acknowledging it by granting them ownership seemed not only incorrect but also a colonial practice of exploitation and power asymmetries. Therefore, I reached out to the protagonists of my study who were available and directly asked them about their preferences.

4.4.1 Analysis with Mapping and Memoing

Clarke positioned Situational Analysis as relational and ecologically oriented (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2018). Therefore, she introduced four analytical maps with a focus on relationality and ecological complexity. Methodical mapping in Situational Analysis also draws particular analytical attention to power manifestations, nonhuman elements, and agency.

The first map is called a situational map. Situational maps are also the foundation for relational maps, the second kind of map. The third map is heavily informed by Strauss’ social worlds/arenas theory (see also chapter 4.2), including its name, social worlds/arenas map. Unlike situational map(s), which introduce(s) the situation of inquiry and everything of relevance in it, social worlds/arenas maps centralize the relational ecosystem of any organizational or institutional unit in the situation (Clarke, 1991; Clarke et al., 2018). Lastly, positional maps display the positions taken and not taken in the situation. They focus on the analysis of discourses.

These four maps and their evolution throughout the research trajectory through induction, abduction and further theoretical sampling are all accompanied by extensive memoing and are the main analytical tools of SitA. Therefore, I will briefly introduce each one of them separately before I elaborate on how I worked with them throughout my research trajectory.

Situational Maps

Situational maps aim to visualize all major human and nonhuman actors in a research situation. In addition, they also lay out discursive, historical, symbolic, cultural, political, and other elements – first in a messy version of any map, and then clustered. *Messy* situational maps are a site where all gathered elements are included, even if they may appear irrelevant (Clarke et al., 2018). They are usually the first maps that are created in a SitA project, and while Clarke et al. suggest continuously creating adapted versions of *messy* situational maps, I used them, especially during the early stages of my research and then again towards the end of

my analytical process. Early maps in particular are supposed to help researchers to get an idea of the situation of inquiry (ibid). Their purpose is not simply to include everything and everyone, but to help the researcher(s) to begin to understand what kind of elements/actors/actants are present in their research situation and how they co-constitute it:

It is likely that, over time, not all [the human elements] will remain of interest, **but all should be specified here**. Nonhuman actors/actants also condition interactions within the situation through their specific agencies, properties, and requirements. The place demands on humans who want to or are forced to deal with them by the conditions of the situation. Their agencies and obduracies must routinely be taken into account by other actors. (Clarke et al., 2018: 128, emphasis as in original)

To get a deeper understanding of the ‘agencies and obduracies’, Clarke (2005) initially proposed two strategies. The first strategy is to create an ordered situational map that helps to understand who and what does what and how in the situation. The second strategy is to create relational maps based on the *messy* situational maps. This analytical step was initially considered as part of situational maps (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2015, 2018), but since the latest publication by Clarke and her co-developers Rachel Washburn and Carrie Friese, it is regarded as a separate map entity (Clarke et al., 2022).

Especially initial *messy* situational maps are designed to be chaotic and confusing. Their specific purpose is not to simplify but to put everything on the map, which creates an important empirical foundation for theoretical sampling, as initial *messy* versions of situational maps are also designed to help researchers to “help think about [elements, especially those taken for granted], remind you to get data on it, and render the invisible more visible – on the table to be addressed in your research” (Clarke et al., 2018: 129).

An issue widely discussed, especially regarding situational maps, is how they are related to and/or can be combined with coding, one of GT’s main analytical strategies (Brück et al., 2023; Washburn et al., 2023). On the one hand, Clarke et al. (2022) emphasize how important coding (especially open coding) is to break up the data (see also Charmaz, 2014). However, they also argue how, on the other hand, it can be used with certain empirical material only (interviews, focus group discussions, field notes, and documents), which heavily limits the range of empirical material that can be used. Because “[o]ne of the distinguishing features of [SitA] is its emphasis on using a wide array of empirical materials to generate these maps: interviews, ethnographic notes, documents and visual materials from both contemporary and historical situations of inquiry” (Clarke et al., 2022: 99), coding can be used as part of the analytical process, but situational maps should not be based on codes. In an

interview Ana Mazur and I conducted with Rachel Washburn, she specifies on this matter:

For doing Situational Analysis, we emphasize using a broad array of different data sources, not just interviews [...], things that are also really important in the situation of inquiry. [...] The idea, especially with those messy maps, is that if you are putting codes on, you are kind of already in some ways over-determining your analysis from a SA perspective. It is what we would call a premature closure. (Washburn et al., 2023: 62)

Rather than analyzing the relations between the elements in a situation of inquiry, she further states, researchers would analyze the relations between and among codes. While certainly worthwhile and of research interest, according to Washburn, mapping codes does not facilitate the analysis of a research situation. In SitA it is especially through the abductive analysis of relations among and between elements that may lead to new questions which further direct the research process – a notion referred to as theoretical sampling (Dimbath et al., 2018) considered crucial in SitA (Clarke et al., 2018).

Analytical mapping was new to me, therefore, I initially mapped quotes, codes, and elements from the expert interviews, thereby making a map for every interview which I refer to as interview maps. I referenced every element on the map with the line(s) to ensure I could trace the elements back to the empirical material. However, since Situational Analysis requires to consider elements that are actually in the situation, I soon moved away from analytical codes on maps, and focused on mapping elements specifically referred to in my empirical material. Doing so allowed me to move away from the specific interviews and the perspectives of individuals and begin to gain a broader understanding of my research situation. Figure 4.3 entails my first messy situational map into which I also included my first two relational maps (I will elaborate on this in the next sub-chapter). All codes and quotes with reference to elements that relate to art, development and/or civil society, were included into the messy situational map, e.g. “colonialism”, “education”, “value of art”, “British Museum”, or “economic benefits”. Codes (e.g. “contribution of art to benefit of society”) were not mapped. However, during this initial stage, coding helped immensely with the relational analysis. Coding and memoing further allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of my data.

Analyzing Relations with Situational Maps

Analyzing relations with Situational Analysis is initially done by using the detailed and relevant version(s) of the *messy* situational map(s). At this stage, all known elements, human and non-human actors and actants have been made visible. Now it can be further analyzed how they relate to one another. In doing so, the aim is to un-

further theoretical sampling. To further explore the dynamics of the relations here visualized in red, I included a session titled “Traditional Cultural Crafts, Indigenous Knowledge, and their Meaning in the 21st Century” to the agenda for the roundtable discussions that were to take place at the end of February 2019.

Relational analyses, just like all other analyses, are due to constant change. As the research process proceeds, the foci change and phenomena, issues, and elements previously assumed as peripheral may develop to become central. For me, such a moment occurred when I did a comparative relational analysis of two independent handicraft groups (which eventually became the foundation of chapter 7). In the situatedness of the group of the *Imbalu* Initiation Ceremony Designers, for example, concepts and notions of the role of tradition in and authorship of and around the ceremony are an ongoing site of contestation that manifest in various moments – in the explorative use of *new* materials, such as plastic beads, handkerchiefs made from cloth, plastic straws or tinsel, for example, or when poaching a particular animal for the designs was prohibited and criminalized.

Social Worlds/Arenas Maps

The third major kind of map or mapping strategy Clarke developed in SitA (2005) is the social worlds/arenas maps. In building on Strauss (1978), social worlds are roughly defined as a “group of people who come together through a shared interest on which they are prepared to act and who use similar technologies and discourses in pursuing their mutual concerns. It is a site of commitment of some sort” (Clarke et al., 2015: 174). Social worlds have one primary activity, are associated with particular sites, and have mechanisms associated with their activities. Those mechanisms describe the way in which the activities of the particular social world are carried out (Clarke et al., 2018). Individuals usually inherit multiple social worlds at once and enter and exit those constantly. Much as individuals enter and exit their social worlds, those, too, are in constant flow. Once they have grown in content and ‘members’, sub-worlds will emerge within social worlds, and the ‘original’ social world can evolve into an arena (Strauss, 1978).

An arena here is an area of interest that “brings multiple social worlds together over time” (Clarke et al., 2015: 172). Social worlds can be of very different natures and in various positions and relations to one another. What they do have in common is the arena they jointly co-construct and negotiate. An arena can thus also be conceived as a play- or battleground; it is a site of “dispute and contestation” (Clarke et al. 2015: 174).

Similar to the dynamic nature of the previously discussed relations analyzed with the *messy* situational maps, the discursiveness of constituted social worlds in their respective arenas is constantly negotiated among actors and actants and hence due to fluctuations and changes. Because of their nature as a site of dispute, controversy, and negotiation, arenas serve well for the analysis of heterogenous perspec-

tives as well as for power structures and positions in the situation of inquiry. To do so, Clarke (2005) proposes a number of sensitizing concepts that help visualize those social worlds, actors, and actants that are rendered unseen in the research situation. Clarke calls them *implicated actors*. Implicated actors are “silenced or only discursively presented – constructed by others for other’s purposes” (Clarke et al., 2018: 76). It is one of the concepts that are rooted in Clarke’s feminist, anti-racist, and social justice-oriented roots. They are the groups that are usually spoken for rather than spoken with, yet most of the time they are deeply affected by the consequences of the negotiations in the arena:

These [...] [implicated] actors [are] explicitly constructed and/or addressed by a social world and for [them] the actions of that world may be highly consequential – **but** [they] are either not present or not allowed to be fully agentic in the actual doings of that world. The actions taken ‘on behalf of’ implicated actors are often supposedly ‘for their own good’. Individuals and social groups with less power tend to be implicated rather than fully agentic actors.” (Clarke, 2015a: 138–139)

As important as the concept of implicated actors is, it runs the risk of reproducing othering processes of those who are already othered in the research situation (Marr and Zein, 2023). Eva Marr and Alexandra Zein speak of implicated actors as a “methodical challenge” (ibid: 223) in inquiry. Much as implicated actors are not fully agentic in the research situation because of the complex relationalities and prevailing discourses, they can *simultaneously* be fully agentic outside the prevailing frameworks. This is especially true in postcolonial research, especially when researchers do not have access to all publics and discourses (Ekeh, 1975; 2012).

In my research situation, for example, the cultural leaders and community elders who are involved with the *Imbalu* ceremony and, in part, also members of the costume designers’ group, can be conceptualized as implicated actors. They are not present in the dominant discourse around the meaning-making of artistic handcraft products in the civil society realm. However, at community levels, they are conceived as bearers of knowledge and as persons of authority. One could argue they do hold powerful positions, albeit in an invisibilized and minoritized discourse. Here, visibility clearly depends on the perspectivity of the researcher and on their *gaze*. Thus, while the concept of implicated actors was indeed important in my research situation, I extended it to invisibilized social worlds to indicate that their invisibility is also a matter of positionality and that they may be fully agentic in a different dimension that remains invisible to me because of the perspective I take in the research (see also Figure 4.5).

In addition to implicated actors, Clarke et al. introduce other sensitizing concepts for the analysis of social worlds and arenas: mavericks, bandwagons, and boundary objects (Clarke et al., 2018). In my research, the latter emerged as partic-

ularly fruitful (see also chapter 5.2). In the SitA theory/methods package, boundary objects are entities, material and/or immaterial, that “exist at junctures where varied social worlds meet in an arena of mutual concern” (Clarke et al., 2018: 75).

In postmodern realities, individuals and collectives are challenged to communicate within and between various social worlds. Relations between social worlds are ever-changing and situated within historical, political, civil, and social structures. The theoretical concept of boundary objects, which was first developed by Susan Leigh Star, allows for the investigation of negotiators and translators on the borders between at least a couple and often multiple social worlds (Hörster et al., 2013: 11). According to Star (2010), boundary objects become a mutual point of reference of the social worlds and are defined according to their relevance for the actors and accessible information about them within a particular social world. Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer define boundary objects as

both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites [...]. They may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a key in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds. (Star and Griesemer, 1989: 393)

In my research situation, social worlds/arenas analysis helped me identify *artistic handicraft products* as central boundary objects, and through theoretical sampling I then assessed their various, at times conflicting but also importantly overlapping discursive meanings by using the fourth map proposed by Clarke (2005): positional maps.

Positional Maps

Positional maps focus on the analysis of positions taken or not taken in the situation, on “issues, positions on issues, absences of positions where they might be expected (sites of discursive silence), and differences in discourses” (Clarke et al., 2018: 165). As Clarke and colleagues point out, the focus of SitA is not on finding the normative positions but to analyze the alternative positions – those that may be on the margins. At this point during the analytical processes the power aspect, in its many variations, becomes fundamental. The aim and the challenge while working on a positional map of the situation of inquiry is that “the goal is to represent all the major positions articulated in the materials **on their own terms**” (ibid: 166, emphasis added). Consequently, the discourses are not to be correlated or associated with an individual, a particular group, or community, or any form of organization or institution. Instead, Clarke supports Michel Foucault’s notion to move “beyond

‘the knowing subject’” Foucault 1973: xiv, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 166) to consider the major positions taken, no matter how contradictory they may be. The aim is to “represent [the] heterogeneity of positions in all its richness, not to link them to particular actors” (ibid: 166).

In my analysis, I developed three positional maps in which I analyzed the major positions on the discursive meanings of “motivations for becoming involved with the creative industry”, “authentic Ugandan indigenous art”, and on the meanings of the boundary object “artistic handicraft products”. The first map I developed (Figure 4.4), which I used to analyze the major reasons for becoming involved with the creative industry, tinted my research insofar as it raised questions regarding the linkages between a sense of self-efficacy among actors who become involved with the creative industries and the perceived collective cultural, social, and economic benefits. At the same time, the empirical groundedness for some of the positions could not be sufficiently triangulated. Furthermore, the axes worked for some positions but not for others, and generally were too focused on individual motivations to grasp the dynamics in the situation. Therefore, I discarded the map but continued to work with the positions that re-emerged in my empirical material: “artists as custodians of culture”, “providing others with skills for income creation”, and “fulfilling (development) agendas” which I later integrated into the final versions of the positional map on the meanings of “artistic handicraft products”.

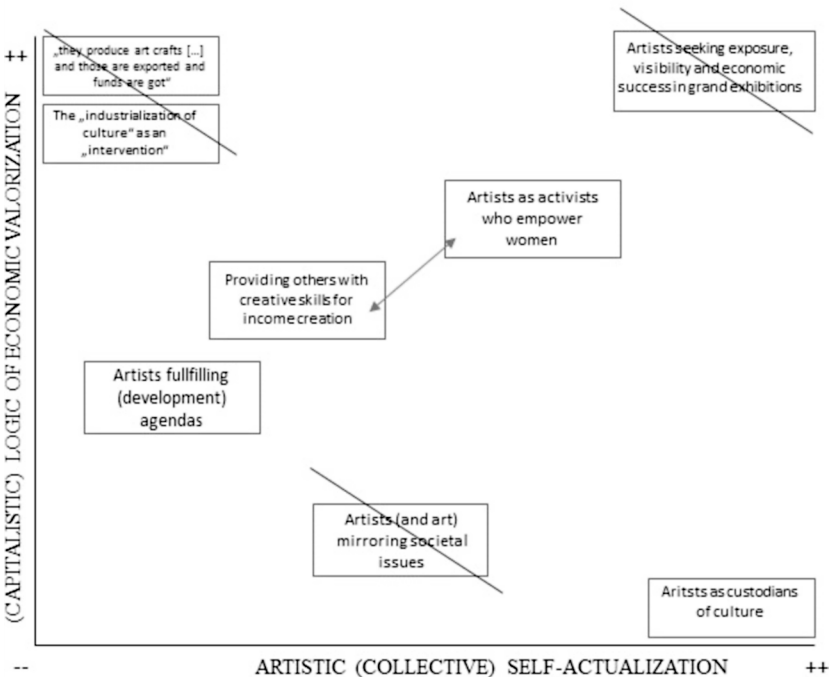
I initially worked with the regular positional map as proposed by Clarke and colleagues. However, as I worked through my material, I began to wonder how I could simultaneously map the major positions taken or not taken and the positions missing in my data but also consider the *major minoritized positions* that are present (but possibly implicated) in the situation as a whole, but overlooked and hence not considered in the dominant discourse. For example, artists like Fred Mutebi, Sanaa Gateeja, and Acaye Kerunen (whose work I introduced in chapter 1) are professional artists who work jointly with handicraft artisans. All three artists use handicraft products as the material foundation for their artworks, for example, Kerunen’s installations and sculptures made from wickerwork (Merali, 2022) or Gateeja’s fashion designs, tapestries and large wall hangings made from paper beads (Kasozi, 2019). In the situation of inquiry, the co-production of art by which the products of handicraft artists are used – in a way – as the ‘raw material’ of artists with visibility in the contemporary (international) art world is *major* if considered from an anthropological or art historical perspective (Kasozi, 2019; Siegenthaler, 2019), but *minoritized* in the negotiations around the boundary object artistic handicraft products. In a similar notion, one of the major positions taken indicates a ‘lack of innovation’ among handicraft artists who are said to ‘just copy from one another’ rather than developing individual, creative ideas to evolve their products in design and function. This position entirely contradicts one of the major positions I found among the handicraft artists themselves, who emphasize the importance of sharing all skills

and ideas with others so they can collectively improve. Working together and sharing, the way I understand it, are valued more important than innovation. In addition, those values help group members build a social network through their artistic practice on which they can rely in times of crisis.

In search for a way to consider both, major and minoritized positions, I came upon the previously mentioned three-dimensional positional map and began to work with it (Clarke, 2005; Salazar Pérez and Canella, 2015). It allowed me to highlight the blank spaces I found in the major discourses around artistic handicraft production taken by the international collective actors whose positions, also because of their financial power, determine many of the developments and positions of local collective actors. Simultaneously, I could elaborate on how the lack of consideration of major minoritized positions can result in misunderstandings at best and in the development of artistic handicraft projects that barely address the needs and interests of the people they are designed for at worst.

Figure 4.3: Discarded and Kept Positions of Positional Map "Motivation for Engagement"

Positional Map: Motivation for engagement with the creative industries, Version III, 21.09.2020



In this chapter, I introduced *doing* Situational Analysis with the four maps and a few sensitizing concepts initially proposed by Adele Clarke (2005), and later enriched and diversified by Clarke, Friese, and Washburn (2015; 2018). In doing so, I provided some glimpses into how I worked with the methodical approach of mapping. And while mapping is essential for working with SitA, so are memoing and thick description (Charmaz, 2014; Geertz, 1973). Both add depth to the analysis and transparency. At times, coding, too, might be an important analytical feature as well (Clarke et al., 2022; 2018; Washburn et al., 2023). In the following sub-chapter, I will turn to my own research process. In doing so, I will elaborate on the development of my research design, how I went about theoretical sampling, as well as how I integrated the analysis of visual material in form of project leaflets and commercial posters, wall graffiti, and artistic handicraft products and its materiality.

Throughout the process of analysis, I produced 33 field notes, the majority of them in my field notebook. I further wrote 44 mapping memos and 49 map versions, 42 specific code memos and 45 analysis memos. My analysis were validated through joint analysis sessions: 54 in interpretation workshop sessions and 28 in PhD colloquia in addition to 5 WhatsApp interviews for follow-up questions and validation as well as one peer-review for one of my results chapters with Ugandan interlocutors.

4.4.2 The Research Process. From Explorative Research to a Focused Case-Study

The Field Research Process. Induction and Abduction

SitA, in leaning on its methodological roots in Grounded Theory, applies the concept of theoretical sampling through induction and abduction. It fits well with my research design, whereby I set out exploratively with a broader research interest in understanding the nexus between artistic handicraft production, civil society, and international development rather than a focused research question. Both, the specificities of my research situation and the research question evolved with time through the iterative process of moving back and forth between gathering data and analysis. With SitA, abduction means “taking back and forth between the empirical research materials and trying to conceptualize them more abstractly and analytically. [...] This is accomplished by [...] making and remaking maps” (Clarke et al., 2022: 19). Importantly, this process is both intellectual and experimental, at times leading into dead ends or feeling like “an intellectual going to sea in a bathtub” (ibid: 19).

From Explorative Interviewing and Archival Research ...

At the explorative stage of this research project, conducted a series of seven recorded explorative interviews, many informal conversations and a two-day literature study at the Africana section of the Makerere University library in August 2018. During this weeklong stay in Kampala, I spoke with local experts from the field of art his-

tory, socially-engaged art, entrepreneurship, and development. I asked them about their ideas and thoughts concerning the connections between art, development, and civil society very broadly through the six topics I introduced in chapter 4.4. In unscripted follow-up questions, I purposefully decided to follow the course of the direction if my interview partners. I asked about art forms my interlocutors considered particularly relevant in everyday life in Uganda (e.g. interview with Philip Kwesiga, 29/08/2018: 223), about the social values of those art forms (e.g. interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma, 23/08/2018: 17–19; 38), as well as about their individual engagement (e.g. group discussion with Justine Nabaggala, Joan Kekimuri and Kizito Maria Kasule, 26/08/2018: 99–100). Furthermore, I also inquired about the felt impact of colonization (e.g. interview with Venny Nakazibwe, 29/08/2018: 61–64; e.g. interview with Kizito Maria Kasule, 29/08/2018: 48) and about funding for or through art (e.g. interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma, 23/08/2018: 203–206; interview with Philip Kwesiga, 29/08/2018: 411).

The archival research turned out to be more challenging than anticipated, as the Africana section is a closed section. This meant that I had to conduct a keyword search which significantly limited the scope of the literature I found. I photographed everything that seemed relevant with my phone and manually copied text fragments that seemed particularly relevant into a Word document.

Back at home, I transcribed the interviews according to the simple transcription guidelines of Thorsten Dresing, Thorsten Pehl and Christian Schmieder (2015) with the exception that I kept all informal contractions and discontinuations. I also transcribed all utterances. Succeeding, I began to code them using initial coding techniques according to Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014). I did so manually and while coding, I also began to draft the first versions of explorative *messy* situational maps. For the latter, I initially copied all elements referred to by respondents onto the map. In a second step I only kept those that were related to my research interest, and those that re-appeared throughout the interviews and in the archival material I had photocopied. Through initial coding of the interviews, categorizing, and mapping (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2018; Charmaz, 2014), I reconstructed four major re-occurring themes and broad areas of concern for art and civil society relevant to my study:

- Art in International Development: A pillar for sustainable and participatory development approaches?
- Voice(s) of Civil Society: Investigating the Value of Artistic Practices
- Art and its Relation to the Ugandan Economy
- Traditional Cultural Crafts, Indigenous Knowledge, and their Meaning in the 21st Century

The areas of concern are all interlinked and mutually dependent. Yet, they gave me a first empirical idea about what mattered most in the situation of inquiry. While I worked my way through the interviews with coding, mapping, and memoing, I was able to present and validate the preliminary findings of my analysis at a conference titled *Arts and Power. Policies in and by the Arts*, organized by the working group *Sociology of the Arts* of the German Sociological Association (DGS). Succeeding the conference and the roundtable discussion (02/2019), I also began to gather website material from 9 NGOs and social businesses that framed ‘art’ with ‘social’ interests and causes and used them in my analysis and for further theoretical sampling.

In February 2019, I returned to Uganda. With the decisive support of the then Dean of the Margaret Trowell School of Fine and Industrial Arts (MTSIFA), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kizito Maria Kasule, 50 artists, curators, scholars, NGO representatives, members of local arts associations, art-affiliated people and a representative from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) gathered at the university’s art gallery. In a three-day round-table workshop, the workshop participants intensely debated on the four broad areas of concern for my research.

The workshop was set up in the following way: In the mornings, the topics were introduced by one expert. Associate Prof. George Kyeyune, for example, spoke about the linkages between art and civil society using the example of the Ugandan independence monument. Dr. Joan Kekimuri addressed how and where indigenous knowledge is embedded into art objects and how indigenous artistic practices should consider the performative. Bruno Sserunkuuma talked about art and the creative industries, and Nuwa Nyanzi about art and its relations to (international) development. All speakers were paid for the preparation of their presentations. Participants further had the opportunity to receive travel subsidies and lunch and snacks were provided throughout the length of the workshop. Following the 45-minute presentations, we held a regular questions and answers discussion. In the afternoons, participants could then choose to participate in an in-depth two-hour-long discussion on one of the two topics that were introduced in the morning. All participants had given prior consent to the discussions being recorded and the records being used for scientific research. The discussions, too, were transcribed by Comfort Akunda, a research assistant in Uganda, according to the simple transcription guidelines (Dresing et al., 2015). With some very minor exceptions, I abstained from participating in the discussions and focused on listening and taking notes instead.

In the subsequent analysis, I turned to initial and selective coding (Charmaz, 2014). However, since methodically I was unable to bring coding and mapping together in a manner that strengthened my analysis, I soon focused less on coding and more on intensive reading, memoing, and mapping instead. At the time, I began to intensively work on the empirical reconstruction of my research situation through focusing on the collective actors. Methodically, the social worlds/arenas map proved

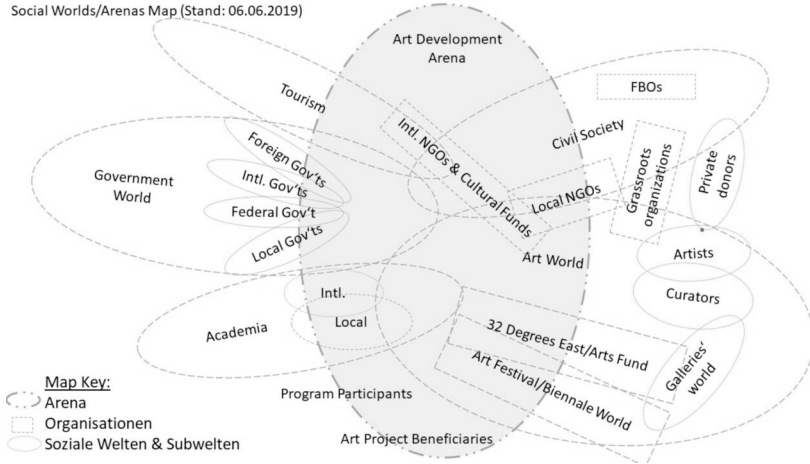
to be pivotal at this stage of analysis, and it evolved to become the essential framework for further analysis, theoretical sampling as well as the choice of case study. Throughout the years to come, I would adapt the map constantly, and as I moved from a more explorative research design to a more specific research situation, so did the map (see Image 4.1 and Figure 4.2). Alongside the analysis of the roundtable discussions, I continued to analyze website material and policy documents that had been referred to as important. Besides the UNCP, this included the Uganda Vision 2040, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the SDGs, and a draft of a new law under which all artists would have to register and obtain a license – a law that was commonly understood to be an attempt to limit the freedom of artistic expression, especially of performing artists in general and Bobi Wine in particular (see also Kakungulu-Mayambala et al., 2019).

While I worked on the analysis of the gathered material, two possible foci for case studies that would allow me to zoom in on the research situation began to emerge. One clustered around the issue of project ownership and the relationalities between visual and performing arts and foreign funding (Memo “We love Youganda” from 11/12/2019). At the heart of this cluster stands the German non-profit organization Viva con Agua e.V. (VcA), its artistic activities in Uganda and with visual and performing artists, and its strategy in cooperating with artists to promote its central message ‘water is life’. The other clustered around the commodification of art products frequently referred to indigenous arts or cultural crafts, how it is understood as bearing potential to boost the Ugandan economy and the creative industries, and how they are believed to empower ‘master craftspeople’ and simultaneously promote Uganda as a tourism destination. In addition, it appeared as if all the above were negotiated through and at the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda (NACCAU). Based on the multiplicity of areas of concern that emerged in my earlier analyses, the widespread presence of artistic handicraft products and their close affiliation with concepts such as ‘tradition’ and ‘cultural heritage’ or ‘indigenous art’ and with ‘empowerment’, ‘economic development’ and ‘social change’ grounded in local as well as international discourses, I found the latter to be more relevant for my study at hand.

The analysis of the round table discussions then led me towards two possible case studies; one of them being a German-based charity organization and their strong engagement in Uganda, whilst the second possible highly relevant case study was the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda (NACCAU). As the emphasis of my research was on locally relevant and historically situated art making processes and its social and political meanings, I decided to focus on the NACCAU, which then became the focal point of my research (see also chapter 4.4.2 and 6). Alongside the evolution of my research design from its explorative stages towards a more focused case study format, my research question, too, evolved with time.

Figure 4.4: Early Version Social Worlds/Arenas Map from 06/2019.

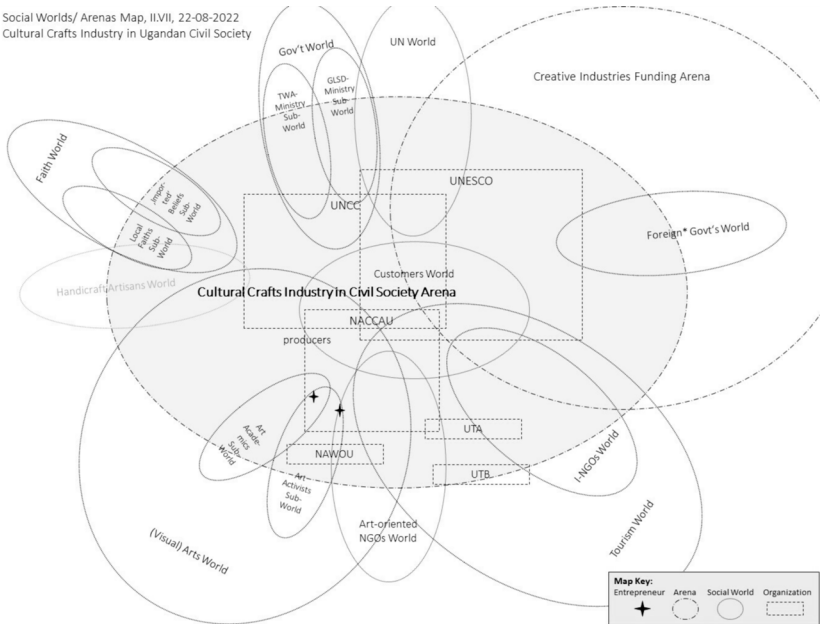
Social Worlds/Arenas Map (Stand: 06.06.2019)



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Figure 4.5: Final Version Social Worlds/Arenas Map from 08/2022

Social Worlds/ Arenas Map, II.VII, 22-08-2022
Cultural Crafts Industry in Ugandan Civil Society



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During those early stages of my research, I was still working for a socio-cultural organization involved with artistically oriented development projects in Uganda. At the time, my position as project manager and the network that my engagement had equipped me with, worked to my great advantage. With the strategic and organizational and personal support of the Dean of MTSIFA at the time, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kizito Maria Kasule, and the structural support of Topaz, the Israeli organization I worked for, I was able to organize a three-day round-table workshop with well over 50 practitioners from the field of visual arts, artistic entrepreneurship, (international) development, art history and socially engaged art, who all agreed for their discussions to be recorded for the purposes of my research. The topics debated during those three days were the four areas of concern from the analysis of the explorative interviews I had conducted.

... Through a Shift in My Involvement with Socially Engaged Art in Uganda

Upon embarking on my research trajectory, I had visited Uganda several times and worked closely with Kizito Maria Kasule, then Dean of MTSIFA and founder of the Naggenda International Academy of Art and Design (NIAAD) and Bruno Sserunkuuma, ceramist, lecturer, and NIAAD board member for the realization of joint socio-artistic projects. In my role as project manager of a private Israeli NGO, I had been responsible for the development and implementation of joint projects together with NIAAD and MTSIFA around art and social development⁶.

Since both Kizito and Bruno are visual artists (Bruno understands his ceramic vessels as canvasses), and through their close collaboration with Venny Nakazibwe, Deputy Principal of the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT) at Makerere University, I was introduced to the Makerere-centered dimension of the contemporary Ugandan art world. My interest in pursuing research at the intersection of art, civil engagement, and social change thus developed in part because of my engagement with Kizito and Bruno, both of whom I would consider as socially engaged artists. Being the founder of NIAAD and of the Seyna Art Gallery (which was officially inaugurated in 03/2020), Kizito is among those artists who established a *new space* that negotiates art (history) in Uganda (Peters-Klaphake, 2015).

Bruno is a firm promoter of promoting local visual handicrafts in the creative industries, particularly of women's empowerment through artistic handicraft production. As such, he has become a 'go-to' person for many initiatives that seek to alleviate poverty through artistic handicraft projects, for example, the *Design, Health and Community Project*, in cooperation with Northumbria University (SA) and Newcastle University (UK) (Guille, 2012; Sserunkuuma, 2019). Also, the three Israeli founders of *Mirembe*, a social enterprise that promotes hand-made "ethical[ly] curated craft[s]"

6 I left this position and the organization in March 2020, when it became apparent that my research could lead towards conflicts of interests with my practical work.

by “Ugandan women” (Mirembe, 2023: n. p.), were actively supported by Bruno. In his office on the Makerere University campus, he always keeps a number of woven tablemats and coiled baskets next, which he readily sells on behalf of women handicraft groups.

In June 2018, when I officially started my Ph.D. program, I thus already had an idea about my future research situation. Moreover, as I was doing my work as project manager, I noticed how it was people like Kizito, Bruno, and myself (with the board of directors of the organization I worked for in the background and the founder of it quite present – physically and cognitively), who developed projects that were supposed to ‘bring about social change’ through art in Uganda. Having potential funders in mind, we built our rationale on the SDGs and the capacity of culture and cultural activities for sustainable development.

Through my work, I became sensitized to how notions of sustainable development became essential in our projects, but also how the financial power asymmetry shaped the cooperation, and how communication failed time and again because, while conversing in English, project partners still spoke different languages. While one side finds pride in being direct and honest – of conversing *tachless* (Yiddish: frankly) – the other side values discretion, digression, and metaphorical speech in order to not humiliate the other by openly criticizing them.

In addition, I observed how the majority of the propositions made were based on thoughts, not empirically grounded. Poverty eradication was foregrounded and everything, it seemed, was channeled into accomplishing that. Interestingly, the primary actors who linked artistic activity with social causes understood art *as a tool* (see also chapter 5.2.1), for example, for economic empowerment, education, or health improvements. Not surprisingly, then, many of the actors involved were NGOs or bodies that cooperated with NGOs. In part because of the close association with developmental issues, artistic handicraft production was an activity that was led and discursively dominated by civil society actors, it seemed.

However, the more focused my research became, the more potential conflicts of interest arouse. Hence, at the beginning of 2020, I decided to end my affiliation with my employer and return to Uganda as a researcher only.

... Towards the Development of a Focused Case Study. The NACCAU and Independent Handicraft Groups

Thus, when I returned to Uganda for a three-month field stay in January 2020, I began to focus on the NACCAU, the case study I had chosen for based on my research interest and preliminary findings. Through Bruno Sserunkuuma I was connected with Nuwa Nnyanzi, the vice-chairperson of the NACCAU and one of the central figures at the NACCAU (see also chapter 6.2). In the days and weeks to come, I interviewed several the NACCAU members as well as the marketing manager at the

time, visited the 2020 *Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo*, and accompanied the NACCAU members who exhibited and sold their products there, spent afternoons at the NACCAU crafts village observing the premises, and met with the members of its saving circle. In addition, I studied the products available at the crafts village and learned about NACCAU's project involvement in cooperation projects. Tracing the projects, I returned to Makerere University Campus (and to the roundtable discussion transcripts) to speak with Bruno Sserunkuuma about the *Souvenir and Handicraft Development Project (HSDP)* and met with the then-CEO of the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA) Richard Kawere to speak about a newly launched cooperation project with the NACCAU called *the Marketability of the East African Cultural Crafts* project.

While meeting, observing, photographing, and gathering data, I became aware that most NACCAU members are – to my surprise – traders rather than artists themselves. In the Arts and Cultural Crafts Association, there are very few who actually produce arts and crafts, the activities of the *national* association heavily center around Kampala, and most traders (here called brokers) work independently with the people to whom they frequently refer as *the producers*. Therefore, I decided to search for and meet with *the producers*. Between 2014 and 2019, the NACCAU cooperated in a UNESCO-led project titled *Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda*. The project, I had learned through my prior analysis, included training workshops for *master craftspeople* to improve their artistic and handicraft design skills. For me, it was an opportunity to meet the artisans who, in one way or another, were affiliated with the NACCAU and to learn about their positions, ideas, and associated meanings with artistic handicrafts. Up to this point, I had only encountered them as implicated actors (see also previous chapter 4.4.1).

This time, it was Nuwa Nyanzi who connected me with a woman who would become the pivotal actor, gatekeeper, host, and friend Dorothy Wanyama. Dorothy is from Mbale, owns a handicraft shop there, is a designer, and works intensively towards pursuing her dream – the construction of a vocational academy for artistic handicraft certificate training (for a more detailed introduction, see chapter 7.1). For the UNESCO training, Dorothy had gathered over 60 artisans from across Eastern Uganda to come to Mbale. Now, she helped me to reach out to six handicraft groups and arrange to meet them at their workshops or working sites. Thus, at the end of February 2020, together with my research assistant Barbra Loyce Khoba, I traveled to Mbale to meet Dorothy and some members of those six handicraft groups. After one week in Mbale, I returned to Kampala to do some more interviews there, make a first preliminary assorting of field notes and recordings, and prepare to return to Mbale where I would spend more time with one or two groups.

The Covid-Pandemic

Instead of returning to Mbale, however, I returned to Germany instead. In just a few weeks, the newly discovered coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which had first been detected

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

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

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

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

4.5 Limitations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 5: Situating Artistic Handicraft Products

Creative Industries in a Development Realm

5.1 Introduction

Creative Industries between Empowerment, Protection, and Sustainability

While cultural practices across the [African] continent do not serve as a basis to conceptualize and theorize the CCI [cultural and creative industries], the urge to buy into this discourse creates the necessity to turn to textbooks and 'Western' debates. Although the literature is not grounded in the realities of most African artists, managers, producers, organizers, publishers, and so on, the search for the model of the African cultural industries thus lies more in understanding the ways culture is currently practiced than in making this praxis fit existing taxonomies. (De Beukelaer, 2017: 585)

Christiaan De Beukelaer's point of concern is based on a set of two interlinked developments regarding the creative industries on the African continent. First, the academic discourse was developed largely without empirical engagement with the creative industries outside the Global North. Consequently, in Africa, it was almost absent from debates and local policies until the adoption of the 2005 *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (ibid), which Uganda ratified in 2014. Second, and potentially as a consequence of the former, De Beukelaer found that many stakeholders in Burkina Faso and Ghana believed that in order for creative industries to be 'real', they have to be similar to the discourse and practices in the Global North (De Beukelaer, 2015; 2017). In my research situation, in which I look at artistic handicraft production, many actors in this strand of the creative industries are western-style NGOs, international organizations such as the UNESCO, and private business actors. Frequently, creative and artistic work is associated with its potential for economic growth and sustainable development and hence positioned in what I call a 'development realm', in which foreign humanitarian, cultural and development organizations, foreign governments and their financial capital, international bodies such as the UN organizations, national ministries

as well as local actors from the private sector, and western-style non-governmental organizations negotiate the course of direction. They all find a lot of potential in the creative industries for intellectual development and heritage, and hence identity construction on the one hand and, importantly, economic growth and financial development on the other. It is thus a site of contestation, conflict, and power manifestation, of consent and hegemony, and therefore an issue through which ownership and in(ter)dependences are negotiated.

This arena, which I call *Cultural Crafts Industry in Civil Society Arena*, thus became the central arena¹ – the “play- or battleground” (Clarke et al., 2015: 174) in my research situation. The following chapter is dedicated to introducing my empirically reconstructed research situation and its most relevant collective actors. Here, I delve into the pivotal social worlds, sub-worlds, and organizations (see also Figure 4.6 in chapter 4.4.2). To do so, the boundary object *artistic handicraft products* serves as a thread around which I build my narrative and present my findings. Consequently, chapter 5.2 first addresses the boundary object and introduces its associated meanings among the social worlds with a particular emphasis on my first case study, the NAC-CAU. Next, I elaborate on several important collective actors that inform, shape, and are shaped by the discourse on the boundary object which I here call the ‘(Visual) Arts World’ (chapter 5.2.1), the ‘Artistically-Oriented Handicraft Associations and NGOs World’ (chapter 5.2.2), the UNESCO as a pivotal organization (chapter 5.2.4), the ‘Tourism World’ (chapter 5.2.6), as well as the minoritized social world of ‘Independent Handicraft Groups’ (chapter 5.2.7). I also briefly discuss the discursive arena of the ‘Cultural Crafts Industry Funding’ (chapter 5.2.4), in which funding narratives and (assumed) convictions are at play and which feed into the co-constitution of the boundary object in the ‘Cultural Crafts Industry in Civil Society Arena’. In closing (chapter 5.3), I summarize the findings regarding the negotiated meanings of the boundary object and their implications for the situatedness of artistic handicrafts and their production.

The social worlds/arenas map (Figure 4.6) of my situation includes more social worlds than presented in separate sub-chapters. Yet, the epistemological underpinnings, the theoretical sampling, and my research questions ultimately directed me towards a focus on the *minoritized* positions of collective actors further discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 (see also chapters 4.2 and 4.4). “Turning up the volume” (Clarke et al., 2018: 225) on those positions and dynamics is the major point of interest here. Nonetheless, throughout the following chapters, I do refer to the positions taken by other social worlds in detail wherever empirically relevant.

1 See chapter 4.4.1

5.2 The Contested Meanings of Artistic Handicraft Products

Early versions of my social worlds/arenas map displayed a rather complex and broad notion of my situation of inquiry (Figure 4.6). The findings of analytical mapping indicate how contemporary notions of the meanings of artistic handicraft products and production are influenced by colonial narrations and art curricula closely linked to Margaret Trowell and, subsequently, though differently, Cecil Todd (see also chapters 2.2 and 2.3.1). For example, in the roundtable discussion on indigenous knowledge systems, Joan Kekimuri, an artist and art historian, argues for the need to explore artistic practice rooted in local culture and ancestral worship to dissect their relevance for social change in the present day but largely ignored:

Whether you like it or not, that area [of cultural art making] is marginalized due to – in the contemporary Uganda – in the traditional art practices because of the connotations: colonial, educational, political, Christians. [...] So, you can see that they have been branded, okay? (Dr. Joan Kekimuri, roundtable discussion ‘Indigenous Knowledge Systems’, 28/02/2019: 456–460)

Kekimuri affirms that traditional art practices have been marginalized due to colonization, (imported) education, policy decisions, and Christianization. Later in the discussion, another discussant claims that while most of the participants present are devoted Christians during the day, at night they turn to ancestral worship practices “made to be satanic” (571) by the “colonial masters” (556), linking artistic handicraft products with cultural practices that may still be performed under the radar, yet are affiliated with “pagan, uncivilized people” (558) in the public discourse.

Similarly, they are shaped by the UNESCO discourses and their local adaptations, for example, in the vocabulary used to frame artistic handicraft products in a cultural heritage framework. The Uganda National Culture Policy (2006: 7) links its definition of culture with a cultural heritage definition, whereby “tangible heritage includes monuments or architecture, art and crafts, sites, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic and historical interest”. National, urban-based associations, too, adapt strands of the UNESCO discourses and fuse them with economic interests commonly associated with the creative industries and development agendas. More recently, tourism actors tapped into the arena as well, promoting sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism combined with what they frequently call ‘authentically’ African experiences, thereby altering the perceptions of artistic handicraft products and production. This position, albeit differently framed, can also be found among community elders and cultural leaders, whereas foreign-based and (often) foreign-run, private NGOs frame artistic handicraft products as culturally marked

accessories for people in the Global North, often with the claim that their consumption ‘does good’ because it supports women in need of empowerment in Uganda².

Through further theoretical sampling and analysis in a circular process of induction and abduction, I then created a series of *messy* situational maps (see chapter 4.4.1). The data I used to do this included policy documents and written project descriptions as well as formal and informal conversations with artists, art historians, socially engaged artist-activists, handicraft artists, volunteers in art projects, and participants of roundtable discussions on the subject matter. Based on the findings, the so-called *cultural crafts industry* was considered a relevant, suitable, and rather unexplored arena. In the situation of inquiry, the *cultural crafts industry* forms part of the cultural or creative industries. Although there are theoretical differences between the creative and the cultural industries (e.g., O’Connor, 2015), in the empirical data the terms are used synonymously. For reasons of traceability, I will use the term creative industries only. Though various conceptualizations of the creative industries exist in the literature, they are generally referred to as “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent, which have a potential for job and wealth creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCSM, 2001: 5). It centralizes the individual as the originator of creativity and innovation. It further proposes creative expression with the potential for economic benefits linked with the juridical framework of intellectual property. While intellectual property here is proposed as universal, scholars such as Christiaan de Beukelaar (2017) consider the prevailing normative framework as responding to liberal democratic juridical systems, which would position this definition as being empirically grounded in and referential to non-African realities (De Beukelaar, 2017).

As part of the creative industries, the cultural crafts industry includes the area of the production, dissemination, and marketing of ethnically marked crafts. Involved actors in the empirical situation commonly refer to them as *cultural crafts*. Actors who belong to the cultural crafts industry are organizational actors such as the NACCAU or other formalized associations, foreign-run or -based NGOs, foreign and international cultural institutions such as the UNESCO, governmental institutions (both local/national and foreign), tourism organizations (here mainly in form of Uganda Tourism Association, UTA, and Uganda Tourism Board, UTB), and private (social) businesses. Independently organized (rural) handicraft groups, too, are positioned

2 In addition to many other places in the Global South. This phenomenon is often referred to as White Saviorism or the White Savior Complex. The term was made famous by Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole in his Twitter response to the documentary movie *KONY 2012* by Jason Russell. It is frequently considered to be a neo-colonial practice, as it “has the tendency to render people of color incapable of helping themselves – infantile or hapless/helpless victims who survive by instinct. [...] Any progress or success tends to result from the succor of the white individual, which suggests that escaping poverty or ignorance happens only through the savior’s intelligence” (Cammarota, 2011: 244).

within the creative industries, though not necessarily always by the artisan groups themselves (see also chapter 7) and without being fully agentic (Clarke et al., 2018).

They all perform in the various dimensions in the contested arena and, as I argue, in civil society, thereby creating and (re-)negotiating new and old spaces, consent, and the hegemonic meanings of local cultural heritage. As such, I refer to the central arena of this research situation as the arena of *the cultural crafts industry in civil society*. Here, prevailing notions of civil society suggest a de-politicized space of parochial interests that aim to improve the lives of marginalized individuals and communities on the one hand (see also chapter 3.2). On the other hand, the organizational and associational activities seek to propose and promote suitable, culturally sensitive approaches for the (economic) development by simultaneously strengthening the linkages to the (assumed) cultural heritage and hence cultural development of post-independence Uganda. By conceiving civil society broadly as part of the state (Buttigieg, 1995; Gramsci, 2011 [1992]), as a space that cannot be separated from the private (Tripp, 1998; 2003), and as inclusive of ethnic activity (Kasfir, 2017), the various sites of artistic handicraft production can be perceived also from a civil society perspective (see also chapter 3.4). As such, the arena becomes a site of conflict, ownership, hegemony, and question of interpretative sovereignty on the meaning(s) of artistic handicraft products.

Framing the arena as a site of civil society broadly conceived and artistic handicraft products as boundary objects of contestation therein allow to address a series of questions of concern: How do rural and cultural civil society actors make meaning of artistic handicrafts? What kind of development do they seek and what is the role/agency of artistic products therein? How are artistic handicrafts, their production, and dissemination sites linked with issues of concern from the perspectives of handicraft artists? Which handicraft products are framed as cultural crafts by whom and why? Moreover, what is the role of international actors, discourses, and other elements in negotiating the meaning-making of artistic articulation of handicraft artists in Uganda?

With the artistic handicraft products of all organizational and collective actors' engagement being central to contestation and negotiation processes, these objects can thus be considered pivotal boundary objects in the situation of inquiry. Their constructed meanings run alongside the discourses on 'poverty eradication and economic development', 'cultural heritage', and the 'preservation of indigenous and traditional art forms', as I will proceed to demonstrate. Less visible are their roles in negotiating author- and ownership, in the worship of ancestors, as agents in negotiating positionalities within communities, and as convivial mediators that help to establish networks among individuals engaged with it.

Artistic Handicraft Products as Boundary Object

As I elaborated in chapter 4.4.1, boundary objects are entities – material and/or imaterial – that “exist at junctures where varied social worlds meet in an arena of mutual concern” (Clarke et al., 2018: 75). They are frequently found to be key elements for most social worlds in the situation that can make them “sites of intense controversy and competition for the power to define and use them” (ibid: 75). In what is to follow, I use the boundary object ‘artistic handicraft products’ as the departure point and linking, though contested, element for the introduction of the social worlds and organizations in the arena of cultural crafts industry in civil society.

Image 5.1: Example of boundary object artistic handicraft products. Here: Coiled wickerwork. From left to right: kwanjula introduction ceremony basket: banana fiber (obudeku), polyphone bags & wrapping paper; lidded storage basket in traditional shape: banana leaf stalks (obudeku) & polyphone bags; Buganda basket: banana leaf stalks (obudeku) & cane fiber (enjulu).



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The boundary object artistic handicraft products include a wide range of products in various forms, shapes, functions, and aesthetics. They are made from different and changing materials (see for instance wickerwork products in Image 5.1) and include but are not limited to wickerwork, pottery, jewelry, products made from ‘African’ fabric (meaning waxed fabric with colorful patterns), woodcarvings, and

barkcloth products. In rural areas and in places little frequented by foreign visitors and expatriates, blacksmith products might be included, or uniforms designed and tailored for rituals and ceremonies (see also Image 5.2).

Image 5.2: Example of boundary object artistic handicraft, here: Imbalu Initiation Ceremony Uniform.



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The understandings and agency of the boundary object vary significantly among the social worlds in the situation of inquiry. They do, however, have common structures which, according to Star and Griesemer (1989), are conditional for boundary objects. In the empirical situation, the common structures associated with the boundary object could be reconstructed as inclusive of the following:

- They are contemporary interpretations of local forms of visual and/or material culture (e.g. *Kwanjula* baskets, 'African' fabric, rolled paper-beads).
- They are manufactured mainly by people who have been trained beyond formalized art training programs, in one or more of the following formats:

- In (elementary) school (e.g. conversation with Harriett Natukunda and Sarah Bako³, 25/02/2020; interview with Philip Kwasiga, 29/08/2018)
- in NGO-run workshop formats (e.g. roundtable discussion Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019; interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma, 27/01/2020 and 23/08/2018, YouTube video “Beadmaking with Widows in Gulu, Northern Uganda”, 15/10/2019; Mirembe Website, 28/11/2020);
- at their homesteads, by older family members, or community elders (e.g. group conversation with members of Bunangaka-potters group, 25/02/2020; group conversation with Isiah and the hat maker collective from Ishibira, 27/02/2020; interview with Jackie Katesi, 18/02/2020).
- They are mainly made from locally available raw materials, both natural and synthetic (e.g. photograph of basket tag at Banana Boat shop, 17/03/2020; Website Screenshot of *Colon Cancer Awareness Bracelet* of “Project Have Hope”. 15/10/2019; group conversation with women wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020).
- Although some scholars and interview partners perceive an initial dynamic, the production spaces are – depending on region, handicraft, and local traditions – currently perceived as gendered spaces (independently of whether they were historically, see also Chapter 2.3; e.g. interview with Philip Kwasiga, 29/08/2018; interview with Dorah Kasozi, 28/08/2018, Website Screenshots: *BeadforLife*, 15/10/2019; *The Dignity Collection*, 15/10/2019; YouTube video “Weaving a Future – NAWOU and Uganda Crafts”, 15/10/2019; Project SPACE, 09/10/2019; *Pears of Africa*, 28/11/2020; “Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda” Project Leaflet, 12/07/2020).

Situating the NACCAU as Case Study

During the empirical phase of my research, I focused on the NACCAU as a case study (see also chapter 4.4.2), which I will briefly present here and continue to focus on in more detail in the following chapter. The abbreviation NACCAU stands for the *National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda*, which self-identifies as a member of the Ugandan creative industry. It was originally established in 1994 in the broader context of a Pan-African conference as the *Ugandan National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association* and renamed in 2003. Today, the NACCAU’s main site of activity is its cultural crafts village, a space with workshops that serve as production, networking, and retail sites, allocated in a semi-circle around a green lawn in the heart of Kampala behind the national theater and across the street from the parliament building.

The architectural structure of the crafts village aims to imitate an imaginary village in rural Uganda (interview with Nuwa Nyanzi from 26/01/2020). The walls of

3 Last names changed

the shops are painted in the fur-patterns of popular safari animals (e.g., giraffes, zebras, or leopards, see Image 5.3), hinting towards the main customer target groups. Their setup invites visitors to stroll around and pass by all shops on the compound. It is only at the rear end of the compound that the structure leaves the well-planned design. As the association grew, more shops were needed, and an open space next to the theater building was turned into additional workshop and retail space.

Upon entering the crafts village, visitors pass by two graffiti artworks by Ugandan artists Hatimax Sebintu and Fatuma Hassan, who participated in the *Walls of Water* project of Viva con Agua, an international NGO founded in Germany that sells bottled water there to finance the promotion of clean drinking water and sanitary hygiene in countries of the Global South⁴. The graffiti are to remind that *water is life* (VcA's mission), though several pieces do not specifically articulate the message directly. As the freedom of artistic expression was the guiding principle in the project, the organization resisted imposing any further instructions on participating artists⁵. In such close proximity to the crafts village, they mark a break with the scenery as they create a sharp contrast between the contemporary interpretations of *water is life* on the one hand, and the idyll of timeless, 'traditional' rural Ugandan life on the other hand.

The two graffiti (Image 5.4.) are in close proximity to the crafts village (right behind the left aisle of shops in Image 5.3). In the left scene, painted by Fatuma Hassan, a woman stands in the center. She looks towards the left and has her back turned towards the spectator. She is painted from her upper thighs upwards and seems to be holding something under her left arm. A second figure with human facial features is located on the right side of the scenery and is looking directly at the spectator. Unlike the woman, who seems to be walking towards the background of the scene and whose skin color is kept in natural brown tones, the skin of the second figure is purple and blue, potentially a reference to water. The background of this first scene is dominated by sharp, abstract, colorful forms and figures on the left side that become increasingly blurred further towards the right end of the scene.

Hatimax Sebintu's graffiti, too, includes two main figures: one on the left side of the scene and one in the center-right. The dominating colors here are saturated

4 Viva Con Agua (VcA) was founded by former professional St. Pauli soccer player Benjamin Adrion in 2005 after having participated in a training camp on Cuba. One of its foci is to promote hygiene and advocate for clean drinking water in cooperation with visual and performing artists. VcA Uganda, founded in 2015, is among the more established partner organizations and main organizer of the biannual music festival We love Youganda (Interview with VcA 09/12/2019). See also: <https://www.vivaconagua.org/>

5 As I was debating on an appropriate case study for this research, I conducted a telephone interview with the public relations director of VcA, who emphasized on the importance of artistic freedom in all VcA art-projects.

shapes of purple, blue, green, and brown, which are highlighted by two yellow flowers on the left side and one large yellow circle behind the head of the second figure. This figure, potentially a woman, is painted frontally from the shoulders up. However, above her nose, where the spectator would expect her eyes, the skull is cut off. Instead of eyes, a forehead, and hair, a flower is growing out of the head. The big yellow circle behind could be interpreted as a moon or the sun. Small black fish are in the background alongside blue stripes that remind of waves. They are the connecting element between the figure with the flowered head on the right side of the scene and the second figure on the left side. This second figure is painted from the side. Only the head is seen, which is painted in different shapes of brown with dark spots on the rims around the eye and the chin. The visualization reminds the spectator of the wooden masks that are commonly associated with traditional masks as produced and used by several ethnic groups in many regions on the continent. The hairline is marked by zig-zag forms in shades of green. Two large, cut-off yellow flowers visually connect it to the right part of the graffiti, both in terms of content (flowers) and color (similar to the large circle).

This brief description illustrates the compositional freedom with which Sebintu and Hassan, whose interpretations of *Walls of Water* may not be easily accessible to spectators of their art, expresses their interpretations of *water is life*. For the *Walls of Water* project, VcA invited the two Ugandan artists to work alongside one artist from Mozambique, two artists from Kenya, and three artists from Germany. For the mural project, they were invited to apply their art onto the walls of public buildings in Kampala, for example, the National Theater and the National Museum. The residence program found its highlight in the *Art creates Water* gallery exhibition. It was financially supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which allowed VcA to invite artists to deliver its message to the general public.

At the NACCAU, a very different and distinct notion of art and artistic expression predominates the scenery. The artists whose products are on display here frequently remain unseen and unnamed. Their stories and worldviews are not part of the artwork. Unlike the graffiti on the walls of the National Theater, art objects here are for sale, and their anticipated customer is – by and large – a foreign tourist who seeks to find a souvenir, something nice “that will remind you of your time in Uganda” (Roundtable Discussion Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 175). The emphasis, then, is less on the artistic expression of an individual or collective, but on the associated emotions and needs of the purchaser, as the following quote by David Hume shows:

As an artefact of tourism, the humble souvenir serves many purposes. From the perspective of the producer, the souvenir needs to represent the culture and heritage of the tourist destination, that is, his or her home or part thereof: the more nodes of heritage that can be tastefully invested in the souvenir by the maker, and

recognized by the consumer, the better. An object made from a material indigenous to the tourist destination is a good start. If the object represents some aspect of the destination's heritage, then all the better, and, if it carries with it the mark of the maker, who happens to be a local craftsperson, then better still. In this transition, formerly utilitarian artefacts are altered through artistic imagination and may be bracketed somewhere between art work and anthropological artefact. (Hume, 2013: 2–3)

Image 5.3: The NACCAU shops and lawn with National Theater in the background and customers strolling around the compound.



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Indeed, if one observes the art objects on display at the NACCAU, the visitor will find artistic handicraft objects associated with the local material cultures: woven baskets in various shapes, sizes, forms, and colors as well as woven mats, jewelry made from hand-rolled (paper-)beads, wood carvings in form of masks (which are usually imported) or abstracted human figures, kitchen utensils and bowls, so-called *African* prints, and stuffed safari animals made out of the colorful patterned and waxed textiles⁶ Africa has become famous for. Drums in various sizes are offered for

6 Design has a long and rich history in Africa (Nakazibwe, 2005; Pinther and Weigand, 2018; Preston Blier, 2018) However, the colorful prints that have become renown as 'African prints' are of European, particularly of Dutch, production. The designs were imported from other colonized regions and are witness to and result of cultural encounters and hybrids. They became popular among Africans and have since become associated with Africa. This, according

sale as well as barkcloth products. There are other art objects as well, but in the social world of artistically oriented handicraft associations and NGOs, these are closely associated with the local, indigenous cultures, and cultural heritage. By framing their products within the realm of cultural heritage, the meanings and adaptations of the boundary object become subject to the construction of tradition and its boundaries. This is both a strategy to situate the products as valuable objects and a burden, as it limits the aesthetic interpretations and hence the artistic freedom with it. Consequently, here, the development of “new art [...] must take place within a milieu of existing practices” (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 16).

Image 5.4: Walls of Water Graffiti artworks by Fatuma Hassan (left) and Hatimax Sebintu (right), National Theater, Kampala.



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In addition to the obvious, David Hume’s quote addresses a second important aspect regarding the boundary object artistic handicraft objects. By touching upon the ability of objects to be altered through artistic imagination, he emphasizes the processuality of artefacts. Their associated meanings change and evolve over time. Currently, they are situated “somewhere between artwork and anthropological artefact” (ibid: 3). My empirical findings, too, show how several social worlds, including the sub-world of art-academia and the international NGOs-world, the tourism

to critical scholars such as Tunde M. Akinwumi (2008), threatens the survival of actually authentic African fabric designs.

world, and the social world of art-oriented NGOs display and frame items as indigenous and traditional while really, they are contemporary in materiality and design.

As attentive as Hume's observations are regarding the interplay between artisan and customer, his elaborations neglect the political, discursive, and hegemonic dimensions of the ongoing negotiations and hence do not consider the power asymmetries at hand. Amani Maihoub (2015) takes a more critical perspective and emphasizes the struggles involved with the "discourses of political domination and resistance within the context of identity construction and the politicization of indigenous art and aesthetics [, which happen] at the visual level" (2). She further claims that there is no such thing as a "politically innocent" (ibid: 3) relationship between people and art objects. All parties involved have a particular interest, and since the relationship is more often than not directed by economic interests, 'tradition' becomes a loose concept that is bent to fit whatever it needs to 'do' in a particular moment in the situation, e.g., facilitate gendered empowerment or economic growth, artistic liberation, therapeutic activities, culturally sensitive development, or justify the need to protect tangible and intangible culture. All of those contested meanings are negotiated through and with the boundary objects *artistic handicraft products*.

5.2.1 (Visual) Art World

In the art world, artistic handicrafts objects primarily appear to be defined through their aesthetics, materiality, and their value for contemporary art by means of cultural inspiration (interview with Dorah Kasozi, 28/08/2018; roundtable discussion on *Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 28/02/2019). This social world is composed of those people who make their living through and with art, including practicing artists, scholars, and students in art institutions and academies, curators, directors of galleries and other exhibition spaces, personnel at cultural institutions or residency programs (see also Figure 4.4, the early version social worlds/arenas map). It further includes, in part, artistically oriented NGOs and their staff. The latter also forms a sub-world, as their interests are often interlinked with those of (international) development actors and agendas.

'Art as a Tool' - Empowerment of Marginalized Others through Artistic Activity

During the interviews, informal conversations, and observations as well as the analysis of project descriptions of socially oriented art projects, I became aware of several professional artists who are engaged with handicraft production and production projects (e.g., the 'Arts Ability Uganda' project, Streetlights Uganda, the NACCAU, and the NAWOU). In these initiatives and associations, teaching artistic handicrafts to individuals who are marginalized in one way or another, can be reconstructed as a pivotal function of the boundary object in the sub-world of socially engaged artists:

I touched on NGOs sponsoring communities briefly when I talked of paper beads [...] But I did not have enough time, I just wrapped everything else into that, But you are right, we have worked with master crafts people to sharpen their skills, make more professional [sic] and appreciate standards of uniformity [...] Most of them did not know and don't have the tools but there are those who managed to finish a prototype within a limited period of time. (Nuwa Nyanzi, roundtable discussion on the Arts in International Development, 29/02/2019: 99–107)

In referring to the *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda Project* (2015–2019), Nyanzi addresses how he and others (“we”) have provided training to “master crafts people” to prepare them for mass production, “because one will want thousands of the same” (ibid: 105–106). These trainings are led by a professional artist, who is in a position to lead trainings and workshops for “master crafts people” who are understood as being in need of further professionalization. “We” further refers to the NACCAU, which here is positioned as an NGO that sponsors communities by expanding their skills and knowledge. Here, Nyanzi functions in the role of an NGO representative and an artist with an agenda to support handicraft artisans. In other cases, professional artists, too, engage with or are (co-)founders of associations. Alongside their individual artistic practice, they support the promotion of handicraft skills as well as the production, dissemination, and marketing of handicraft objects. Their common aim is to live off of their art and to relate it to the local culture. Furthermore, artists such as Nyanzi share a common interest transforming society by means of art, forming a sub-world of art activists.

As professional artists, they turn to what they know best in order to support others – art. The main aim of using ‘art as a tool’ is to equip those marginalized groups of people with vocational skills, thereby focusing on poverty reduction through production of high-quality crafts, as the following quote displays: “[W]e keep focusing on [...] is the crafts [...]. [Women and the youth] are actually the majority in the production process. And one of our roles is to help create more opportunities of employment” (interview with Richard Kawere, then CEO of UTA, 11/03/2020: 193–196). The target group of empowerment and skills training projects are often women with a low socio-economic status who spent limited time in the formal education system. They are considered hard-working and caring. There is a consensus among project leaders, policymakers, and development workers as well as in development agendas and the public discourse that the health and future prosperity of children are dependent on women and their successes (Goodwin et al., 2005; Heaton, 2015; Mkan-dawire et al., 2022). In this rationale, it is essential to empower women with low socio-economic backgrounds. It merges economic empowerment with gender equality.

The empowerment strategy applied here operates at the intersection of gender and class, sometimes disability (Crenshaw, 2022). In both international as well as

national (development) discourses, women are generally considered responsible for the education and upbringing of children. The assumption is that if a woman is well and healthy, so are her children. Therefore, empowering women means investing in the future of whole communities, regions, and nation-states. Its narratives extend well into the arena of the cultural crafts industry in civil society:

NAWOU mainly partners with women producer groups of the handmade crafts, involving women infected and affected with HIV/AIDS, those with disabilities, single mothers, widows, survivors of gender based and sexual violence, women with no access to adequate education due to discrimination where parents chose to educate the boy child over the girl child, and women who have not had the opportunity to receive economic empowerment in their lives. (NAWOU, 2017: 4)

Here, a number of reasons why women are marginalized are offered. Those reasons can be broadly clustered into health-related reasons and the associated consequences in society on the one hand and gender-related reasons associated with structural discrimination on the other hand. The solution offered associates the boundary object artistic handicraft objects with economic empowerment. From this perspective, handicraft products are framed as being a useful element that helps with the achievement of the economic liberation of marginalized women. In doing so, unlike in the story Katesi tells about her grandmother, wickerwork activities do not bear meaning in themselves, nor do the art objects produced. They become valuable objects not because of their aesthetic, social, or cultural value, but because of what they potentially do for the women who produce them.

The marketing of the handicraft objects follows a similar pattern. The notion is that the purchase of the products helps the (women) artisans restore their lives in dignity, as Image 5.5 shows. This screenshot from 2019 served as the landing page for the collection of handicraft products from Uganda of a U.S.-based organization then called 'Fashion & Compassion', now 'BraveWorks'. It shows a woman sitting on a hill surrounded by bare soil and rubble. In her right hand she holds a small hammer, with which she works the stones in front of her. Her feet are bare, and the blue shirt she wears is full of dust. In the center of the photo, "the Dignity Collection" is written in white capital letters. The subtitle states "traditional paper bead jewelry made by war-displaced women in Uganda". It is also a link to a promotional video made for the 'Dignity Collection' (see Image 5.5). The subtitle merges the two seemingly conflicting positions regarding the boundary object: it combines the position of artistic handicraft objects being 'traditional' and hence 'culturally significant' and 'indigenous' – thus the preservation of ethnically-marked cultural heritage – with the notion of 'art as a tool' that has the capacity to lift marginalized individuals out of poverty.

At the same intersection of gender and class, men are often constructed as violent, absent, engaged in polygamous marriages or relationships, or addicted to substances. In the discourse strand around (women) empowerment through handicraft production, men are framed as incapable of providing for the family. Implicitly, this assumes them to be in charge of providing, which feeds into heteronormative gender roles that understand men to be the major breadwinners and women to be in charge of the household and the children. This implicit normative assumption can also be found in the NAWOU catalog. Even though in the NAWOU quotation above men are not explicitly mentioned, the attentive reader immediately understands that perpetrators of the “gender based and sexual violence” (NAWOU, 2017: 4) are indeed assumed to be men. In my research, I did not specifically focus on gender dynamics. However, the empirical findings demanded the consideration of gender constructions and discourses around gender-based roles, which play an important role in the situation in general as well as with regard to the handicraft objects. Therefore, I elaborate on the role of gender in greater detail in chapters 6 and 7.

Image 5.5: “The Dignity Collection – Traditional paper bead jewelry made by war-displaced women in Uganda”, ‘Fashion for Compassion’ Online Shop.



©Fashion and Compassion, 15/10/2019

In the interviews I conducted, socially engaged artists often argue with key biographic incidents, in which artistic expression and production led toward a positive outcome for one’s own life. Bruno Sserunkuuma, for example, finds the motivation for his engagement with the NACCAU in particular and women empowerment projects in general in his own biography (private conversation 08/2018). It was because of his hard-working mother that he was able to attend school and later university. Today, to honor his own mother and other mothers in the country, he is engaged with projects in which women are trained as artisans. During my several visits to his

own office and studio space at Makerere University, he always kept some wickerwork in the form of (table-)mats and baskets for sale. He refers to artisans as craft makers, artists, and as “custodians of the traditional knowledge” (interview from 23/01/2020: lines 36–37). To him, crafts are both the embodiment of local material culture and an important tool for poverty reduction. It is another example of how seemingly conflicting positions strengthen each other when merged within the narrative of ‘art as a tool’.

Fred Batale is the founder and director of an association called ‘Arts Ability Uganda’ (previously Disability Art Project Uganda, DAPU). With his project, he aims to train and empower people with disabilities in Kampala through artistic engagement. In a video interview from December 2015 with Deutsche Welle (DW), Batale speaks about his motivation to establish the association. People with disabilities, Batale says, are not visible in public debates and, according to the artist, are socially excluded.

The association evolved significantly during the past years and is currently constructing its own office and workshop building. In addition, although the artistic objects resulting from Arts Ability Uganda are quite different in form, material, and function from the handicraft objects previously discussed (Batale and his colleagues also use music, dance, and drama), here, too, art is considered a tool:

I thought, because I had some knowledge in art and design, I thought I could use this as a tool, in order to empower [other] people with disabilities, to get the skills, which they can use [unc.] to sustain themselves. (Fred Batale in: Schwarzbeck and Getmann, 2015)

In the founding principles of the association from 2013, this notion of art as a tool is concretized in two ways. First, it seeks to create economic stability for people with disabilities with the aim of “lift[ing] them off the streets” (DAPU, 2013: n. p.). Second, it aims to “lobby and advocate for disability rights through art projects” (ibid).

While all associations and initiatives have multiple and complex reasons for their engagement with artistic handicraft production, many align in perceiving art as a tool for individual poverty reduction. In addition, in several interviews (particularly in expert interviews) and the roundtable discussions, the same narrative and wording of ‘art as a tool’ emerged frequently and became an important concept for further theoretical sampling. The notion of ‘art as a tool’ manifests itself in three strands: (1) The first strand assumes that raw materials for handicraft products are inexpensive, and hence the potential for significant economic gains is high. Here, art as a tool is used to generate income. (2) In the second strand, art as a tool means to empower individuals psychologically. In the narration about her grandmother, Katesi elaborates on how she seemed happy when weaving, as it was time for herself. Among members of Arts Ability Uganda, art is used for lobbying and to render

people with disabilities visible, which aims at improving their living conditions and their subjective well-being. In other cases, psychological empowerment refers to dealing with psychological trauma (e.g., Kiwojolo Creations). This last aspect, however, must be considered with caution. While artistic engagement may indeed be described by artists as therapeutic in and of itself (Kasozzi, 2019) and can intentionally be used as such (Malchiodi et al. 2011), my empirical data does not allow for any conclusions drawn of possible mental health benefits in artistically oriented projects. This neither was the focus of my research nor did any actors or elements in the selected case studies emphasize this aspect. Therefore, I will not address it further. (3) The third strand regards the notion of ‘art as a tool’ as a foundation for innovation. As creativity and innovation are closely connected to engagement with the arts, the arts are seen as an essential foundation for inventions in other areas (technology, digitalization, etc.) to be developed. The following quotation from an interview with sculptor and art historian Philip Kwesiga indicates this very well: “[E]ngineering starts with drawing on the ground” (Interview with Philip Kwesiga, 29/08/2018, 239–240). While for Kwesiga this strand is essential, he also criticizes that the interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity of art and other disciplines are not understood by policymakers and ordinary people alike:

And they've been tossing around arts and design in secondary school, almost to the extent of removing it. And they're looking at new things. Literature, they're looking at technology. But they're not looking at technology of crafts, you know. And they don't see the connection. Because [...] if they knew that there was a connection between making a better craft and making a good technology in order to make a good craft, then they would have embedded it. But they don't. They don't think like that. Very, very very limited, few people think like that. (Interview with Philip Kwesiga, 29/08/2018, 286–293)

Linking Artistic Practice with Tangible and Intangible Culture

Particularly in a second important sub-world, the art-academia sub-world, many artistic handicraft objects are strongly affiliated with the local cultural tangible and intangible heritage. They serve as an inspiration and are said to ground contemporary art in the local cultures⁷. Especially also in the late 1990s and early 2000s – a few years after the re-establishment of the monarchies as cultural institutions – a significant number of art scholars began to discover *indigenous* art forms as a source of inspiration, as the following quote emphasizes:

7 See, for example, Samson “Xenson” Ssenkaaba’s performance and installation Musisi. Musisi means earthquake. In the installation, the earth is symbolized through pieces of bark cloth stitched together with raffia strings. In addition, he used baskets filled with coffee beans and empiki seeds that symbolically refer Baganda culture their materiality (Chikukwa et al., 2016).

There were all these efforts, undergraduate and post-graduate students going back to study material culture, the pre-colonial material culture as sources of inspiration, you know. And it reached its epics, with its peak [...] those Ph.D., I think it was two-thousand-twelve, two-thousand-thirteen, where he [...] did a studio Ph.D., and explored the potential of his heritage, and discussed and said: No, when I was an undergraduate student, you know, I was denied the opportunity to study my culture, to use my culture as a starting point. (Interview with Kizito Maria Kasule, artist and art historian 29/08/2018: 315–322)

In this sequence of the interview, Kasule elaborates on how developments in politics and civil society from roughly the 1990s on had influenced artists to investigate the local material culture to find inspiration for their oeuvres. Especially the last sentence of the quotation indicates a paradigm shift in thinking about artistic handicraft products. Here, they are not framed within the context of economic development but as an important source for the constitution of an identity. Throughout the course of the interview, he continues to talk about other art scholars during this period to take on a similar turn. While doing so, Kasule speaks about using one's own culture as a starting point. It emphasizes the processuality of cultural expression, which is a perception of the boundary object that not all sub-worlds in this social world, let alone in the arena(s), share. Other interview partners emphasized the meaning of artistic handicraft products for the identity of artists in particular and the national identity in general. Some interlocutors specifically elaborated on the interconnectedness between political events in Uganda and the exploration of the local cultural heritage of professional artists in Uganda, as the following quotes demonstrate:

Francis Nnaggenda. [...] when he returned [...] the political situation was not very good, and many expats had of course left. [...] And when he came back, he picked interest in the notion of improvisation and he started using the resources around us, without waiting for, you know, all materials to come from the art [...] suppliers from the west and he encouraged, you know, improvising. (Interview with Venny Nakazibwe, 29/08/2018: 76–85)

[...] when the kingdom was restored in nineteen ninety-four, there was a rebirth. Since then [...] there has been an increased interest in these indigenous culture [sic]. And that explains as to why also during the nineteen nineties, there was that continued, emerging, powerful interest in the study – you know – the study of – in the jewels of these indigenous artefacts, art objects, analysis of the different cultural practices. (Interview with Kizito Maria Kasule, 29/08/2018: 408–413)

Indeed, in the 1990s, the student numbers at the art school increased (Nagawa and Siegenthaler, 2022), and several Ph.D. projects around the turn of the millennium

indicated a strong interest in (re-)discovering local and indigenous art forms and their implications for contemporary artistic practice. There is Venny Nakazibwe's (2005) dissertation on the continued and changed use of barkcloth in Baganda over time, for example, or Philip Kwesiga's (2005) study on the production and use of pottery in Nkote. Sunananda Sanyal (2000) explored two generations of artists trained at the Makerere art school and their exploration of indigenous objects, materials, and social memories. Richard Kabiito's (2010) search for integrating Ganda indigenous knowledge into contemporary art is another example, and so is Kasule's own dissertation (2003) which focuses on the renaissance of contemporary art at Makerere University.

In addition, several contemporary Ugandan artists embed tales, traditions, local perceptions of aesthetics, and materials into their artworks (e.g., Sanaa Gateja, Samson "Xenson" Ssenkaaba, Jackie Katesi, Fred Mutebi, Lilian Nabulime, Bruno Sserunkuuma, and Acaye Kerunen)⁸. In an interview with Jackie Katesi, who self-defines as an artist who merges painting into sculpture in form of woven installation sculptures, she explained her motivation to use weaving techniques the following way:

I am a sculptor but I concentrate on weaving. Why weaving?! It's a beautiful story behind it. [...] It started back in the 1990s, when I grew up with my grandmother. I grew up with my family, but as an African tradition – sometimes they would take you to the grandparents in the village, for you to be acquainted with life and you learn the local things because most things in town are not. [...] You know as a child growing up, there are moments when they would introduce you to housework and sometimes you are getting stubborn, but the [grand]mother would be like: "You have to learn these things! These are basics of life". So, when she said this, she would sing a song, a traditional folk song [sings the song]. I loved the melody – I did not understand the words but I basically loved the flow. So, I discovered one thing about my people in the village. These are people who moved their lives on certain things. For the women, it was basically weaving. [...] If she [my grandmother] had a problem, she would go and weave. Weaving was more of a companion, more of a friend, more of a hope, more of a sister. [...] When you would see her weaving, you would see her happy [...] She had no time, but if you would see her weaving, you would know this is her free time. (Interview with Jackie Katesi, artist 18/02/2020: 9–53)

Katesi, whose stage name is *the Kalange*, touches upon similar topics as, for example, Kwesiga. Here, too, (re-)discovering the local material culture, the material culture

8 For a detailed elaboration on how art-related concepts are applied in this study, on Ugandan art in general as well as political and social readings of artistic expression, see chapters 2.1 and 2.3

of *her people in the village* serves as a departure point for the development of a contemporary style, rooted in weaving techniques associated with the boundary object. At the same time, the quote above touches upon several other issues as well, and it is worthwhile to stay with them for a moment. The traditions and techniques Katesi applies are rooted in the practices of *her people* – meaning the people in the village, her family, and her community. She grounds her artwork in her childhood memories and associates them with local and indigenous traditions. In doing so, she also frames urban life in Uganda as detached from those very traditions, stating, “They would take you to the grandparents in the village, for you to be acquainted with life and you learn the local things because *most things in town are not*” (ibid: 14, emphasis added). Furthermore, in Katesi’s elaboration, artistic activity becomes a sanctuary – especially for the women in the village:

These are people who moved their lives on certain things. For the women, it was basically weaving. [...] If she [my grandmother] had a problem, she would go and weave. Weaving was more of a companion, more of a friend, more of a hope, more of a sister. [...] She had no time, but if you would see her weaving, you would know this is her time. (ibid: 46–53)

In this sense, artistic engagement with the production of boundary objects has both a relational and a social function in addition to functional and aesthetic characteristics. The boundary object here is fully agentic in form of a strong material agency: the artistic handicraft objects and their production practices “transform and impact the specific way in which reality discloses itself for human beings” (Kirchhoff, 2009: 206). According to Michael Kirchhoff, subjects (X) and material culture (or a technology) (Y) can co-constitute behavioral activity – for example, weaving. The agency of the material culture and the creative engagement with it, according to Katesi, result in weaving, singing, and happiness. Furthermore, they communicate with third parties. In this particular case, Katesi understood that whenever her grandmother sat down to weave, she, and everyone else “*would know this is her time*”. Among the independent handicraft groups, artistic handicraft production is also a social, relational, and at times spiritual practice (see also chapter 7). For Katesi, the rootedness of the techniques with her people gives her work authenticity and individuality while simultaneously situating it within the family, traditional life, and community and hence bridges dichotomies of rural and urban, traditional and contemporary, as the previous quote demonstrates.

Similarly, Bruno Sserunkuuma visualizes folklore music in his art to address health questions around HIV/Aids. By doing so, he navigates through different art forms that lend a language to community members to discuss sensitive yet crucial public health issues (see also chapter 5.2.2 on the subject matter):

So, I tell stories, my pots tell stories. So, one time I listened to a local musician, who [...] was talking about a snake in the pot. Eh – like sometime back people used to cook from clay pots. So, you go back in your home [sic], you find – the pot you cook from – there is a snake! In that pot! So, what do you do?! [...] So, I listened, it was in the local language, in Luganda, then I started composing and asking the same question and – what – like, what he was saying: the snake in the pot. If you try to kill the snake, because pottery is fragile, you may break the pot. [...] He was leading that to HIV/Aids – [...] we contract Aids through sex, and sex is part of life. Should we give away with sex? Should we kill the snake? What do we do?! (Interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma, 23/08/2018: 164–180)

All professional artists I spoke to regard artistic handicraft products as local and valuable art forms. They are framed as culturally indigenous and carry indigenous knowledge. At the same time – and in part for those very reasons – they are sought as adequate tools for the empowerment of marginalized groups and economic development, especially of women with low socio-economic backgrounds. It merges two seemingly conflictual positions and currently is one central dominant conceptualization of the boundary object.

5.2.2 Artistically-Oriented Handicraft Associations and NGOs World

Culturalization of Artistic Handicraft Objects

Reste Kaddu Lwanga – one of the founding members of the NACCAU and its current secretary-general – stated that her motivation to co-found the association was “to make a statement” in opposition to government (observation protocol from 19/02/2020). According to Lwanga, government failed to invest into the cultural sector and to support artists and artisans politically, structurally, and financially. As we are sitting in her shop talking, a woman approaches Lwanga’s shop, looking around, screening the products on display. Lwanga greets the woman with the following words I have heard so often when at the NACCAU, “You’re welcome, take a look at my shop”. She does not have much time, the woman answers, and she is looking for something for her daughter – a souvenir to bring back to her. “Something small”, she adds. Lwanga mainly sells paintings in addition to some necklaces and hand dyed and waxed ‘African’ fabric. The fabric seems to have caught the woman’s attention, and Lwanga immediately gets up and places a pile of fabric of different colors and shapes upon the table. The woman touches it with her fingers, praising the quality and the beauty of its patterns. After a few seconds, she asks about the price. Reste replies, thereby emphasizing the quality of the cloth as if to justify the asking price. Suddenly the woman appears to be no longer interested. Now she is looking to excuse herself: “Unfortunately I don’t have much money [with me]. And I am really only looking for something small – for my daughter”. She tells us that she

will look around some more and might return later. While the woman walks away, I ask Lwanga whether she thinks the woman will return. Her answer is “No”. The woman is looking for something that she, Lwanga does not offer: “Something small for her daughter”.

In associations such as the NACCAU, the boundary object is an object of constant negotiation between the ideas and skills of artists and artisans on the one side, and customers’ tastes and international discourses on the other side. In this brief encounter it becomes clear that whatever Lwanga has to offer does not suit the interest of the potential customer. She is looking for something small and inexpensive to take back home. Lwanga offers larger items in form of paintings and fabric which has not (yet) reached the status of a souvenir craft which would require additional steps to be taken (e.g. taking the fabric to a tailor, measuring, sewing, and fitting). A souvenir, here, needs to submit to the characteristics of being handy in size, low in financial investments, and aesthetically appealing to the woman and her perception of her daughter’s taste. Lwanga quickly understands that the art products in her shop do not respond to the imaginaries of a Ugandan souvenir of her customer, yet tries to convince the potential customer by praising the quality of the fabric and the authenticity of its manufacturing process (hand dyed and waxed).

In this brief encounter, the associated meanings with the boundary object of Lwanga and her potential customers do not match. For they need to represent both: the local cultural heritage as understood from the artists/artisans’ perspectives, and as understood from foreigners’ perspectives (Hume, 2013). It needs to present the aesthetic and decorative quality that attracts the foreigner’s eye, while it also functions as a reference to a regional site and local cultural expression.

To do so, artistic handicraft objects are always at risk of being romanticized and exoticized as being representative of an authentic, rural *African*⁹ lifestyle, which is situated on the peripheries of development and represents the pre-industrialized and pre-modern, ‘natural’ life of peasant people. To do so, products are branded as *traditional*, as made from *organic* or *recycled materials*, *handmade* as well as by individuals or groups in rural areas (see also Image 5.6). This othering process frames

9 It must be stated here that many associations and NGOs I investigated in one way or another are sensitive to the diversity of the African continent and the people that inhabit it. However, it also became clear that in many cases, especially regarding the imagination of rural African life, the narratives fall short to differentiate. The Mirembe project for example promotes handicraft products with the label Made in Africa, when, indeed all products for sale in their online shop were from Uganda (by June 2022 the website design had changed, the slogan disappeared). While in some interviews interview partners were clear in their intention that souvenirs were to help visitors to remember Uganda, others favored the expression remember Africa and added that items sold at the crafts market came from several African countries. Furthermore, foreign tourists are often unaware of the differences of local material culture, they would then add.

Ugandan handicraft products as objects of an *African* tradition and tribal culture from a tourist perspective (Merali, 2022). In this process of negotiating meanings, Lwanga chooses the narration of manual labor in affiliation with quality which could be further elaborated into a story of authentic, indigenous products. Anitra Nettleton (2010: 56) observes how artistic handicraft products, here in form of baskets, that refer to “African histories and memories” with a concocted “African aura [...], belong within a particular space of production denoted (and fenced off) as ‘authentically’ African, because it is not industrialized, and therefore apparently not ‘modern’”. The visual components of artistic handicraft products mark the borders between rural and urban, tradition and modernity.

Artistic handicraft objects as agents of sustainable development

However, handicraft products are also framed as agents of sustainable development by actors such as project funders, the UNESCO, and members of the art-academics sub-world. A means to protecting and conserving the environment by re-use of raw material, as bearing the premise of lifting poor individuals, mostly women, out of poverty. The tag text on the coiled basket in Image 5.6 powerfully demonstrates how the dominant discourses that frame the boundary object in this social world are interconnected:

Traditional Uganda Baskets – These beautiful baskets have been hand woven by a women’s group on the slopes of the Rwenzori mountains in western Uganda. Made out of Millet straw, Banana fibre & Raffia & coloured with natural dyes extracted from plant material. PURE NATURE. (Banana Boat, 2020: n.p.)

The tag is printed on manually pressed paper. Its woodchip texture and its colors – a piece of ivory-colored paper glued on top of an umbered piece of paper – are purposefully chosen for their naturalness. The left rim of the ivory-colored top paper is framed by abstract designs. The product title “Traditional Uganda Baskets” of the item for sale is printed in bold letters. Here, the artistic handicraft product offered is framed by the term ‘traditional’. In addition, the (potential) buyer receives information about the origin of the product and producers (“the slopes of the Rwenzori mountains”), the materials used (“millet straw, banana fibre & raffia [...] natural dyes extracted from plant material”) and the producers, who remain homogenous as a women’s group.

I took this photo at one of the Banana Boat shops. Banana Boat is a private business that “follow[s] the principles of Fair Trade” (Banana Boat, n.d.). As previously mentioned, the borders between NGOs, associations, and (social) businesses are often blurred, especially in the realm of the cultural crafts industry. As a business, Banana Boat presents itself as ecologically sustainability-oriented. It emphasizes the importance of recycling and the use of natural fibers and dye. At the same time, the

founders and owners Suni Magyar and Ralph Schenk, self-describe their business as socially responsible by providing “work opportunities for local crafters, small entrepreneurs and women’s groups” (ibid: n.p.). As demonstrated in the product-tag text, the positioning of the products for sale in their shops and how the business positions itself are surprisingly similar to artistically oriented non-governmental and non-profit organizations. Here, too, the lines between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘contemporary’ are blurred; products are not sold by the artisans themselves, and the emphasis on economic gains for (women) artisans an important asset of the marketing strategy. Importantly, Banana Boat also emphasizes ecological sustainability and hence links the boundary object with a new(er) emphasis in the development realm on climate protection.

In her paper on contemporary South African baskets and their constructed meanings, Anita Nettleton makes similar observations:

Most of the objects for sale in these markets are handmade, and often (but not exclusively, [...]) by people living in the rural areas. The differentiation between rural and urban, tradition and modernity are easily lost sight of in such an environment. Yet, they form the base of both development and promotion of indigenous crafts. (Nettleton, 2010: 56)

In this quotation, she refers to a dichotomy that artistic handicraft objects and the artists and artisans who create them bear – between tradition and modernity and between rural and urban. While it might be easy to lose sight of these lines in the constructions of meaning making processes associated with artistic handicraft practices and practitioners, it is elementary to consider the discursive hegemonic power of those who produce, reproduce, and manifest – in short, construct them. The implications and consequences thereof will be further discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

Whether it is the NACCAU, the NAWOU, or Banana Boat, all legal entities I investigated emphasize that the production site of the boundary object is a site of manual labor. In addition, they construct artistic handicraft production as a gendered space in which first and foremost women receive the support needed to ‘work themselves out of poverty’ – the strand of the boundary object that argues with the contribution of artistic handicraft products as important for economic development and empowerment. It further associates poverty rurality, with gender-based violence, and/or with disrupted biographies, for example due to forced migration. This notion can also be found in the NACCAU mission statement in which it is proclaimed that the “local cultural heritage is [the] foundation and inspiration through which

[we] promote, preserve and transform Uganda's visual arts into a vibrant sector for education, employment and poverty alleviation" (NACCAU, 2021)¹⁰.

In some of its activities, the NACCAU seeks to cooperate with actors from the private sector and/or local branches of international organizations such as the UNESCO and the Uganda National Commission for the UNESCO, which co-determine the perception of the boundary object in this social world. Recent project collaborations include a UNESCO-led project called *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda*. This project was funded by the government of the Republic of Korea, headed by Uganda National Commission for the UNESCO, executed by the NACCAU, and operated between 2015 and 2019. The objectives of this project were myriad, and many relate to the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. The project partners highlighted the diversity of the material cultural heritage and sought to enhance the quality of products and support artisans (primarily women, see also Image 5.6) in establishing marketing strategies for their products the creative industries. Ultimately, the aim was to enable artisans to create economic gains through their work and to deliver proof of the importance of their contribution to the Ugandan economy.

Image 5.6: Basket tag: Traditional Uganda Baskets.



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10 I will further elaborate on the NACCAU, its activities, objectives, agency, and relevance for artistic handicraft products as well as its potential and limitations in chapter 6.

A second example is the *Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts* project of the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA) – a private sector institute – in cooperation with Eco Tourism Kenya, which operated from 2020–2021. It was funded by the German Society for International Cooperation (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ) in the interests of supporting people with little or no formal education to foster the quality standards of their locally manufactured products. In Chapter 6.3, I will elaborate on the role of these project-elements in the situation. In the social world of artistically oriented handicraft associations and NGOs, these two projects support my overall observations regarding the conceptualizations of the boundary object. Taking nuances into consideration, artistic handicraft products here are, by and large, debated alongside the discourses on poverty eradication and as a tourism-oriented heritage construction – namely as a site of interest for tourists to remember the authenticity of *the real Africa* as framed in form of traditionalized and culturally ethnicized artistic products.

The social world of artistically-oriented handicraft associations and NGOs has significant overlaps with the (visual) arts world and increasingly with the tourism world which – at times – makes it particularly challenging for actors in this world to position themselves beyond dominant frameworks (see also chapter 6). This social world includes formalized local organizations, such as the NACCAU, as well as social-businesses that operate with similar rationales. They are distinct from the international NGOs world insofar as one of the common interests in this social world is to gain funding from international NGOs. I begin this chapter with a description of the collective actors I summarized here under “associations and NGOs” before I display the meanings associated with artistic handicraft products and production in this social world. In doing so, I provide some empirical examples that demonstrate how the boundary object is understood and negotiated within this social world.

The need to differentiate between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other associations and legal entities is closely related to the establishment of the United Nations and its various bodies and agencies (Willetts, 2009). Especially in the development realm of the postcolonial-era, NGOs began to play an increasingly important role in the spheres of civil society, *good governance*, and sustainable economic growth (Neverdeen Pieterse, 2010, see also chapter 3.2). In theory, *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) are independent from the government and thus also not steered by governmental but by parochial interests (Woldring, 1998). In reality, however, non-governmental organizations are not only shaped by governmental decisions, they depend directly and indirectly on governmental support and cannot at all times be separated from the states (Ferguson, 2006; Fowler, 2012; Gramsci, 2011 [1992]). Still, dominant civil society strands conceive NGOs as *the spaces of civil society* (Edwards, 2011b); Despite heavy criticism of the development focus of NGOs in the Global South and their contribution to “unfavorable conditions for rural social movement emergence” (Isgren, 2018: 180). This orientation towards sustainable de-

velopment often de-politicizes the discourses on civil society and development and emphasizes humanitarian assistance that alleviates the symptoms rather than addressing the roots of societal challenges (see also chapter 3.2). Unsurprisingly, then, from a local perspective, NGOs are often understood synonymously with funding organizations from the Global North, and many local associational bodies depend, directly or indirectly, on foreign (funding) partners in one way or another:

Civil society is the (...) site – we call them – those people who advocate for community development, for example those you'd find helping our teachers associations or other associations in terms of like office, **in terms of salaries, in terms of other programs, based on external funding. The NGOs. The non-governmental organizations.** [...] We will be training to position the visual arts in the international market. So, they give us – they will give us some funding to be able to train, like we have already done like I've always done with the producers. How they can improve on their products. (Interview with Nuwa Nyanzi, artist and vice-chairperson NACCAU 26/01/2020: 398–406, emphasis added)

Unlike NGOs that usually have a small member base and cooperate with foreign organizations, associations in Uganda are frequently urban and member-based organizations. They may or may not be profit-oriented. Frequently, they are not entirely non-governmental although they might conceptualize themselves as such. Often-times, they are affiliated with governmental ministries in one way or another. Associations such as the Uganda Tourism Association (UTA), the National Association of Women's Organizations Uganda (NAWOU), or the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association Uganda (NACCAU), for example, serve as umbrella organizations and promote the interests of their members or member organizations or private businesses alongside running projects or permanent programs (such as the NACCAU crafts village run by the NACCAU). The NACCAU itself is affiliated with the Uganda National Culture Centre (UNCC), which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), and its members may be in multiple positions in more than one legal body, which further blurs the borders between them (Ferguson, 2006).

The Uganda legal system differentiates between for-profit and non-profit social businesses. The latter can be incorporated into an NGO (TradeLab, 2019). The lines between non-profit and for-profit remain blurred which results in profit-oriented businesses being able to operate as social businesses. The main legal difference is that for-profit businesses, even if they operate in a socially oriented way, are not obligated to reinvest their profits towards the good of the general public. In the cultural crafts industries, this leads to creative combinations whereby an enterprise chooses to market its products using the same strategies as NGOs, but, as in the case with

Banana Boat, conceptualizes ‘empowerment’ as paying handicraft artisans for the products they purchase and then resell.

Local, artistically oriented organizations vary in size, aim, and structure. Most of them, as is the case with the association investigated, are influenced by globalized and oftentimes simultaneously foreign-dominated structures. However, much as they adopt vocabulary and concepts that frame the meaning of artistic handicraft products, they may also create agency by negotiating the associated meanings of their products.

5.2.3 Cultural Crafts Industry Funding Arena

The most important arena identified here is the previously introduced cultural crafts industry in civil society arena. In addition, my analysis directed me towards a second important arena of concern, the cultural crafts industry–funding arena. In chapter 2.3.3, I discussed the contested significance of the Cultural Turn in Development, thereby introducing three strands of conceptualizing it in development work. In spite of dispute around the whereabouts of the Cultural Turn (Labadi, 2020a), one of its major impacts is the establishment of funding possibilities for artistically oriented (development) initiatives and projects in the Global North (Nagawa and Siegenthaler, 2022; Stupples, 2011; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017). The previously mentioned *Walls of Water* project, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an example for this, as are the 2020 Kampala Art Biennale (KAB), co-funded by the EU, the Swiss Art Council, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the annual Ngalabi Short Film Festival, funded by the Goethe-Zentrum.

Since the ratification of the 2005 UNESCO Convention in 2015, the cultural crafts industry was also able to benefit from project funding from industrialized countries. One example is the previously mentioned *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* project that received financial support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) of the Republic of Korea. The *Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts* project was funded indirectly by the German government through its development agency GIZ, and the *Handicraft and Souvenirs Development Project* (HSDP) received US\$1.5 million from the Geneva-based international Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), an initiative that supports the development of the ‘least developed countries’. It is noteworthy that many projects related to the cultural crafts industry in Uganda are financed directly or indirectly by foreign governments. However, since this is not the focus of the study at hand, I will not further elaborate upon the subject matter.

The division presented here is not accidental. In the beginning of my research, cultural institutes, and culture funds such as the Alliance Francaise, the British Council, and the Goethe Zentrum, as well as the Dutch Prince Claus Fund, appeared as elements and organizations in my data and on my maps. However, the more

focused I became on artistic handicraft objects and the artisans who produce them, the less relevant cultural institutes became. They are conspicuous in their absence insofar as these organizations and institutes focus on art projects, residences, and programs. In terms of the boundary object, they become relevant actors when dealing with historical artefacts, preservation, exhibition, and the question of the archive.

Yet, their absence in my research situation can also be understood as part of the dynamic that differentiates arts and crafts as two separate yet related dimensions of the creative industries. This finding surprised me as did the ‘emergence’ of the UNESCO as an important organizational actor in my data. Moreover, it was not only the UNESCO as an organization that proved to be a powerful actor in the situation. Alongside the organization, its discourses on the safeguarding of cultural heritage and the protection of cultural diversity must be regarded as fully agentic and very influential in many social worlds.

The Creative Industries Funding Arena is a site of important power asymmetries whereby those actors that have funds decide which narratives will prevail. In my research situation, this arena is mainly shaped by the social world of foreign governments that always also consider inner interests when providing funds for the cultural crafts industry, by the UN-world, the tourism world, the international-NGOs world, and by the UNESCO.

While associations such as the NACCAU may be member-based, the membership fees do not cover the expenses, which forces collective actors to submit to funders’ narratives on authentic African crafts, UN agendas of sustainable development, or the UNESCO discourses on safeguarding cultural heritage through its commodification. With regard to the situatedness of contemporary artistic handicraft production in civil society in Uganda today, the funding of culture and the individual interests of funders must be considered as co-constitutive in the postcolonial realities of the Ugandan creative industries.

5.2.4 The UNESCO

With the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and its four overarching goals, the UNESCO introduced the first international treaty that “provides a policy framework to create dynamic creative sectors. Parties are developing sound policies and measures to support every stage of the value chain, involving not only the culture sector, but reaching across, [sic] economic development, employment, finance, education and many more” (project leaflet, Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, 2020: n.p.). The core of the convention, which Uganda ratified in 2015, is the recognition of the dual nature of “cultural goods and services” as being more than “mere commodities” (ibid). Rather, the UNESCO states, they “also carry meaning and values, shape opinions

and foster mutual understanding” (ibid: n.p.). Alongside the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, the 2005 Convention serves as an important point of reference. Throughout my empirical data, in interviews, roundtable discussions, on websites, or in project documents, references to tangible and intangible cultural heritage are made frequently. Furthermore, the protection and promotion of local cultural customs are pivotal in all social worlds. Among independent handicraft groups, the protection and promotion of handicraft skills are often referred to as being a cultural responsibility; it is “generational” or a “spirit” (e.g., group conversation with members of the *Imbalu* Initiation ceremony costume designers from Bubyangu, 27/02/2020: 460–469; group conversation with members of Bunangaka-potters group, 25/02/2020: 507) while in urban, internationalized social worlds, the terms ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘indigenous culture’ prevail.

Lynn Meskell and Christoph Brumann also attest that the UNESCO has a considerable symbolic weight, which can “be converted into power and material gains in many domains” (Meskell and Brumann, 2015: 22). Labadi (2020c) understands the UNESCO’s power to be discursive rather than financial. This is particularly true for the World Heritage List and the List of World Heritage in Danger. Their ‘major currency’ is the prestige and interest that comes with the listing, as the World Heritage Fund has

[i]ncreasingly limited means to support nominations and conservation measures. The underlying assumption and precondition for listing is that the nominating nation itself is capable of conserving the site, and, with the prestige of a World Heritage title, it is indeed often much easier to attract investors and donors. (Meskell and Brumann, 2015: 26).

The UNESCO’s strategy is not only applied in inventorying heritage sites and practices. In my research situation, the UNESCO highlights the economic potential of the creative industries and their contributions to the gross domestic product of any given country. It frames creative activities as contributing to sustainable development, and sustainable development as being interdependent with cultural diversity. Again, it does not fund activities and projects directly, but by emphasizing the importance of supporting the creative industries, the likelihood of attracting funders increases (see also chapter 6). According to its own estimations, the creative industries can make up to 11% of a country’s total employment (Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, 2020). This, however, includes publishing, film, music, and audio-visual media, as well as sports and other forms of entertainment.

Beyond promoting the economic potential of the creative industries, the UNESCO also seeks to preserve the diversity of cultural expressions through co-funding the restoration and maintenance of cultural sites and landscapes, and by inventorying sites, practices, and products as well as customs, ceremonies, and traditions

as tangible or intangible cultural heritage. Barkcloth making, for example, was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2008. Furthermore, as Meskill and Brumann (2015) suggest, it has received significantly more attention since then.

After the colonization of present-day Uganda, barkcloth, which had been known among the Baganda to be the fabric of the royals and the dead (Nakazibwe 2005), almost disappeared entirely and was rediscovered by artists and designers only recently. Especially in the Baganda, many people I spoke to referred to barkcloth with pride, highlighting its significance by referring to its UNESCO listing. Although I did not speak with any official UNESCO representative or staff member in Uganda, it was present – physically or discursively – almost everywhere I went. In the UNESCO realm, the boundary object is a driver of economic growth as well as a vehicle to promote *social inclusion* and *cultural diversity*, though without specifying what exactly this entails, as the following quote from a project leaflet shows:

The results of the creative industries mapping study undertaken by the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO in 2009 indicates a high potential for Uganda's design/craft sector to foster economic growth, job creation, export earnings and to promote social inclusion, cultural diversity and human resource development, provided key skills in creative design, artistic product development and marketing are improved upon. (UNESCO 2015: n.p.)

Here, artistic handicraft products serve both an economic interest and a social interest. Interestingly, economic interests by and large outweigh social and cultural notions in this quote. This becomes particularly prominent in the last part of the sentence, which also serves as the rationale for the project promoted in the leaflet, the *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* project, as further elaborated on in chapter 5.3. Improved skills in design, product development, and marketing are deemed pre-requisite aspects that do not relate to cultural diversity or social inclusion. On the contrary, a neoliberal thought of improved marketing and higher levels of innovation dominates the UNESCO's position most taken with regard to the boundary object that, in a subtle yet sharply formulated way, presents handicraft artists and their products as unprofessional.

In the quotation above, this becomes apparent in the wording “provided key skills [...] are improved upon”. The visual components of the leaflet support this notion. At first glance the cover image appears as an arrangement of colored forms, a pixel art filter blurs the lines and makes the recognition of the products on display unless the spectator knows and recognizes the forms, impossible (see right part of Image 4.1). The item most identifiable is a basket, which covers the upper half of the image. The blurriness of the image strengthens the proposed need for improved skills, as the handicraft products in its current artistic elaborations do not suffice to be at full display. The title of the leaflet further strengthens this analysis: “Strength-

ening the artistic, design & marketing skills of Ugandan women professionals". Here, too, we find the articulated need for improvement on several levels. First, artistic skills are to be strengthened. This refers to the technical skills needed to produce an artefact. In addition, the articulated need to strengthen design skills can be understood as an appeal for more innovation through new designs, materials, forms, and patterns. Lastly, marketing skills are to be improved as well.

During my conversations with independent handicraft groups, I was told that the participants of a weeklong training that was offered as part of the *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* project were taught how to calculate an appropriate price for their products. The calculation strategy considers the costs of material, the working hours of the artisan, transportation, and marketing costs. However, group members considered this calculation unrealistic. Their local customers oftentimes have little money themselves. Frequently enough, artisans are in immediate need of money, and hence at times sell their products below the buying price of the raw materials they used. Raw materials, I am told, are often natural products. However, since they do not readily grow where the artisans live, they need to be purchased anyway. Furthermore, the increasing mobility of people shapes their artistic production, including the materials they use.

This economization process of the boundary object can be understood as a condition of neoliberalism, in which "the enactment of government policies relies increasingly upon the self-empowerment of capacitated citizens and self-organized communities in marketized relationships, which position cultural heritage as a resource" (Coombe and Weiss, 2015: 43). "In heritage studies", Coombe and Weiss further write, "neoliberalism is used as a generic adjective for states, policies, and economic practices, a process of economizing heritage goods and/or promoting socio-economic development in competitive global economies. It is often conflated with economic globalization and the instrumental expansion of international tourism" (ibid: 44). Indeed, it appears that the positions taken by the UNESCO in the situation of inquiry center around economic activities with and through the boundary object framed as tangible or intangible cultural heritage. In this logic, too, the ongoing improvement of skills and techniques, as well as the development of innovative assets that stand out in a competitive global market are as necessary as the entanglements with the tourism sector.

With Clarke, the omnipresence of the UNESCO as an organization – as an entity that produces important documents which become discursively influential in the situation, and because of its status as the expert on culture (Meskell and Brumann, 2015) – indicates that it is a powerful actor in the situation. The UNESCO is fully agentic in generating consent for the current status quo to the point where members of the women's wickerwork group took from a training workshop that "once we work hard in our crafts business, they are global. We want to produce in bulk so that we are globally recognized as Uganda – and to preserve our culture" (group conver-

sation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 296–297). The boundary object is conceptualized as sufficiently agentic in facilitating change in the lives of handicraft artists on the condition that they work hard enough, which indicates that if they fail to improve their livelihoods, it is because they have not worked hard enough.

I return to this issue when I elaborate on the overall discourse on the boundary object and its creators in chapter 5.3. While the UNESCO may play a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around the boundary object and consent in the situation, its framing of artistic handicraft products is not shared by all relevant social worlds that I introduce in this chapter. In the art world and its sub-worlds, the position is contested because it limits the perceptions of local material culture and (re-)colonizes the discourse around artistic freedom by submitting it almost exclusively to neoliberalist market theory. In the minoritized social world of independent handicraft groups, notions of the previously mentioned responsibility for the boundary object through a ‘generational spirit’ or of handicraft products facilitating conviviality (Nyamnjoh, 2017b) are important. Moreover, at the NACCAU, members apply strategies that attempt to benefit from the UNESCO discourses by submitting to them and simultaneously liberate themselves from prevailing hegemonic power asymmetries by establishing new alliances.

5.2.6 The Tourism World

In the tourism world, the boundary object serves as an agent to tell a particular story about Uganda’s culture, authenticity, and cultural heritage. Here, the boundary object is framed within the concept of *memorability*: “For every tourist that comes to Uganda, we interact with [and] look for things we call *memorability* – something to remember” (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO of UTA on 11/03/2020: 148–149). The memorability aspect is important for tourists to have a reminder of their (positive) experience in Uganda that they will share with friends and family. In addition, Kawere also relates tourism to societal transformation. For him, the engagement of tourism with artistic handicraft products, producers, and associations such as the NACCAU has the following meaning:

[O]ur focus is to transform the livelihoods of those people. It’s not only about the tourists, it’s also those other products like the mat – which are highly demanding also in other markets because they are highly organic materials. [...] So, they are also on high demand, meaning that if we put an effort here, we would be able to transform a specific life. And tourism, in essence – apart from being a business – its main essence is to cause transformation of the society. [...] So, the whole entire – why tourism industry is attached to the crafts, emerging as a result of; One (1) is the demand of the sovereigns by the tourists that come to the country; two (2) is the

need to work with producers to transform their lives. Because as they transform their lives, it's the tourism industry that actually benefits in the end. (ibid: lines 167–178)

The Tourism World is among the social worlds of significant importance for the dissemination of artistic handicraft products. In addition, the linkages between the arts, cultural initiatives, and tourism in general are plenty. After all, it is cultural differences in architecture, clothing, cuisine, rituals, and ceremonies among others that create a feeling of being in a different place for tourists. In the situation of inquiry, the tourism world plays an important role in the negotiation process of the boundary object, predominantly in two ways as I will proceed to demonstrate:

(1) During the analysis of texts and visual material from websites, it became apparent that the international NGOs world is currently primarily a sub-world of the tourism world. In the research situation, international NGOs are by and large privately founded NGOs. Often, they are the result of an initiative of a few individuals who came to Uganda as tourists or volunteers. The appreciation for the aesthetics of artistic handicraft products in combination with the desire to help people change their economic situation for the better make the core ingredients of these privately founded NGOs. Founders either form (women's) groups to start manufacturing handicraft groups or buy from existing groups and resell them abroad. An example for the former is the Mirembe initiative of three Israeli volunteers of the TEN Brit center (Focus group discussion with Assoc. Prof. Kizito Maria Kasule, Dr. Justine Nabaggala and Dr. Joan Kekimuri, 23/08/2018), an example for the latter is the project PEARLS OF AFRICA, a German based initiative that works jointly with “60 Ugandan refugee women of the Emmanuel Group in Kampala, Uganda” (PEARLS OF AFRICA website, retrieved on 28/11/2020). Hence, they are an important social sub-world for many handicraft artists. The product designs in these groups are heavily tinted by the taste of the project founders and the targeted market – a market interested in unique and ecologically sustainable manufactured, small(er) design products from low-income countries through which they can *do good by purchasing goods*.

Already in 1994, Ingrid Thurner wrote about the linkage between souvenir art and the mechanisms of tourism and observed how “souvenir trade – like tourism – obeys to the economic mechanisms of the society of the travelers, not of the society of those being travelled to” (Thurner, 1994: 1, my translation). This reminds one of Trowell's reference to creating products for foreigners (Europeans) who seek “things with an African flavour” (Trowell, 1937: 44). In this sub-world of the tourism world, foreigners not only seek things with an African flavor but by establishing organizations, they also actively participate in the construction of what are considered *authentic*, natural Ugandan craft products. Potential customers are encouraged to purchase their products not only because of their aesthetic and artistic value or the story they tell about places far away, but importantly also because purchasing them means help-

ing individuals and communities who are considered dependent, poor, and without agency. One such example is the previously mentioned former landing page of the “Dignity Collection” of the U.S. founded organization *Fashion for Compassion* (see also Image 5.3).

(2) (Local) associations such as the NACCAU actively reach out to actors and organizations in the tourism to form alliances. Throughout interviews, group discussions, and conversations with individuals from academia, from artistically oriented civil society organizations as well as with art-activists, there was an overall consensus that the current government, and in particular the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in charge of Culture, does not promote the interests of individuals and groups engaged with arts and culture. As a result, two strategies emerged. The first strategy is to put pressure on governmental bodies, to invite members to all events, and to create visibility (e.g. roundtable discussion on ‘Art in Intl. Development’, 27/02/2019: 635–664). The second strategy is to seek alliances elsewhere. The NACCAU becoming a member of the Uganda Tourism Association (in 2018) can be considered as implementing this second strategy, as the following quote indicates:

Ordinarily, you will find that the crafts production, in terms of legislation and laws in Uganda, falls under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Works. They [the NACCAU] were not being helped that’s why they wrote and requested to us if they could come and be part of our congregation. So, we accepted them about two years ago, and have been studying how best to support that sector. (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO of UTA on 11/03/2020: 206–210)

The tourism world frames the boundary object artistic handicraft products as souvenir art and as such within the narrative of *memorability*. This concept is not limited to handicraft objects for sale in crafts markets, souvenir shops of safari lodges, and in airport shops. It is also true for the cultural experiences during a visit to Uganda. The photograph of two posters (Image 5.7), both by the Uganda National Culture Center (UNCC), visualizes this narrative very well. At first sight, the big green circle in the middle of the posters catches the attention of the spectator. It is reminiscent of a circle reticle used, for example, in telescopes or microscopes, and just as with the scientific instrument, the circle and the lines that run towards its center help the viewer focus on relations between elements as well as distances between and among them.

In both posters, the green circle is located in the center and white lines move away from it toward the edges of the posters. Within the lines, there are photos of people engaged with cultural activities. In some images, there are drums while in other images people appear to be in movement, dancing. Around the saturated green circles in the center of the posters, there is a second, more transparent outer

green circle. This second circle lays a green filter onto the colors of the images clustered around the center. In the center of the right poster, bold white letters read “culture for sustainable development”.

It includes five scenes. Out of these, three are in a single section of the reticle each, one image stretches over two sections, while the last and largest image covers most of the upper half of the poster. The latter is the image of a man in a white shirt. He wears a hat and holds an instrument with strings. Spectators only see the neck of the instrument. Behind his left upper arm, there are some beige lines, which could be straw or other grass fibers. Apart from the fibers, the background is black. Light falls onto the tip of his nose, lips, and chin from above, which suggests that the musician is currently playing a concert.

The second largest image located in the lower left corner is divided into two by a white line. Here, the spectator sees a man wearing an orange shirt and blue pants. He sits on the ground with his mouth open as if he is speaking. In front of him are four items in beige-brown wooden colors. They are assorted in a line; three of them have a red number painted on them, surrounded by one blue circle and two blue lines, one above and one below the circle. The item farthest to the right is lighter in color. The man is either kneeling or sitting on a green lawn. In the background, there are branches set up vertically in the shape of a cone.

The image to its right is the sole black-and-white image in the poster. Not only the colors but also the fact that the person in the photograph looks directly into the camera lens hence also at the spectator make this image stand out. The man in this image wears a dark shirt without sleeves, patterned pants, or a skirt around his waist, and a belt decorated with shells around his waist. He wears many beaded necklaces around his neck and right arm. Assumedly, he wears more beaded necklaces around his neck and left arm as well, but this cannot be seen here. In front of his chest, he wears a row of handkerchiefs made from cloth neatly assorted next to one another. They cover most of his torso from the front. He holds his lower right arm at a 90-degree angle from his torso, and with his hand, he holds a bar with a fuzzy, furry top. His head is covered by a flat hat tight to the rear of his head. In the background, we see another man wearing a similar outfit. While we do not see the upper body of this second man, we do see this man's thighs and two objects in the shape of an eclipse with a horizontal opening throughout the middle of the object. They are bells made from iron. Only a spectator who recognizes the outfit knows this as the costume worn by *Imbalu* initiation candidates – an initiation ceremony of the (Ba-) Gisu in Eastern Uganda.

In the image above, the spectator sees several drums and people playing them. They are standing and appear to be in the process of playing their drums. They hold drumsticks in both hands; the man in the foreground has his right arm up in the air while his left arm and hand are just above the upper rim of the drum. In the background, there are two more people in a similar body posture, indicating that,

possibly, they not only play the drum but also do so in sync. Behind the drum players in the background, there is a green hedge, and even further away, we can see the white walls of a building and four windows. The photo is thus taken outdoors, but very likely in an urban setting.

All drum players in this image wear similar clothes: a white shirt with red fronts, black pants with a red stripe on the side, and black gaiters with bells around their lower legs. Around the rear part of their waist, they wear red bast skirts, called *mpina*. The drummers look towards the left of the scene. The attentive viewer might see that the last image in the upper right corner of the poster could be a different detail of the same photograph.

In it, we see four women in a row from front to back and another drummer in the background, standing in front of a similarly green hedge. The women wear brown skirts with colorful patches, green shirts, and brown and colorful necklaces in addition to a beaded headband around their heads. The three women in the fore- and midground are moving, likely dancing. Their upper bodies are leaning in towards the front. Two of them look straight toward the right of the scene (potentially toward the drummers), and the person in the middle looks straight into the camera. The fourth woman in the background cannot be seen well. However, there is a drum right in front of her, which may be an indicator that she is a drummer rather than a dancer.

Considering the details as elements of the same photograph, the dresses, the dancing, and the drumming, the indications are quite clear that this photography was taken at a *formal baakisimba*¹¹ dance. Baakisimba is both music and dance in the tradition of the Baganda. Today, interpretations of the so-called village baakisimba (*baakisimba ey'omukyalo*) are used for sacred and secular purposes, while all other baakisimba performances are *formal* (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2014). According to ethnomusicologist Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, formal baakisimba groups outside of the *kabaka's* palace only developed after the 1940s, “when the *badongo ba kabaka* (king’s musicians) began to perform outside the palace, and especially in the 1960s after the abolition of the Buganda kingdom” (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2014: 125). With the abolition of the kingdoms, baakisimba lost an important performance space and part of its function. In addition, Nannyonga-Tamusuza’s writings indicate that the emergence of formalized groups further disconnected it from its socio-cultural functions. In post-independence Uganda, baakisimba, particularly

11 It must be noted, though, that most baakisimba groups combine baakisimba with other dances, especially with *nnankasa* and *mbaga*. *Nnankasa*, a “fast, and therefore exciting” (Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2014: 126) dance, has become increasingly popular and is performed during festivities such as weddings, graduations, conferences, and so-called beer parties (*mu birabo*). For detailed elaborations about baakisimba, I refer to Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza’s *Baakisimba: Gender in the Music and Dance of the Baganda People of Uganda* (2014).

promoted by the *Heart Beat of Africa* group, became a national rather than an ethnic dance.

Baakisimba became detached from being a performative cultural expression of one ethnic group. This, Nannyonga-Tamusuza writes, had implications for the costumes, too which started to emerge more frequently in black, red, and yellow, the colors of the Ugandan national flag (see also Image 5.7). It was during this period, too, she further states, that baakisimba “became an art form and ceased to be an intimate and vital aspect of living among the Baganda as before” (ibid: 126). This is relevant because it describes how the meanings of cultural practices, here baakisimba as performative cultural expression, combined with material culture and design of the costumes worn during the performance.

Furthermore, it is especially relevant because it addresses several questions that accompanied me throughout my research. First, it asks about the meaning of art. Nannyonga-Tamusuza suggests a rupture between art and culturally meaningful activities which also asks what and when is art, about its meanings and purposes, and about its relations with the people who developed or inspired the development of it. Second, what are the linkages between professionalization on the one hand and a decrease in informal and spontaneous baakisimba dance events on the other hand? This relates not only to performance but also to the costumes, and it extends to the question of the situatedness of artistic handicraft products. Third, if indeed baakisimba ceased to be “an intimate and vital aspect of living” (ibid: 126) within a cultural group, then why does the Ugandan National Cultural Center (UNCC) print it on a commercial poster that promotes “culture for sustainable development” (UNCC, 2019: n.p.)? This brings me to the title of the poster: How do cultural expressions, here in form of music and dancing, relate to sustainable development? How can they relate, especially when experts such as Nannyonga-Tamusuza suggest that their meanings have long shifted away from their situated cultural attachments and hence political and societal functions to new associated meanings primarily as entertainment?

In her monograph, Nannyonga-Tamusuza relates baakisimba dance and music to gender roles among the Baganda. In doing so, she seeks to explore why women were denied access to drum beating. Possible explanations include elaborations on linkages with female menstruation and its perception of women being unclean during their menstruation period. In their study about pottery practice in the Ankole region in western Uganda, William Kayamba and Philip Kwesiga (2016, 2017), too, found taboos around women's participation in expressive handicraft practices in relation to their menstruation. They write, “It was strongly believed that when a woman under menstruation extracts clay, her pots would also fire with red strips [...] Menstruating or pregnant women are, often, not allowed to extract or manipulate clay, and sometimes, even to touch unfired vessels” (Kayamba and Kwesiga, 2017: 45). How do such gendered roles inform notions of sustainable development

as presented in the poster? In the discourse around culture for sustainable development, those critical moments potentially bearing conflict remain largely absent, and hence position the boundary object as artefacts detached from culturally situated embeddedness.

A different reading about why women were denied drum beating connects the act with the manifestation of power (an understanding that is also shared by e.g., Reid, 2017). Since women already have the power of giving birth and hence embody the role of being the ‘mother of a nation’, allowing them to beat the drum would mean “to assign women extra power” (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2014: 130), which was to be prevented. In contemporary practices, women re-negotiate their role in baakisimba as well as in pottery making. Some women have become *ngalabi* players (ibid; personal conversation with Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, November 2017) and in doing so, ruptured the status-quo.

“For many social theorists and anthropologists, culture is the glue of social cohesion and [...] this glue comes unstuck under the pressure of tourism” (Hume, 2013: 2). In this quote from the introduction of *Tourism Art and Souvenirs. The Material Culture of Tourism*, David Hume refers to Davyd Greenwood and his perspective on the impact of tourism on the host-country’s material culture in form of the arts and crafts of the local communities. Hume challenges this notion by arguing that if an artefact or a ritual is indeed “communication and social cohesion, and it has endured many generations without drastic change to its meaning and purpose, then it is likely to be robust enough to communicate between different cultures” (ibid: 2). He then proceeds to elaborate on the communicative agency of material culture in the form of artefacts and their meanings for the craftsperson who made them on the one hand, and the tourist who consumes it on the other hand. This co-constitution of meaning associated with the handicraft product is shaped by information provided to the tourist about the materials, the historical values regarding the aesthetics, and the skill set needed for its production, as well as the embeddedness in local historical cultural practices.

Yet, the tourism world is not primarily occupied with the dynamics and processuality of cultural expression. In the here discussed poster, cultural expressions are fragmented, cut and pasted together in an assemblage around one major target – to make tourism sustainable. The logic applied here suggests that art – performative as well as in form of material and visual culture – is consumed by visitors, who, through their consumption, help to protect and preserve the cultural heritage. Through the analysis, it becomes apparent how the social sub-world of international NGOs could be understood as partially belonging to the tourism world. Their narratives reinforce one another and mutually build on each other. In addition, organizations such as the UTA and the UTB play an increasingly important role when it comes to the negotiation of associated meanings of the boundary object. Unlike any other social world, in this world it is clearly articulated how artistic handicraft artists are con-

sidered prospective clients that ensure the survival of the interests of the tourism world and hence as powerful and agentic (interview with Richard Kawere, CEO of UTA, 11/03/2020).

Image 5.7: UNCC Commercial Poster 'Culture for Sustainable Development', National Theater, Kampala.



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5.2.7 The Minoritized Social World of Independent Handicraft Groups

Collective actors of the artistic handicraft groups-world oftentimes live in the peripheries around large cities or in rural areas. They are independently organized in the sense that they are not registered as a group, an association, or a business, nor are they affiliated to any formalized group, be it non-governmental, governmental, or faith-based. They usually lack any materialized documentation about their existence apart from their artwork or the materialized documentation produced by non-group members. In most cases, they do not have a permanent workshop or studio, nor do they have any marketing materials, let alone online representation on social media platforms or a website. The groups I met with were structured and organized quite differently. The sisters Harriett Natukunda and Sarah Bako¹², who live in Mbale, work as a pair and feel affiliated with their congregation at church. The hat makers' group was established by Isaiah Wandera¹³, who continues to be the

12 Last names changed

13 Last name changed

leader of the group of approximately 30 members: 27 women and two men. The *Imbalu* initiation ceremony uniform designers' group is led by community elders and cultural leaders of the community. It has a chairperson who is also a local politician and a vice-chairperson who is also the treasurer. Furthermore, the group is guided by the *umukuuka*¹⁴ (meaning grandfather or elder) who holds a position similar to the *kabaka*, and hence is sometimes referred to as *umukuuka kabaka* or *umukuuka bamasaaba* (the Gisu or Bagisu sometimes also self-refer as Bamasaaba). The group members regard him as an important teacher and cultural archive.

The group of potters I met used part of the house and court of one of its leaders as workshop site. Like most groups, they aim to purchase jointly raw material in bulk, and similar to the hat-makers group and the *Imbalu* initiation uniform designers, they also share their profits. The women's wickerwork group was initiated by an elderly woman who taught community members with the purpose of 'passing the skill' on to the next generation. After her death, others joined the group. Together they decided to work in public so new potential members might see them and gain an interest. Particularly among this group, members emphasized that products were not only used for sale, but could also be used at home, emphasizing the practicability and relevance of their work: "[...] to make such they [community members who might join] can also make some products for their own use in their homesteads in the essence that if they may have not sold the product, they can use it still in their homesteads" (group conversation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 273–276). Similarly, one potter from the pottery group explained that pots had frequently been used for barter trade:

From time immemorial. Still, right from our forefathers, they [the forefathers] would exchange these pots with other communities such as Busiu for millet, cassava, yams, matooke – in times of hunger [as well as] other foods and items they did not produce yet needed them. So they would bring us children food and we ate an grew up. (David Khatuyu¹⁵, group conversation with members of Bunangaka-potters group, 25/02/2020: 510–514).

Here, the boundary object is conceptualized as functional object for self-use, for cooking, or for purposes of barter trade. A basket or bowl made of *obukedu* (banana

14 At the time of the re-establishment of the monarchies in the 1990s, the Gisu or Bagisu people refused to appoint one single cultural leader as king, as they, according to the literature studied, have long been "administered at clan [rather than at tribe] level" (Shero, 2017: 159). When pressured to appoint a king, the Gisu decided to adapt "their own word for king, Umuhinga, and named the appointed, Umukuuka – the grandfather or elder" (ibid), which reinforced the rejection for central authority and instead emphasized the value of "elder leadership at the clan level" (ibid).

15 Last name changed

leaf stalks) and *enjulu*¹⁶ serves the function of smashing Matooke, others are used as tray tables or smaller baskets with a lid for storage, especially for rice and ground-nuts. Pots might be used for cooking, for water or local beer storage and cooling as well as to give away to special guests (Kayamba and Kwesiga, 2016; 2017). The hat-maker group members use hats and brooms they make, or flowers for decorative purposes.

Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2001; 2014), Amanda Tumusiime (2012), and Dorah Kasozi (2019) all demonstrate how women in Uganda, as individuals or in groups, use art to (re-)negotiate their role(s) in contemporary society. In the situation of inquiry, and in one independently organized wickerwork group in particular, women use the agency of artistic handicraft production to enhance their visibility in public, to “attract other members in the community”, so they are “compelled to also join our group and also learn” (group conversation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 268–270). Here, the boundary object of artistic handicraft products, too, is understood to bear the potential to be an agent in leaving poverty behind. However, unlike in other social worlds, overcoming poverty is not an individual but a communal task. As such, sharing knowledge, sharing time, and sharing, materials, and by doing so, establishing coherence and conviviality become important strategies to reduce poverty.

While poverty reduction is important, it does not dominate the conceptualization of the boundary object in this minoritized social world. In the situation of inquiry, they could also be considered implicated actors rather than a social world (Clarke et al., 2018). For reasons presented in chapter 4.4.1, I consider them as a marginalized or minoritized social world. Clarke, Friese, and Washburn (2018) conceptualize implicated actors as actors who are not fully agentic in the situation, who are spoken for rather than spoken to (2015), or who are visible only discursively or without being able to speak (see also Spivak, 1988). SitA renders implicated actors visible which is an important step for social justice-oriented inquiry. However, if the agency of implicated actors and their positions are not actively sought, it also risks reproducing epistemic violence in the research situation (Brunner, 2020).

Furthermore, especially in the publics of postcolonial reality, implicated actors may actually *be* agentic in a different dimension in the situation (Ekeh, 1975, 1992, 2012). In other words, independent artistic handicraft groups may be invisibilized by dominant social worlds and discourses, yet they remain agentic in the situation. Their members can be respected cultural leaders who are conceptualized as ‘authentic’ leaders in their communities, their products appreciated for their aesthetics and practical purposes, and their knowledge as invaluable for the cultural identity of a

16 Apparently, cane fiber used to grow around Mbale region but is nowadays mostly imported from Baganda region. According to the women, most swamps there have been destroyed due to land scarcity while others who grew them locally had sold their land.

people – and remain entirely unaware to other social worlds. While their positions may not be received in the major (internationalized) discourses, they do build alliances with individual actors who promote their interests, at least to some extent, and who recognize their knowledges as indispensable for the development of local epistemologies and praxis. Therefore, the empirical findings make a strong case for their conceptualization as minoritized social world rather than as implicated actors without agency. Alongside conceptualizing the boundary object as practical for personal use, I was able to reconstruct two additional major understandings, which I turn to next:

Artistic handicraft products and their agency in building conviviality

Among independent handicraft groups, the agency of artistic handicraft products is used to build social networks. Those networks serve several functions: they can be social security or financial support networks or they can be networks of empowerment, networks of exchange, and networks of hope. During my conversation with the hat-maker group (Image 5.8), Isaiah told me the story of a man from a nearby village called Nalugugu he referred to as the *munjankole man*, who had conned members of group and the larger Ishibira community. According to Isaiah, the man had appeared in 2017 and collected 200,000UGX per person. “He promised to take members to Kampala”, Isaiah tells me,

With the assurance that their livelihoods would improve. Unfortunately, he disappeared with people’s money. [...] So, I sat them down and taught them the handicrafts. Then they started realizing some small revenue hence meeting their small needs like buying salt and sugar. (Isaiah Wandera¹⁷, group conversation with hat-maker collective from Ishibira, 27/02/2020: 125–130).

Isaiah had learned weaving techniques from his mother’s sister as a child. She mainly made hats and mats. Isaiah first observed her work and eventually began to copy her techniques. As a grown man, he continued his aunt’s work, initially with his wife only.

However, after the consequential experience with the *munjankole man*, he saw the need to teach others as well and initiated the group with which I was able to meet¹⁸. The foundation of the group was, according to Isaiah, a response to an existential threat, and is considered a joint step towards financial independence. For Isaiah, this is related to the wellbeing of community members, who experience self-potency

17 Last name changed

18 I usually met a few group members and was never sure how much larger the groups actually are. Sometimes the group members themselves did not know, either. Here, some group members were attending a funeral nearby, some of the attendants joined our discussion after, others left early.

in the group. During the conversation, Isaiah also talks about the financial security network the group has established through the joint work.

The group started saving money together for the joint purchase of raw material. It occurred that they were not able to accept an offer because they did not have sufficient funds to make a series of samples that customers sometimes request prior to be willing to make a deposit. However, when provided the opportunity to buy material to make a sample for a potential customer who intended to order 400 hats for a coffee plantation, the group decided to dedicate the savings to spend it on malaria medication for community members, especially children:

In addition [...], at that time when this client came, much as we had some little saving in our group, we used it on treating malaria in our children since it was a rainy season and there was a malaria outbreak in our community. So – there is no way we could use that money to buy the materials to make him hats. (Isaiah Wandera, group conversation with hat-maker collective from Ishibira, 27/02/2020: 102–105)

Here, artistic handicraft products can be interpreted as a means to build community and a social security network. Through the joint activities of weaving hats, members of the hat-maker group also weave a social network, and joint savings, although put aside for joint investments, can also be used to the benefit of individuals in the group. Even more so, the quote indicates that in times of need helping group members is considered more important than expanding the work of the collective. The group meets up to three times a week but at least once and always on Mondays. At times, there is no material, and “if there is no material, we just meet as a group and discuss as a group” (ibid: 180–181).

The women's wickerwork group (Image 5.9) was established by a woman who has now passed away. Her name was not mentioned in the conversations. She trained several of the group members still active in the group, and made sure that they, too, share the acquired skills with other women. While some did learn handicraft techniques in elementary or primary school, most women were taught either by group members or other individuals. Mary Kato¹⁹ connects being taught with social relations and an act of love or friendship: “I learned these things from Buganda. I had moved from this village to Buganda region where I met some women who loved me so much and encouraged me to learn these things” (Mary Kato, group conversation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 77–79). Because the other women had ‘loved her so much’, they wanted Mary to learn the skills. Caring about another person was a prerequisite for wanting to teach her handicraft skills. Caring and teaching are thus closely connected. Here, the associated meanings of the boundary object are primarily relational: becoming an artisan is the result of

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someone else caring about them and sharing knowledge, which then becomes joint knowledge. Mary then started teaching others as well. She says that if she trains others, they can “earn something – like – money. [And] money can help them to meet other needs” (ibid: 110–111). Only together can they move ahead. They work together twice a week and under the tree of a churchyard. Joint learning and sharing knowledge are considered pivotal:

Each of us has unique skills and talents in the way we do the work. What one knows is different from what the other knows, thus bringing us to work together to complement each other. Another thing is one member may be aware of the sources of materials yet others don't know, thus coming together [means] to be able to share the sources, get experience. (Margaret Katushabe²⁰, group conversation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 261–264)

Image 5.8: Members of the women's wickerwork group from Supa working underneath a large tree on a churchyard close to the nearby road to Pallisa, so others can see and join.



© Anna-Lisa Klages, 28/02/2020

In addition, by working in public they reach out and motivate other women to join the group:

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It [working in public] is also to attract other members in the community to join us. So, once we are in a group like this, if somebody passes by and sees us, if they are interested, they are compelled to also join our group and also learn. (ibid: 268–270)

Working together and sharing knowledge establishes trust among the group members. Rather than feeling threatened that others might copy their ideas, they consider it essential to share knowledge about where to get material, how to apply and improve techniques. One important aim for the women of the wickerwork group is to improve their quality of life by earning additional money. From their perspective, the boundary object brings them together as poverty is something that can only be overcome together. Moreover, while it could be argued, then, that the boundary object could be considered more as a ‘tool’ (see also chapter 5.2.1), here the emphasis is on how members of this group (and potentially beyond) connect through and with the boundary object in their particular situatedness:

We all need to work together to come out of poverty because – [if] you will find your fellow woman badly off, she joins us when she sees us. We fight to come out of poverty. [...] Thus, we are not selfish with our knowledge but instead we choose to share it with other people. (Sarah Akumu²¹, group conversation with women from wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 272–276)

Artistic Handicraft Objects as ‘Generational Heritage Spirit’

To reach the working site of the *Imbalu* initiation ceremony costume designers, potential customers, meaning parents of adolescent boys who will participate in the bi-annual rite of passage into adulthood, at times must travel great distances. Bubyango, the village where the group meets, works, and where most designers and artisans live, is located on the northwestern slopes of Mount Elgon, just below 2.000 above sea level.

After our arrival, we learnt that we were not the only ones who move to Bubyangu this way:

They [customers] know that this is the center in Bugisu region and when one sees another putting on [the uniform], they ask where they got it from and they are directed to this place, so, they move while inquiring until they reach here. Also, this place is well known in the whole of Bugisu region for making these crafts, so they are easily directed to reach us. (Musa Atim²², Imbalu knife blacksmith, group conversation with members of the Imbalu Initiation ceremony costume designers from Bubyangu, 27/02/2020: 460–464).

21 Name changed

22 Name changed

The work of the *Imbalu* initiation ceremony costume designers is deeply embedded in the customs and rituals around the rite of passage from boyhood into adulthood among the Gisu or Bagisu people in Eastern Uganda. Therefore, becoming a costume designer not only demands artistic skills and creativity, but ritual knowledge and the possession of a “generational heritage spirit” because the knowledge “is living from generation to generation” (Abdul Malukhu²³, group elder, group conversation with members of the *Imbalu* initiation ceremony costume designers from Bubyangu, 27/02/2020: 526–528).

Among the initiation ceremony costume designers, it is imperative to teach all children who are considered male. The costumes (also referred to as uniforms) themselves are an important actant in the rite of passage, as they make “the boy look so handsome! When he is dancing (...) The candidate should look different with decorations to attract” (Hamza Okot, *ibid.*: 37–38). However, the uniform does not have aesthetic purposes only, but is to be considered as one of many features of the *Imbalu* ritual, in which the blessing of the ancestors for the rite of passage is of central meaning (see also chapter 7.3). Ancestors are not only considered present, but it is important that they be in favor of the initiation. Only then will they provide support for the candidate. In preparation of the ritual, community members assemble bamboo, prepare the house, sacrifice a goat, brew local beer, and prepare meals for the festivities. The uniforms (see also Image 5.2) are a composition of contemporary and historical elements and designs, materials, and assets (I will elaborate on the various design components and the different roles the costume has in chapter 7.3). The process of making a uniform could take two days, provided the designers are “extremely free” (*ibid.*: 129–130). A uniform is not made by one person but by several designers, with “each one [working] on a unit piece of the uniform” (*ibid.*: 132). In the conversation, I learn that the same group also makes the drums used in the festivities and the knives needed for the circumcision, which is an essential moment during the ritual.

Among members of the group are a number of community elders. This includes local politicians such as the information officer, and the defense secretary LC1²⁴. The group itself is chaired and co-chaired by three cultural leaders, one of whom also holds the role of treasurer of the group. The members of the *Imbalu* Initiation uniform designer group are highly respected members of their community. For them, making the uniforms is at times a burden, as it comes with a number of challenges, but it also fills them with pride to be the people responsible for the successful rite

23 Name changed

24 LC stands for Local Council. LCs are supposed to be elected governments at district level in Uganda, ranging from LCI (at village level) to LCV (at district level). Levels in-between include LCII: parish level, usually composed of five to ten villages; LCIII: sub-county level, which includes a certain number of parishes; LCIV: county level. The LCIV is elected by the LCIIIs. All LCs have executive committees headed by a chairperson.

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.

Chapter 6: The NACCAU

Art as Crafts, Crafts as Art, and All as Cultural Heritage?

6.1 Introduction. The Cultural Turn in International Development Revisited

NACCAU and the Question of Sustainable Development

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter 5, in the art-academics sub-world, artistic handicraft products are sometimes constituted as indigenous art forms and hence considered equivalent to western(ized) concepts of art, while at other times they are regarded as belonging to a separate crafts category, namely as artistic or cultural handicrafts. Linking material cultural heritage with contemporary artistic practices in general is a contested topic in Uganda (Kasozi, 2019; Kyeyune, 2003; Siegenthaler, 2019). The debate becomes particularly heated when spiritual or economic interests are at play. In the following chapter, I continue to dwell on the debate around what makes art, what makes craft, how this everlasting debate is addressed, and some of its parameters co-constituted by civil society actors in post-independence Uganda. I do so by focusing on the NACCAU as a case study. This allows me to demonstrate the political, social, and economic interests involved in artistic expression in an association that is neither a western-style (non-governmental) organization nor can be clearly differentiated from one. An association that understands itself as non-governmental yet remains affiliated to the government, and an association that that seeks to (economically) empower and, at times, struggles with its own survival in ideological and in economic terms. This, with Clarke et al. (2018), process of segmentation allows to get a close-up shot into the situation that helps understand how the elements and dynamics at play shape the situatedness of artistic handicraft products and their production in contemporary Uganda.

One of the strategies the NACCAU applies is to seek alliances in governmental, non-governmental, and private business structures. Moreover, while this could be considered a liberation process from dependencies on (foreign) customers and their assumptions about Ugandan/ African aesthetics, it creates new dependencies in terms of content creation and limits the possibilities of self-positioning as an independent artistic actor with political agency.

Furthermore, the association also regards itself as an important archive of traditional and indigenous knowledge and, concomitantly, as an important actor in Uganda's civic engagement with cultural identity construction. In addition, while innovation is often demanded, at times it appears that UNESCO discourses on cultural heritage interfere with conceptualizations of cultural expression as a vital and living aspect of everyday life and promote static notions of cultural preservation instead. Finally, yet importantly, the analysis of the NACCAU's work brings forward the important and yet challenging question of ownership of artistic handicraft objects which is oftentimes negotiated without the presence of those who produced them.

The following chapter is organized as follows: First, I introduce the NACCAU as an association and the two artists-activists who appeared as central figures and intellectuals in and around it, Nuwa Nyanzi on an operational level and Bruno Sserunkuuma on a conceptual advocacy level. I then continue to situate the NACCAU in the broader discourses of economic struggle and artistic engagement in civil society, thereby particularly highlighting interlinkages and -dependencies with development actors, the UNESCO-bodies, and their respective agendas. In concluding, I discuss how dominant strands in the discourses around development, civil society, and art demand that associations such as the NACCAU constantly re-position themselves, making the association what I call an actor in-between – as co-opted to consent by development and heritage agendas that frame and limit its agency on the one hand and as an organizational actor seeking to establish locally situated answers to questions of creative, artistic production and meaning making as well as to social cohesion, conviviality, and development on the other hand.

6.2 The NACCAU Being and Becoming

My first visit at the NACCAU crafts village occurred in November 2017. At the time, I worked for a socio-cultural organization based in Israel, and I had travelled to Kampala to attend an intimate co-hosted conference titled *the Future of Contemporary African Art in a Globalized Art World* at Makerere University. One of the speakers at the conference was Nuwa Nyanzi, a practicing artist and, among other things, the vice chairperson of the NACCAU. In his presentation, titled *Transforming Visual Art Practice in Line with Global Market Trends*, he argued that for Ugandan (visual) artists to succeed, they needed to turn to their cultural and natural heritage, which could lead to towards them “introducing uniquely fresh dishes to the global visual arts menu” (personal notes from 16/11/2017). Currently, he further claimed, Ugandan visual artists merely consume foreign trends and mostly copy and adapt them. In order to be able to contribute to the emerging global community, however, they need to use their

own cultural resources adequately. The lack thereof, Nnyanzi concluded, results in the currently negligible appreciation of art among the general Ugandan population.

Of Entrepreneurs and Intellectuals

A few days after the conference, I found myself in Nuwa's art studio at the NACCAU crafts village. He had invited me there together with colleagues from abroad. Standing in the stall that serves as a studio and office as well as art gallery and crafts-shop (he also resells artefacts), he now explained about his contribution in making Ugandan art renown throughout the world, namely by having designed the cover of the 1999 World Health Report and by having contributed to the UNICEF greeting cards series with a nativity scene he painted in 1978. This appears to be of great importance to him, because I will hear him repeat the story during other conversations we will have throughout the field stays of this research (e.g., roundtable discussion on Art in Intl. Development from 27/02/2019; interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi from 26/01/2020). At the time, I did not know that this was but the first of many conversations I would have with Nuwa. His vision has remained unchanged since then. Nuwa is convinced that Uganda, and Ugandan visual artists in particular, have a lot to contribute to the international arts and crafts industry. However, unfortunately, many individuals involved do not innovate but copy instead. What he and some scholars I spoke to consider a lack of innovation is understood as *not being selfish and sharing knowledge with others* by members of some of the handicraft groups I met in Eastern Uganda. It is a trait of which members of the wickerwork group in Supa were particularly proud of.

The differences in the quality of the products are another aspect with which Nuwa is concerned. Customers may want to order *in bulk*, meaning in large quantities. In addition, it is this bulk production with standardized quality norms that he considers essential for the future of handicraft artists he mainly refers to as *producers*. According to Nuwa, those “master crafts-producers” (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi 26/01/2020: 408) need further training “to improve on the design, layout – [on] design production – design development and production” (ibid: 408–410). This contradiction directly questions the framing of artisans as *masters*. However, it is a position taken by many in the situation – the UNESCO, for example – and it is also common among several professional artists engaged with socially engaged art projects that aim to improve the lived realities of handicraft artisans. While mostly they *do* believe that handicraft artists are masters and important contributors to the preservation of local culture, they are also believed not to conform to international *minimum* quality standards and not to know how to transform their technical man-

ufacturing skills into innovative designs that mark one of the transitions between art and craft¹.

In addition to the need for handicraft artists to improve on the innovativeness and quality of their designs, Nuwa frequently addresses the role of the Ugandan government in general and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in particular. He believes that if governmental policies were more in favor of supporting the creative industries, the NACCAU and other associations like it could contribute immensely to the local economy:

Most of the [art-related] activities taking place in Uganda [...] – I’m talking about the visual arts, eh – are not a result of government policy. Not even government support. Because we don’t get it. If anything, government benefits from our work, efforts and ideas. But there is no direct policy in particular [...]. The government of Uganda has a culture policy – which is not necessarily – is not a qualitative enough [sic] policy. It’s a document, which is trying, which tried to fit in [into] what was already going on. (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi, 26/01/2020: 100–107)

His critique of the government is one of the re-occurring themes during this interview and other conversations we have. In the quotation above, his main concern is the lack of a well thought through cultural policy that could support the creative industries by providing it with ideas, directions and if not financial, then at least legal and structural support. As he continues, he tells me about the financial burden of the NACCAU needing to pay rent to the Ugandan National Culture Center (UNCC):

So, we’ve been managing this place and at that time [in 2003] we were paying 4 million [UGX] every three months to the Ugandan National Culture Center² as ground rent. And then later on they increased it to 9 million, after they increased it to 25 to 27 million; now we pay 40 million. Every three months. The contradiction is: elsewhere the government would pay [laughs] people who were doing this kind

1 In her work, Acaye Kerunen addresses this question as well. Her participation as one of the two exhibiting artists at the inaugural Ugandan National Pavilion titled *Radiance – They Dream in Time*, curated by Shaheen Merali at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022) marks an important discursive moment for the negotiations of meanings of art and craft in Uganda, in which “Kerunen’s understanding, across the wide range of vernacular diagrams, sophisticated patterns and constellations, draws on regions, tribal spaces and neighbourhoods [sic]. [...] Shapes of decoloniality break into the space of representation where the normativity of urban life and the self in the ever-expanding modernity of westernized [sic] forms have entered as trashed tourist arts” (Merali et al., 2022: 15).

2 The UNCC is a Ugandan statutory body. It was established in 1959 by the Uganda National Cultural Centre Act. Today it operates as a “semi-autonomous body” under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (UNCC, 2022).

of job to operate or to be subsidized. Here, they take each and every coin from us. And they don't plow it back. (ibid: 152–161)

In his logic, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in particular, should be supportive of the work of the NACCAU and its members. Throughout my field stays, I heard many people to whom I spoke openly criticize the current government for neither providing the structural prerequisites for the cultural sector to develop, nor for supporting any activities, yet being the first to benefit from the achievements. Although the government is unanimously perceived not to 'do its job', most solutions proposed by the actors are frequently state-centered. They include demands for government finally to take up its responsibilities and seek ways to advocate actively for their interests, e.g., by participating in steering committees or advisory committees to governmental projects while believing that large sums of the money will disappear between offices, or by partaking in working on the development of an updated National Cultural Policy (NCP) which is simultaneously criticized as not being implemented (e.g., roundtable discussions 02/2019).

Nuwa is very active and involved with several committees, always promoting the interests of the NACCAU, as he describes it. He is a member of a local Rotary Club, on the steering committee for the *Souvenir and Handicrafts Development Project*, and an independent art consultant. Nuwa knows how to position his vision of an artistically oriented society both in academic and business circles as well as in newspaper interviews or online podcasts (WhatsApp messages with Nuwa Nyanzi, 05/2020 – 03/2023). With Clarke et al. (2018: 72), he could thus be understood as an entrepreneur, whom she defines to be a “participant[s] [of a Social World, who] cluster[s] around the core of the world and mobilize[s] those around them. [...] These individuals or small social world elites typically remain at the core over time”, and hence hold powerful positions within social worlds or organizations.

Empirically, Nuwa Nyanzi can further be referred to as an organic intellectual. Organic intellectuals are *organically created* within any social group, and come “into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, [a social group] create[s] together with itself” (Hoare and Nowell-Smith, 2007: 3). A social group creates “one or more strata of intellectuals, which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (ibid). Organic intellectuals, therefore, function as organizers of the social hegemony of a group.

Just like entrepreneurs in the sense of Clarke et al. (2018), they are at the center of an organization, a group, or a more loosely affiliated cluster, such as a social world. Because of their position, they are powerful in terms of content creation and production within the group but also for its positionality in the discourse(s). They are organizers of all the functions intrinsic to the organic development of an integral civil and political society. In other words, organic intellectuals can be understood as

intermediaries. In addition, while they have a major role in influencing the social and political developments in a social (and artistic) organization, they also have the agency to subjectify the members of their social group.

In the situation of inquiry, Bruno Sserunkuuma, too, can be considered as an intellectual. He promotes the work of the NACCAU and brings its members and individuals such as Nnyanzi into the art academia sub-world (who does not fail to emphasize that he is a God-taught artist, not a formally trained one). In doing so, he also becomes an advocate of the association's work and supports it by visibilizing it in the wider art world. He shows solidarity with handicraft artists and artisans and their work (which he also appreciates for its aesthetics and cultural value).

Bruno and Nuwa promote the work and importance of the NACCAU internally as well as externally, although they do so in different ways. While Nuwa dedicates his daily business to the promotion of his work and socially artistic vision, he synchronizes it with his vision for the NACCAU and hence is very visible in the daily operations in and around the association. Bruno mostly has his entrances on special occasions, in strategic contemplations, and acts as an ambassador to the ideas the NACCAU stands for. Therefore, it should not be surprising that my first encounters with the NACCAU were also facilitated by Bruno and by Nuwa. Because of their importance, impact, and prominence in the twilight zone of artistically oriented engagement with civil society, their positions will be considered throughout this chapter. Moreover, since they both have been engaged with the NACCAU from its re-foundation in 2003, the genesis of the NACCAU, its achievements, challenges, and current aspirations presented here are to a large extent reconstructed through their narrations. Although I spoke to other people in and around the association as well, Bruno and Nuwa opened up and readily provided their answers to all questions and offered to share their experiences and memories. For this research, they were like an open oral archive for me. For both not only readily and voluntarily shared their knowledge but also their networks. This proved to be very important, as written materials and documents about the association are indeed sparse.

Being the NACCAU

I wonder whether the Ugandan art world responded similarly to its participation in the *Seven Stories about Modern African Art* Exhibition in London in 1995 like it did when it was announced that Uganda would stage its inaugural pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, which Gloria Kiconco described as needing “a while to sink in: Uganda had secured a pavilion at the [59th Venice] biennale” (Kiconco, 2022: n.p). In 1995, Ugandan art ‘returned’ to the international art scene during the *Seven Stories about Modern African Art* after years of dictatorship that had driven many Ugandan artists into exile (Kyeyune, 2003; Littlefield Kasfir, 1999). While it must be added that until the early 1990s “anglophone countries [were] severely underrepresented relative to their

artistic importance” (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 136) in international exhibitions on contemporary African art, it would take another twenty years until Uganda had established its own art biennales and became more visible in the international art world. Even during the 2018 Kampala Art Biennale (KAB), curator Simon Njami opted for a studio format in which apprentices (mostly Ugandan artists) would work alongside masters (exclusively foreign artists) to learn and improve their work. While Njami himself interprets the studio format as a return to traditional African customs of transferring knowledge orally and in form of embodied experiences to the next generation – from masters to apprentices, others read it as a neo-colonial practice, in which Ugandans are yet again taken by the metaphorical hand and guided onto the path towards (artistic) development (for an in-depth discussion, see Klages, 2022).

Back in the early 1990s, parallel to the preparations for the *Seven Stories* exhibition in London, Kampala prepared for the 7th Pan-African Congress, which took place April 3–8, 1994. The organizers of the congress decided to invite visual artists and artistic handicraft artisans to display and offer their products for sale. According to Nuwa, this was to be part of the entertainment program – “that’s what they always do” (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi, 26/01/2020: 122). Eventually Nuwa became part of the group of artists and artisans who exhibited during the 7th Pan-African Congress and then joined the organization responsible for the exhibit, the Uganda National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association (UNACCA) in 1994. Nuwa describes this period as one of a malfunctioning organization, which led towards the restructuring and eventually the foundation of a new organization in 2003 – the NACCAU:

Then, due to management and misunderstandings there were very serious issues. [...] The registered members got together and had to find a solution, that’s how the association was renamed and founded based on the agreements towards what was going on. And it became the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda that is when honorable Mrs. Mpanga was appointed – eh – elected chairperson, and I was elected vice-chairperson. And then we have another executive of another seven members and Bruno [Sserunkuuma] happens to be one of them. (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi 26/01/2020: 147–152).

The chairperson, Joyce Rose Mpanga, is an educator and a politician. In her political career, she became the first Minister for Women in Development in 1988, and has been a firm promoter for women’s rights throughout her political and educational career (Tripp, 2000). The NACCAU, to her, is first and foremost about supporting women, which becomes apparent in her following quote from the Ugandan newspaper the Monitor:

Our aim is to encourage women to use their traditional crafts skills to create articles that can be used in a home in an artistic form. We carry out trainings at

our centres across the country to improve craftsmanship, perfection, patterns, the choice of pleasant colours that people want. (Musinguzi, 2019– updated 2021: n.p.)

In this quote, Mpanga reproduces common notions of fusing material culture with women's empowerment and the economic potential of craftsmanship. The outward orientation towards (imagined) customer taste is similar to that of, e.g., Bruno Sserunkuuma, who also suggests that local products must be directed by the taste of international consumers of those products:

Because if you are producing here, for example most of the basketry here is colorful and you are targeting maybe a market in New Zealand, and you plan for them; and this season they're interested in natural products, things which don't have color. So, instead of putting color, then you make them natural, without color. Or you may find the season in that area is green or blue, so instead of making colorful products then you make blue products. (Interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma, socially engaged artist and lecturer 23/08/2018: 163–168)

At the same time, Sserunkuuma is also among the major critics of the concepts of mass-production and standardization, for he finds that it is in difference, variety, imperfection, and non-normativity that artistic handicraft products become art and cease to be a mass-produced item without an emotional and personal touch.

While both Sserunkuuma and Nyanzi, despite some differences in their visions, are very much involved with promoting the idea that artistic and creative work can contribute immensely to the economic development of the country, the association's current secretary-general, Reste Kaddu Lwanga, finds that being a member (and co-founder) of the NACCAU is first and foremost a political act against governmental policy making and in favor of mutual empowerment among artists-peers. When I asked her about her motivations to become involved with the NACCAU, she told me that at the time she felt that artists (she was an active dancer at the time) “had to make a statement” (field notes from 19/02/2020) against a government that was not supporting the cultural sector and the arts as it should. For her, it was apparent that this could be done better in a group of like-minded artists and activists rather than alone. In addition to the political activities she associates with being involved with the NACCAU, being a member provides her with a sense of self-efficacy. Rather than being on the street and on her own, at the NACCAU she receives support even when times are hard (ibid).

When asked why she continues to remain involved in spite of hardships, she offers the following response: “At least here I have my shop. Here, we help each other. The painters and I, we empower each other” (field notes from 19/02/2020). For Lwanga, the shop means independence. So many people sell on the streets, she

tells me, and many of them do not know where they work or what their working hours will be. Her stall and the regular opening hours of the crafts village provide her with a structure as well as a feeling of ownership over her work. In addition, her statement “here we help each other” demonstrates a sense of belonging and empowerment, which she emphasizes upon by stating that she and the artists she works with empower each other. Unlike the dominant strands of economic empowerment, Lwanga believes empowerment means being appreciative of one another, of one’s talents, skills, and persistence. Here, empowerment is about social and structural support. Being the NACCAU, then, means political advocacy in favor of artists, artisans, and their work, and raising awareness of its meanings for social cohesion and cultural practices.

Lwanga long ceased to be an active dancer at the National Theater next door. Instead, she collaborates with young visual artists from within and around Kampala, exhibits, and sells their paintings in addition to colorful hand-dyed and waxed fabrics and some beaded necklaces. Her business at the NACCAU is slow, I will learn, because “most customers don’t look for what I have in my shop” (*ibid.*). People who look to purchase paintings and visual arts in general strive for their luck in contemporary art galleries such as AfriArt Gallery (AAG). Unknown painters however – formally trained or self-taught – because of lack of opportunities, oftentimes try to sell their artworks directly on the streets:

There was a big difference between craft and fine art and it would be rare to find an artist selling his work on the street as is happening now. Because when you are driving, someone is showing you a painting and normally some of them are good, but they are cheaper. The pieces you get from the street are not the process you get from a gallery. Again, that one raises a question, is that one an art or is it a souvenir? (Bruno Sserunkuuma, socially engaged artist and lecturer, round table discussion ‘Art in Intl. Development’, 27/02/2019: 164–168)

It is noteworthy for this statement to come from Bruno, who promotes the idea that crafts are to be considered equal to other forms of contemporary art practices because they are linked to local culture and therefore an important actant in society. He also refers to handicraft artists and artisans as “custodians of the traditional knowledge” (Interview with Bruno Sserunkuuma from 27/01/2020: 36). He is particularly engaged with empowering women and frequently brings their handicraft products to his office at Makerere University to offer them for sale to international visitors.

His own art, however, is nowhere to be found at the crafts village. The boundary between arts and crafts and the economic and cultural value of products, then, may also be linked with the situatedness of the location of the trade. Being the NACCAU therefore also means to work with the fact that situating an object into a crafts village more often means to allow for it to be regarded as a souvenir.

Image 6.1: Paintings for sale at Lwanga's Shop.



©Anna-Lisa Klages, 26/02/2020

Back at Lwanga's shop, I notice another factor, which, with Hume (2013), positions the products presented here in the souvenir-realm: the content of the paintings. Image 6.1 shows some of the paintings for sale at Lwanga's shop. While they vary in size, color, and style, five out of eight paintings are images (and imaginations) of rural African life. The colors and the scenes display a story of calmness, peace, and harmony – much how a foreigner might envision life in Africa as the simple and self-fulfilling peasant life of traditionally-dressed people in-synch with flora and fauna, away from technology, digitalization, and anything that might provoke the idea that this may actually be a scenery in the 21st, not the 19th, century. The only painting that breaks with this storyline is the scene of an urban rush hour in Kampala. At the time I was in her shop, there was one other urban scene and one other large portrait of a young man similar to the portrait of the laughing woman at the bottom of Image 6.1. All other paintings for sale had safari-game animals (lions, giraffes, elephants, gorillas, antelopes, zebras, or buffaloes), or traditionalized rural agricultural life as their theme. As the designs, scenery, colors, and aesthetic language address the taste of foreign visitors, one might indeed wonder who authors the paintings – the painter or the customer the painter has in mind while painting. In a group discussion with three artists and art-historians, this question unfolds in the following way:

JN: *In fact, let me ask you what do you mean by 'power' – within this context now?*

ALK: *[...] So, I'm looking at jewelry. I'm looking at jewelry made from paper-beads. And I'm looking at an organization – in this case it's a start-up or a social business or a non-profit – and what they do is – they sell – jewelry made from paper beads. Made, produced in Uganda and they sell it [abroad]. The designs, however, come from [abroad].*

JN: *Why?*

ALK: *Because they*

KMK: *The power struggles that was*

ALK: *and that is the power construct that I'm talking about. So, you are – Selling something as a 'Ugandan artefact' or jewelry, but as a matter of fact the design*

KMK: *Does not belong to you*

JN: *does not belong to the people*

KMK: *No. It is like – Madam Justine*

JN.: *Then it is not Ugandan.* (Group interview with Kizito Maria Kasule (KMK), Justine Nabaggala (JN) and Joan Kekimuri 23/08/2018: 318–332)

Leading up to this part of the discussion, Kizito shares his experience about working with a woman from a foreign country. She had volunteered in Uganda and, jointly with two fellow volunteers, established a non-profit organization that aims to improve the lives of *marginalized* women (e.g. single mothers or women living in poverty) by teaching them to make jewelry from rolled paper beads (see also Kasozi, 2019). He had spoken about how the decolonization of society is hindered by colonized minds that do not understand crafts to be indigenous art forms and how projects, such as the one established by the three volunteers, re-colonizes indigenous art forms. Firstly, by altering them to the fashion needs of people living in far-away places and secondly, by re-emphasizing that the commercial value abroad is more relevant than the aesthetic, social, and cultural values of the artist who makes them. This leads the discussion towards constructions and deconstructions of power emphasized through artistic work and the excerpt above. Here, Justine decisively positions artistic products that were designed, hence intellectually created, abroad as *not Ugandan* because if the design is not endogenous, it cannot belong to the people.

The NACCAU is not financed by a foreign organization or (foreign) social-business, its member and affiliated handicraft artists thus do not create artefacts for a single foreign market like in the example provided above. And yet, the dynamic relationship between customer and creator or at least between customer and seller co-constitute the meaning of the artefact that facilitates the encounter of the two (Hume, 2013). This brief moment of engagement shapes the narrations of all actors and actants involved. It leaves the customer with his or her piece of Ugandan culture as much as it tells the seller and/or creator about how the customer wants to see, feel, and aesthetically relate to Uganda and how much they are willing to pay for this feeling (see also chapter 5.2.2). Being the NACCAU thus means to meander constantly on the fringes between art and craft, between cultural heritage and souvenir, between commercialization and political advocacy, and between liberation and (new) dependencies.

Finding (new) Allies

As I have touched upon before, the NACCAU and its activities officially fall under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. In its operational structure, the association is part of the Uganda National Culture Centre (UNCC), whose two major sites are the National Gallery called Nommo Gallery, and the National Theatre, on the premises of which the NACCAU members built their crafts village. It was through the then-chairperson of the UNCC board of trustees General Elly Tumwine (who also held a B.A. degree in Fine Arts from Makerere University) that the temporary event of bringing artists and artisans together as part of the entertainment program during the 7th Pan-African Congress was considered further and resulted in the provision of space for the establishment of a more permanent crafts village. Since then, the NACCAU pays rent to UNCC, which causes frustration for the vice-chairperson Nuwa Nnyanzi, for whom the UNCC is almost synonymous with the Ministry for Gender, Labour and Social Development. I already elaborated on some of the resentments Nuwa and others shared with me regarding governmental support from the respective ministry in charge. Because of the perceived relationship with a ministry that does not honor its responsibilities but remains indifferent at best and exploitative at worst, the association sought to establish alliances elsewhere. While I am writing these lines, a newly established alliance with the Ministry of Tourism and private tourism actors (mainly UTA) en lieu has already leads to a more successful collaboration in terms of activities and visibility. One such example is a crafts expo which was only a vision of Richard Kawere, in 2020 the CEO of UTA, when I interviewed him. The expo took place for the first time in April 2022, financially supported by the MasterCard Foundation and facilitated by the UTA.

Cerinah Kasirye, whose business name is Cerinah Trillion, introduces herself to me as a marketing expert (field notes from 30/01/2020). She is not an artist, she fur-

ther explains, but she knows how to tailor and in early 2020, when I met her to speak about her work with the NACCAU, she had just established her Start-Up Trillion-Looks. In January 2020, she had been working with the NACCAU for about a year part-time and with a focus on developing an online marketing strategy for the NACCAU. Kasirye is the first person who informs me about the cooperation with the UTA and a joint project that had been inaugurated just a couple of weeks earlier. She confirms the sentiments of frustration with regard to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and then tells me about the benefits of being a member of the UTA, despite the membership fees the NACCAU has to pay. Because of its membership, the NACCAU now has the opportunity to display and sell at the *Pearl of Africa Expo 2020*, an international tourism expo hosted by Uganda in 2020. In addition, the UTA, jointly with the NACCAU members from the board of trustees, submitted a project proposal and received a grant over US \$40,700 for a project called the *Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts*, funded by the GIZ and in collaboration with a Kenyan partner organization.

Richard Kawere, CEO of the UTA at the time, confirmed that the NACCAU was not receiving any directed support of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. In an interview, he told me:

Ordinarily, you will find that the crafts production, in terms of legislation and laws in Uganda, falls under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Works. They were not being helped that's why they wrote and requested to us if they could come and be part of our congregation. So, we accepted them about two years ago, and have been studying how to best support that sector. (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO UTA, 11/03/2020: 206–210)

He continues by telling me what exactly that means in terms of supporting associations such as the NACCAU:

They have mainly been under Gender. And the government, in terms of restructuring positions there – but the Gender Ministry or the Gender Institutions do not have any proactive activity directly towards that. They are focusing more on exportation of labor, safety, health and safety standards. They are actually not focusing on how they can make use – or they can empower these people [meaning handicraft artists and artisans] through what they are doing. So, (...) that's why they left, and came to tourism. So, we had a discussion, went to the Ministry, and we admitted them to the tourism. So, they are here in the tourism industry association by choice. [...] Since Culture was not caring for them, they found where they can be cared for. (ibid: 212–221)

Here, the government world and two sub-worlds become relevant. I consider them as social worlds rather than as organizations because, as the quotation above indi-

cates, also private business actors such as the UTA can be part of the Government World in terms of advocating for policymaking. Kawere's elaborations summarize what many people told me: in its core activities and emphasis, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development focuses on labor export – thereby meaning negotiating bilateral agreements with third countries for easy access to working visas for Ugandan citizens and ensuring for their safety once abroad – since there have been many reports of migrant workers from Uganda having been exploited in their destination countries. A second major focus of the ministry, as the terminology used by Kawere powerfully demonstrates, is gender. Nuwa holds “so-called development partners” (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi 26/01/2020: 641 et seq.) in European countries responsible for this emphasis, since there are many development funds to receive when focusing on gender equity in general, and on women empowerment in particular.

By finding new allies, the NACCAU also needs to confine to its interests. Partnering with the UTA and actors of the tourism world here leads to consequences by which the commercial value and marketability of handicraft products are favored over their artistic, cultural, and social values. The new collaboration with UTA in the joint project *Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts* aims at the establishment of a digital sales platform, which is to link *producers* (as they are referred to in the project) with each other for knowledge and skills exchange and to create market access to promote their products.

However, prior to being able to work on reaching this goal, first a set of *minimum standards* for the quality of the products is to be developed. They are to be determined by a study that was carried out by Nuwa “and his team” (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO UTA, 11/03/2020: 244–245) at the time of the interview. Based on those results, the UTA and the NACCAU would then focus on the development of those standards that relate to the selection of products to be promoted. With the small budget of the project, Kawere says, not all products can be supported and selection will be made based on sales, input, and revenue:

We can select the most prioritized products in terms of – we are looking at value, ease of production, and value to the production. For example, how many of those products are being exported? How many are highly on demand? So, those are some of what are going to be the parameters for selection of the products to start with in developing the minimum standards. [...] But our target was to – maybe in about two to three years to hit a minimum of products which have the minimum standards. (ibid: 242–256)

When he speaks about the NACCAU and his members, I sense sincere concern for the wellbeing of the handicraft artists he calls producers. He is strongly opinionated about the government and understands the tourism sector to be socially oriented

because ultimately it is Ugandans who benefit from his work, he believes. His vision is to help handicraft artists to become so successful that they can afford to become tourists themselves and explore their own natural and cultural heritage. For Kawere, engagement with the creative industries in form of handicraft production is only one of many potential strategies, and he follows them from a business perspective. To him, handicraft products are a means from which – ideally – people can make a living. He is less concerned with the uniqueness of products or with the question of safeguarding material culture and knowledge about production. Hence, the selection of products to be promoted through the joint project with the NACCAU follows a logic of measurability, which allows for success to be quantified and conveyed into numeric parameters. Being the NACCAU thus also means obeying the rules of capitalist marketing strategies.

Authorship of Handicraft Products

Back at the crafts village, the question of the importance of author- and ownership is one that keeps me busy. For handicraft artists here, too, are mostly referred to as *producers*, not as artists. And none of the handicraft artists I spoke to introduced themselves to me as artists, either. Only in one independent group with which I met, the *Imbalu* initiation ceremony uniform designers, were the members disappointed for not being singled-out in receiving public acknowledgment for their work. Other groups sell their products together without the purchaser ever knowing about the person who made the artefact. There, the person who carries the objects to a market – frequently a member of the group – becomes the initial author. Moreover, the further away from its production site a product travels, the more it ceases to be the result of creative engagement with raw material facilitated by a pair of hands and a mind that had envisioned it before those very hands transformed this vision into a crafted object. By the time it reaches the NACCAU, it is one object among many, ideally purchased in bulk, and potentially by several *dealers* (see Image 6.2). In her analysis of wood carvings in Oaxaca, Mexico, Alanna Cant (2020) observes that the differentiation between art and craft is oftentimes dependent “on the ways that authorship is or is not recognized within a given context” (21). Although, according to Cant, scholars have long deconstructed the notion of the individual creative genius artists allegedly possess and instead highlighted that art is genuinely the product of a flow of knowledge, which in turn is the result of communal production, dissemination, and circulation of ideas, symbols, and aesthetic positions, the question of authorship in artistic handicraft production continues to be contested because it is both “highly variable and inherently political” (ibid: 21).

At the NACCAU, most members are intermediaries – or *dealers*. They buy the products from artisans and handicraft artists and re-sell them. While there are some people who are members of the NACCAU and practicing artists like Nuwa, it re-

mained odd to me that an association that calls itself National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda primarily appears to focus on distributing artefacts and art objects rather than providing members with space and structural support for their own production. For Nuwa, my irritation is no contradiction at all. In his opinion, the NACCAU members have expertise in marketing and quality management and mediate between the *producers* and the (foreign) customers. In their own, distinct way, they become “unofficial cultural ambassadors” (Kersel and Luke, 2015: 72) – a space usually occupied by archaeologists, conservators, museum practitioners, and the like.

In the realm of handicraft dissemination, however, it is their narration of the particularities, histories, and associated cultural significance of the products for sale that facilitates the emotional attachments between handicraft object and customer. This is, in its outward orientation, frequently a consequence of meta-discourses and “neo-imperialist agendas associated with international, national and state agencies, [which are] often the driving mechanisms behind what is preserved, what is excavated, and what is on display as representative of a particular locality, nation, or culture” (ibid: 72) – and of economic interests, I should add.

In its self-understanding, this knowledge equips the NACCAU (members) with the expertise needed to further train those *master crafts persons* to “sharpen their skills, make more professional and appreciate standards and uniformity” (roundtable discussion Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 103–104) as I will demonstrate in chapter 6.4. Being the NACCAU thus also means to make sense and find meaning in contradictions, e.g., to justify the need to train those who are already discursively constructed as *masters* or in offering trainings in craft-techniques, although the majority of the members are neither artists nor artisans themselves.

The NACCAU as Intermediate

According to the explanations of members to whom I spoke, the NACCAU further regards itself (and is regarded) as a cultural interpreter, an actor who connects local material culture and the people who produce it with the logics of the customers. It is through the work of the NACCAU that the latter learn about the value of the product purchased. In return, producers learn how to position their works in a heritage and development narrative. In the conversation with the women’s group from Supa, one member (whom I will call Sarah Akumu here) tells me that she wishes for other women to join the group as well, so all women together can “come out of poverty” (conversation with members from women’s wickerwork group from Supa 28/02/2020: 282). Furthermore, she adds, members “can also make some products for their own use in their homesteads” (ibid: 284). Here, she speaks about togetherness and about creating a sense of self-efficacy when creating objects that can be of

use at home. I then continue to ask her about the perceived learnings from the UNESCO training she participated in in 2018, executed by the NACCAU. Now, her tone shifts. While until now the major narrative had clustered around social networking and togetherness, suddenly I hear the following:

First was teamwork, to support each other. Secondly, we also learned that once we work hard in our crafts business, they are global. We want to produce in bulk so we are globally recognized as Uganda – and: to preserve our culture. (ibid: 292–294)

In her response to my question, Akumu first re-affirms the previous statement. During the weeklong training, working together, training others, and thus supporting one another were the elements that were emphasized. Here, the information confirms the importance of the previous statement and gives it additional authority because even during the official training sessions, working together was considered essential. However, rather than elaborating on this aspect, Akumu proceeds towards the “second” aspect – in which she talks about the need to “work hard” for the success of their businesses. Working hard here means to produce in large quantities and is equated with internationalizing, which leads towards receiving global recognition for their work and ultimately, Akumu says that they learned to preserve their culture, which here is understood as “restoring crafts that were always made by our forefathers” (ibid: 298).

This quotation also marks a shift in narration as it introduces the concept of *crafts business*. The wording is used after I specifically ask about the learnings from the training, and enriched with the addition that their aim is to be “globally recognized as Uganda”. Throughout the conversation, the term only re-appears in relation to the training. For Akumu and her colleagues, the training is linked to learning to understand their handicraft work as a business. Moreover, it results in a group of women from Supa now being preoccupied with their contribution towards the global recognition of Uganda’s culture.

In this example, the UNESCO training project implemented by the NACCAU members delivered a heritage industry and development logic of value making to handicraft artists. In this logic, handicraft artists are taught that their work by itself is of cultural significance and therefore needs global recognition as part of a post-independence nation-state. Furthermore, success here becomes the result of determination of individuals, which re-enforces capitalist conceptualizations in which the successes and failures of humans are by and large the result of their efforts, passion, and dedication. Here, this notion beautifully collides with the previous statements of needing to work together to come out of poverty, and not to be “selfish with [one’s] knowledge but instead [to choose] to share it with other people” (ibid: 286). The instructors of the training project were Nuwa Nyanzi and Bruno Sserunkuuma.

Image 6.2: Purchased Artistic Handicraft Objects Upon their Arrival at the Crafts Village.



©Anna-Lisa Klages, 26/02/2020

Place Matters

The NACCAU members, whether they are artists, artisans, dealers, or all the above, spend a lot of time at the crafts village. They pay an annual membership fee of 50.000 UGX and a quarter-annually rent for the stall they use of 700.000 UGX for a shop. In return, the association pays for the parking fees and a cup of coffee for tour operators whenever they bring tourists to the crafts village and rent includes electricity and basic maintenance of the NACCAU gardens in the center of the village. Some members have employed staff who receive 10.0000 UGX per day and, depending on their sales performance, a bonus at the end of the month. Because members commit to the values of the association, I learn from Cerinah Kasiry, staff members receive some standardized benefits for selling the products they offer. I do not know how many members employ people to work for them in their shops, but I was able to find out that most of them employ them as help, meaning that most NACCAU members spend a lot of time at the crafts village – and with each other. Even on slow days there is thus chatter and laughter to hear around the place; members share food and their stories as well as their sorrows. Many sell similar products and hence are also competitors. The similarity of the products can result in unfortunate dynamics. In one of my protocols, I wrote about a conversation I had with Cerinah about these dynam-

ics, after – to my initial surprise – having just found out that Sserunkuuma does not sell any of his artworks at the crafts village:

While my thoughts are still wandering, Cerinah and I talk about the absence of Bruno's pots in the village. 'One would have to ask Bruno about this choice to not sell here. But I think there is a good reason.', she says. 'What is the reason, you think?', I ask her, and she replies that objects being sold here are actually devalued due to the fact that they are being sold at the crafts village. Whoever has the opportunity to not sell here, will do so. Here, the major problem are the competitors, for there is always someone who is willing to sell for less. This actually devalues the products, for they are no longer appreciated for their artistic know how and aesthetics, but considered as cheap souvenir. (Ethnographic notes from 30/01/2020: 145–153, my translation)

To Cerinah, the crafts village appears to be something like a last resort – for to her, there are much better options to sell artistic handicraft products than here. She names Banana Boat, the social enterprise I introduced in the previous chapter, to support her hypothesis. Another example she offers to prove her point is the *kabaka's* palace. To her, the location shapes the object: an item purchased at the *kabaka's* palace is more valuable because it is associated with the *kabaka*, while Banana Boat shops are located in expensive areas of the Kampala. They are located in areas where many foreigners reside, do grocery shopping, or meet in western-style cafés and restaurants. In both environments, artistic handicraft products have authenticity and are singled-out in a positive sense; at the *kabaka's palace* they were allowed in, potentially hand-chosen or even received the blessing of the *kabaka* (see also chapter 5.2.7). At Banana Boat Shops, there are no competitors around, and the story Banana Boat founders and owners Suny Magyar and Ralph Schenk tell is that of items each “carefully chosen to inspire you” (Banana Boat, n.d.). In its descriptions, Banana Boat uses words and phrases that stimulate positive emotions, such as “exciting”, “carefully”, “skillfully”, “has fun”, and “[we] choose the best” (ibid). Each product tells a story about the people who made it, and although they remain in the collective unknown as women's groups from the Rwenzori Mountains or families from rural areas, they suggest that costumers bring about positive social change through the consumption of products. Unlike the NACCAU, Banana Boat is a business with two owners rather than a larger number of members with different visions and ideas for what the NACCAU should become.

The Savings Circle

As I previously stated, on average, the NACCAU members spend a large amount of time at the crafts village. For individuals such as Nyanzi, it is a place to promote

his own vision, for people such as Lwanga, a place of self-determination, for Kasirye it is a place for exploration, and for Sserunkuuma, a place to give back. For Sara Nabunya and Juliet Khabakuma, it is a place for joint savings, investments, and an opportunity towards more financial independence as well. Sara and Juliet are not only NACCAU members, but also members of the *Uganda National Arts and Cultural Crafts Community Cooperative Savings and Credit Society Limited* savings circle. The circle was founded in 2016, and although for legal reasons it is not an official NACCAU program (for it is not mentioned in the MoU of the association), its purpose is to support the NACCAU members financially (field notes from 23/02/2020; observation protocol by Barbra Khoba from 23/02/2020). Every Monday, two volunteers of the group collect weekly savings from the circle members, and every Thursday, the entire group meets to discuss and decide upon investments to be made, loans to be granted, and members to be supported. The savings circle provides access to small loans, which, according to Sara are unbureaucratic and can be granted without possessing a bank account, support individuals in making investments for their businesses, but also, and quite frequently, to pay for funerals, medicine, or other emergencies. Thus, it is also means to establishing a culture of mutual social support, enabled, and facilitated through the agency of artistic handicraft objects. The savings circle is only one example of this, but it is through their engagement with artistic handicraft objects that the NACCAU members – and only to a certain extent – establish their own community on their own terms. While they are infiltrated by various and sometimes contradicting discursive and material interests (I will get back to those in chapter 6.3), being a group of people with its organic and traditional intellectuals enables the NACCAU and its members to become visible in the civil society arena.

Becoming the NACCAU

On the previous pages, I elaborated on what, according to the empirical data I gathered, *being the NACCAU* means for important individuals within the association as well as how *being the NACCAU* is perceived by some of its partners and social worlds with which it is engaged. In brief, it can be concluded that *being the NACCAU* is processual. It depends on internal negotiations of interests, which, situated more broadly, are co-determined by discourses on sustainable development, women's empowerment, and creative industries development, as well as on the marketability of ethnically marked African artistic handicraft products. Hence, *being the NACCAU* is always also a form of *becoming*. Furthermore, *becoming the NACCAU* is not exclusively a process of social world actors' engagement with one another, but additionally co-constituted by what Clarke, in building on Actor-Network Theory, refers to as non-human elements in the situation (Clarke, 2005).

The Situatedness of the NACCAU in the Ugandan Artistic Discourse

In February 2019, and with the decisive support of the then Dean of the Margaret Trowell School of Fine and Industrial Arts (MTSIFA) of Makerere University Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kizito Maria Kasule, I was able to gather about 50 artists, curators, scholars, NGO-staff, members of local arts associations, and art-affiliated people at the university's art gallery. In a three-day round-table workshop, participants debated on current notions of art in civil society (see also chapter 4.4.2). In a discussion group that roughly focused on Art in Intl. Development, discussants spent a fair amount of time arguing how to represent Uganda best internationally, while relying on indigenous forms of visual and material culture, for example, shields, textiles, designs, and wickerwork (roundtable discussion from 27/02/2019). The discussion participants then shifted toward asking what makes Ugandan art *authentic*, before returning to the question to what extent art exists in international development, debating the benefits and pitfalls, and discussing how artistic expression can be considered to be contributing to sustainability in development – if at all.

During the round-table discussion workshop in 2019, one participant had proposed to bring Ugandan art into its embassies abroad, to use artistic expressions as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy just like other countries are allegedly doing:

My interest is in how to integrate art and tourism. Like when he was presenting [the moderator of the round table discussion had previously initiated the debate with a verbal presentation] in the morning, he said 'you go to embassies and you find the president's photo on the walls, but what about art?' If we can bring in many pieces in those embassies, at least it can help to promote our cultures to different people who visit these embassies, [...] which in the long run may promote tourism and increasing [sic] national income. (Philip Balimunsi, curator, round table discussion 'Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 135–139)

Here, Balimunsi's main concern is how to create a nation brand of Uganda through visual culture, powerful enough to attract tourists to come and visit. Tourism in return is immediately associated with the national income, which positions artistic products as a tool, as already discussed in the previous chapter 5. What I want to emphasize here, though, is not the conceptualization of art as a tool, but the continuation of the issue that is being raised in association with the question of whether art should be exhibited in Ugandan embassies abroad later during the group discussion:

I will hit on the point of identity and maybe diplomacy, because we are talking about going to embassies and not finding anything artistic there. Because I kind of believe that maybe Ugandan artists have lost pride in their country [...]. And also,

that brings me to the question of identity; are there art works or anything artistic that identifies Uganda to the point that if someone finds it there they can say this is Ugandan? (Vivian Lokoth Naume, fashion designer and lecturer, round table discussion 'Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 432–437)

Unlike Balimusi, who assumes that the government does not want to display Ugandan art in its embassies³, Naume, who is a fashion designer and lecturer, turns the question around, wondering whether artists would want for their work to be at display in offices of the Ugandan embassies and hence immediately be affiliated with the Ugandan government. Although her statement that artists may have lost pride in their country remains generalized, it implicitly raises the question of what exactly she means with having lost pride and whether this could also be an indirect critique of the current government, indicating that some artists may not want to be associated with it.

In the second part of the quote from above, she then turns towards another topic, raising the question of whether Balimusi's proposal is relevant if the ultimate aim is to enhance tourism. She suggests that this would require aesthetics that can be identified as Ugandan to the extent that it can stand for the country and its cultures – both in the sense that something common is emphasized like dances or drums that may have variations but according to the discussants, are similar among the ethnic groups of Uganda. In addition, materials and some elements in local wickerwork could be considered representative.

Other participants, such as Philip Kwesiga, who is a sculptor and an art historian, criticizes artists in Uganda for not sufficiently grounding their art in local histories. In his opinion, Ugandan artists must do more research “to discover their roots in order to understand better where they are going” (Philip Kwesiga, sculptor and art historian, roundtable discussion 'Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 721–722). In his opinion, building on the local cultural heritage is a prerequisite “to be able to operate in the global world. [...] You need to work from a solid foundation and be able to justify something that you do” (ibid: 723–724). In this debate, the discussants can agree that material culture in form of artistic handicraft objects dominate Uganda's tangible cultural heritage. Here, they are not a means for the economic development of marginalized groups of Ugandan society but are highly relevant for the future development of nation branding as well as to historically ground contemporary artistic practice. Other participants associate artistic handicraft objects with indigenous spirituality and emphasize their meaning in relational moments associated with traditions, as the following examples show:

3 Whether or not art is exhibited in Ugandan embassies is not a subject matter here, nor is the question of who would be the target audience of an exhibition in Ugandan embassies.

I was saying that the Ngali culture was a strong culture of the Baganda, so whenever the family came together, they would put money in baskets and these baskets would be kept in shrines. And the booze had to be created [sic]. And whenever the family came together, they had to ask permission to the ancestors to allow them to touch this money to use it – but not for luxury. That was the purpose of the Ngali. (Assoc. Prof. Kizito Maria Kasule, artist and art historian, roundtable discussion ‘Art and Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ 28/02/2019: 590–594)

The *Ngali* are a clan among the Baganda, and Kasule shares his knowledge about *Ngali* culture. Here, Kasule refers to the baskets as an indigenous art form that transcended hierarchy within family structures (all contribute a share and then the money is jointly spent) and connected the living family members with their ancestors (for money can only be spent with the blessing of the ancestors). In another example, the spiritual purposes of indigenous art forms are also to facilitate the relationship with the ancestors:

Many of you – I said this and I want to repeat it – many of you people here, Ugandans, you have some of these indigenous art forms under your beds, you know. And at night when you go there, you remove them and you offer these small sacrifices to your ancestors. In the morning you are true western Christians – during the day. (Assoc. Prof. Kizito Maria Kasule, artist and art historian, round table discussion ‘Art and Indigenous Knowledge Systems’ 28/02/2019: 567–570)

In the quotes above, it becomes clear that the discourse on the meanings of artistic handicraft products travels across disciplines and issues that impact the conceptualization of a society’s norms and values. Here, spirituality and faith are addressed as well as family traditions. It addresses questions of modernity and the impact of *western intrusion* or *Chinese products*, which the discussants debate at large, especially with regard to the question how ancestral worship is shaped by indigenous art forms such as gourds and clay pots – and increasingly by the replacement thereof with plastic pots, jerricans, and polythene or plastic bags.

At the NACCAU, indigenous knowledge is mostly addressed when discussed in relation to cultural heritage. As previously mentioned, De Beukelaer (2017) associates this problematic emphasis on the economic potential of the creative industries, which also include a vast range of creative works beyond visual arts and artistic handicrafts, with the lack of an “African take” (583) on the meanings and implications of the CCIs. For him, this is but one of three major problems in the current work with and of the creative industries. In addition to the lack of empirical engagement with the CCIs across Africa, he shows how the discourses of *culture and development*, which include assumptions about how society is organized to establish an idea of the future, is often synonymized with *development of cultural industries*. He writes:

This creates a tension between what Pratt (2014) calls ‘culture in development’ and ‘cultures of development’. There, precisely, the cultural patterns that inform action are seen as key to gradually, selectively, and partially alter practice in order to foster development that is in line with the cultural context. (De Beukelaer, 2017: 588)

So, there is the culture that informs the practice. There is a product, which is ethnicized and understood to be a material product of a particular cultural group, and then there is the temporal culture of development, which is constantly developed or, as Clarke would have it – co-constituted – by the social world actors and the non-human elements involved. As an association in-between, the NACCAU is currently preoccupied with establishing supportive networks rather than with alteration of practices. In its outward orientation, it consents to the narratives of their partners, which determine the framing of its work. This can be seen powerfully in the notion of poverty eradication through artistic handicraft production, which is also not locally grounded empirically, for there is no empirical evidence that the notion lives up to its premise. According to De Beukelaer (2014), the third and last problem with developing the creative industries as a development strategy is their assumption that the creative industries can be a motor for (socio-)economic development. This assumption is dangerous in that it neglects empirical findings, which suggest that “increased cultural consumption and flourishing cultural industries *follow* a socio-economically prospering society, and not vice versa” (Beukelaer, 2014: 246, emphasis added). Furthermore, by co-conceptualizing artistic handicraft objects as souvenirs, the NACCAU further consents to a tourism world that targets foreign visitors with its outward orientation. The 2020 and 2021 lockdowns and international travel bans during the COVID-19 pandemic embody another example of the dangers involved with primarily consenting to the Creative Economy Reports (CER) published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (*ibid.*).

If one were to follow this outward orientation of the NACCAU only, one could ask to what extent, if at all, and by which means the NACCAU can be regarded as an actor in civil society that has political agency in confronting the current cultural hegemony, which continues to dwell extensively on the overarching assumption that Uganda is ‘developing’ (which, according to the De Beukelaer is synonymous with ‘underdeveloped’) and in need of support for its development. Yet, in its inward orientation, the NACCAU members constantly negotiate and alter the positionality of the association. As I already discussed at length in chapter 3, dominant strands in civil society fall short of grasping its meanings, functions, and adaptations in the lived realities of the African post-colonial era (e.g., Kamruzzaman, 2019; Kasfir, 1998a; Obadare, 2014). Almost unsurprisingly, then, was Nuwa’s understanding of civil society as

those people who advocate for community development, for example those you'd find helping our teachers' associations or other associations in terms of like office, in terms of salaries, in terms of other programs, based on external funding. The NGOs. The non-governmental organizations. (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi, 26/01/2020: 398–401)

For Nuwa, civil society is primarily associated with *those people*, meaning western NGOs that provide basic funding for associations. By covering costs for offices, salaries, and programs, they enable the work of the association, which could be teachers' associations or the like. Those associations by themselves remain outside the civil society realm. This statement indeed confirms the critical positions of scholars who attest to western or western style NGOs to be insufficient when contemplating local forms of civil society and its role(s) in the state, for democracy, and in development. Nelson Kasfir builds on an understanding of Michael Walzer, whose conceptualization of civil society allows for a “set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology” to be included in addition to regarding civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association” (Walzer, 1991: 293, as cited in Kasfir, 1998a: 4).

In its inward dynamics, the NACCAU becomes more political, normative, and ideological and is an association led by interests other than economic benefits. However, its members seldomly succeed in positioning aspects of mutual empowerment, conviviality, and political advocacy into the contested arena of meaning making of artistic handicraft products in civil society. Within the association, they are pushed to the margins by a dominant focus on the development of the creative industries for poverty reduction and economic development, which are promoted as culturally sensitive and relevant with referrals to the safeguarding of heritage. Having made similar observations, Sophia Labadi (2020a) re-addresses the question of the Cultural Turn in international development work:

Some chapters [of the edited book] have explained that such a cultural turn has not yet happened. Many cultural and non-cultural projects funded through international aid share the same characteristics: they do not take account of local communities and contexts; they are based on external evaluations and inputs; and they often fail as a result. [...]. Projects need to contribute to the national interests and priorities of donor countries, in terms of trade and economic growth. [...] Another reason is that cultural projects, when funded through official development assistance (ODA) by donor countries, must promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. (Labadi, 2020a: 243)

In her elaborations, Labadi describes a continuation of the established status-quo, whereby project concepts are designed detached from the lived realities and conditions of the communities, as occurred, for example, in the *Strengthening the Sus-*

tainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda” project. Of course, the NACCAU has a responsibility to its members, which includes the expectation that the association as such also considers their economic interests. Cultural hegemony, its discourses, and the reproduction thereof organize utterances and statements that determine “what is to be known and what is understood and what is *not*” (Clarke et al., 2018: 225, emphasis as in original). In doing so, they set the “conditions of possibility” and hence also the “conditions of impossibility” (ibid, emphasis as in original) and co-determine what will be heard, seen, and considered. However, this does not automatically mean that they do not exist nor that they are less important in the situation. It is noteworthy that they are articulated not in utterances and statements with an outward orientation, but in inward-oriented moments and actions, which are particularly present in the positions taken by those independently organized artistic handicraft groups on the peripheries and outside the realm of what could commonly be associated with civil society activity.

In the previous chapter, I reconstructed how relevant social worlds and organizations such as the NACCAU engage with one central non-human element in the situation of inquiry – artistic handicraft products. In doing so, I highlighted some contestations and contradictions in the conceptualizations of artistic handicraft objects, which are subject to the establishment and continuity of cultural hegemony but also of ruptures in my research situation. In what follows I continue to dwell on the roles, the discursive power of some non-human elements, and the assigned impotence of the discursive construction of handicraft artists in positioning the NACCAU as an association in-between.

6.3 Interlinkages and -Dependencies

Unlike chapter 6.2, which was mainly based on the analysis of interviews, roundtable discussions, photographs, and ethnographic protocols by use of open coding strategies to zoom in on the segments within the NACCAU, the findings in chapter 6.3 are empirically based on the relational analysis of messy-situational maps (see also chapter 4.4.1) of the NACCAU in the broader situation of inquiry. Through mapping, I found two cultural policies to be re-emerging elements of reference, *the 2006 Ugandan National Culture Policy* and the *2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. I will therefore briefly introduce them before I show where and how these non-human elements become actants in the research situation, thereby returning to international project cooperations already covered throughout the previous chapters, the *Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda* project and the *Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts* project. In addition, I elaborate on the non-human element material(ity), the discursive construction of artistic handicraft artists who, in this particular moment within

the situation, are implicated actors, and the discursive element overcoming poverty of the debate around how to best support them, which reconnect with the discourses on sustainable development, (women's) empowerment, cultural heritage, and creative industry.

Cultural Policies

The 2006 Uganda National Culture Policy

Culture is the sum total of the ways in which a society preserves, identifies, organizes, sustains and expresses itself. Uganda is endowed with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, which includes sixty-five indigenous communities with unique characteristics. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP, 2004) acknowledges that culture is intrinsically valuable and an important dimension of identity and a form of capital with the potential to move people out of income poverty. However, there is a general lack of appreciation of the significance and value of Uganda's cultural heritage towards the realization of Uganda's development goals. (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006: 2)

With these opening words in the foreword of the 2006 Uganda National Culture Policy (NCP), the Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development at the time, Syda Namirembe Bbumba, set the tone for the content of the policy paper to follow. It mentions the diversity and richness of Uganda's cultural heritage, which is comprised of 65 indigenous communities but does not elaborate on either aspect named. Instead, Bbumba turns towards the linkage between culture and poverty eradication, which she emphasizes by referring to *the Poverty Eradication Action Plan* (PEAP) that was ratified two years prior. Not only does culture bear the potential to "move people out of poverty" (ibid: 2), but the general lack of appreciation for culture is considered a barrier to development here. Furthermore, Bbumba refers to culture's potential in overcoming *income* poverty. This is relevant in two ways: First, it acknowledges the multidimensionality of poverty by emphasizing culture's agency in overcoming this particular kind of poverty. In doing so, it secondly limits culture's agency to the very particular kind of income poverty and hence to its potential economic benefits. It disregards all other poverty dimensions in which culture might have agency or in which cultural hegemony maintains the current social order, which, with Bourdieu, are closely connected to income, hence financial, poverty (Bourdieu, 1984 [1979]).

It is this dichotomy between acknowledging that culture is important for any society and that cultural diversity is a significant contributor to social cohesion, and the subsequent limitation of cultural practices to income-generating activities that

dominate the tone of the 2006 NCP. In this sense, the document informs about the value of cultural articulations for “traditional communities in what is now Uganda”, which

were closely knit units. Their social, political and economic organisation [sic] revolved around the family, clan and/ or the institution of the traditional leader. The daily activities of men, women and children, whether as individuals or as groups were intrinsically linked to, and determined by their cultures. (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006: 6)

Due to the exposure to “various influences” (ibid), among which foreign rule, those traditional socio-political setups were weakened, indigenous knowledge either ignored or belittled, the document further argues. In this logic, the setup of the Ministry of Culture and Community (MoCC) of the first post-independence government emphasized the importance of culture for the social and political coherence in the newly established nation-state. Today, culture is a department under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and that the major aim of the policy, which is the first major cultural policy paper or act since 1977, according to its authors, is to “guide the formal and informal systems of managing culture at all levels” (ibid: 7).

Regarding *Visual Arts and Handicrafts*, here seen as one, the document follows the same pattern: it refers to the variety of visual arts and handicrafts first and then positions objects such as basketry, mats, ceramics, beads, hand-woven textiles and products, and others as being products of culture and history of a particular place and a particular ethnic group. In their functions, they have “promoted the identities of the various communities and created avenues for income generation” (ibid: 9). However, when it comes to challenges and areas of concern, the policy addresses the “poor quality of products due to limited capacity of producers and marketers”, “inadequate quantities”, and “limited research about the products and the markets”, in addition to a threat to the availability of raw materials previously described as “readily available” due to environmental degradation (ibid). This juxtaposition establishes two meanings of culture in general terms and, more concretely, of visual arts and handicrafts. While the early government, it seems, understood the intrinsic value of culture for social and political cohesion of communities and the development of a post-independence nation-state rooted in localities, the contemporary importance of culture provided by the NCP is predominantly linked to an economic development creed.

The *Development and Promotion of Cultural Industries, the Development and Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge; -of Cultural Beliefs, Traditions and Values and -of Visual Arts and Handicrafts* are four of the priority areas of the NCP. By now, the document is mainly concerned with the economic potential and commercialization of culture as expressed in the following:

Uganda is endowed with diverse cultures, which produce unique products including visual arts and crafts. These products are some of the raw materials on which cultural industries thrive. Visual arts and handicrafts have the potential to reduce income poverty [sic] if their quantity and quality is deliberately enhanced. (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006: 22–23, emphasis added)

Visual arts and handicrafts are now exclusively considered as bearing the potential of diminishing the income poverty:

Cultural industries have the potential to promote the livelihoods of the marginalised, the poor, and the vulnerable. Cultural industries create employment opportunities and produce economic gains and incomes at all levels. These cultural industries further contribute to cultural development by protecting and enriching cultural values, promoting creativity, optimising skills and human resources. (ibid: 20)

Cultural values, the document implicitly argues, are not always inherently good. Therefore, the 2006 NCP specifically seeks to “mitigate social practices that are oppressive to people” (ibid: 21). At times, beliefs, traditions, and values are at conflict with modern laws, as is the case with, e.g., “widow inheritance and female genital cutting” (ibid: 10). Unlike cultural values, which are promoted when they “impinge on human dignity” and “promote respect and tolerance among different beliefs and value systems” (ibid), indigenous knowledge is considered a

key factor in social and economic development [...]. In addition, there is recognition of the important role of local communities in contributing their indigenous knowledge systems to enhance the sustainability of development programmes. (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006: 21)

According to the 2006 NCP framework, the ideal cultural industries, then, build on indigenous knowledge as well as on human dignity conform cultural beliefs, traditions, and values.

The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

The 2006 NCP was technically and financially supported by the British Council and the National Commission of the UNESCO in Uganda. Only shortly prior to the ratification and publication of the 2006 NCP had the UNESCO member states accepted the *2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. It was ratified by Uganda in 2015, but already prior to its ratification, it shaped cultural work and policies and promoted the previously rather unknown

concept of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) across the African continent (De Beukelaer, 2017). The direction of my research does not allow me to draw any conclusions whether and, if so, to what extent the 2005 UNESCO convention and the development thereof might have already impacted the 2006 NCP. Since its ratification in 2015, however, it has become a vital non-human actant in the situation of inquiry.

The 2005 *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* links the endurance of cultural diversity with (sustainable) development. The protection of cultural diversity here is connected to the cultural and creative industries, since it is through the creative industries that the global circulation of products is facilitated (De Beukelaer, 2015). To withstand the threat imposed by globalization and a free market, which could result in the diminishing of cultural diversity, the rationale of the 2005 Convention assumes that “all countries must have sufficiently strong cultural industries to make sure their internal market can withstand the influx of imported films, music and books” (ibid: 20–21).

In its logic, the protection of cultural diversity is a global responsibility, and therefore, wealthier countries, “in a spirit of partnership”, are called to support the enhancement of “the capacities of developing countries in order to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions” (UNESCO, 2005: 7). The Convention, unlike the NCP, assumes culture to be inherently good, and the protection of its diversity here is associated with democracy, the empowerment of women as well as of minorities and indigenous people, conflict resolution and peace building, and economic development. For example, by recognizing “the importance of traditional knowledge as a source of intangible and material wealth, and in particular the knowledge systems of indigenous people, and its positive contribution to sustainable development” (ibid: 2) and by reaffirming “the importance of the link between culture and development for all countries, particularly for developing countries” (ibid: 6). It is this form of relative universalism, as Steffen Geiger and I call it, in which all are addressed (the importance for all countries), but some are particularly exposed (particularly for developing countries) (Klages & Geiger, in preparation). This emphasis, by which social inclusion occurs through the explication of a particular group, the rhetoric in the document specifies some addressees of the Convention as more relevant than others. This is a rather common linguistic tool that can also be found in other IOs’ documents, for example in the SDGs (ibid). Here, it re-emphasizes the interconnectedness of culture and development, especially for countries of the Global South, whose cultures, due to wealth imbalances, are particularly endangered.

In my research situation, the major role of the 2005 *UNESCO Convention Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* is to justify and direct the major narrative of sustainable development through visual arts and handicraft work, which is culturally sensitive because it acknowledges and promotes indige-

nous knowledge, and it protects the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of ethnic groups and communities not inventoried in the UNESCO lists.

International Cooperations

“Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda”

The first of the two projects, the *Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda* project was a collaboration between the UNESCO and local partners and financed by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Korea through its Funds-In-Trust (K-Fit) program. Through this program, the Republic of Korea has funded more than 20 UNESCO projects in several countries, thereby considering K-Fit a method of operationalizing the 2005 *Convention*. All of them aimed and aim at the development of the creative industries in so-called developing countries. The creative industries development here was identified as

key in building an enabling environment for creative entrepreneurship in developing countries [...]. Through these investments, artists and cultural professionals have developed the capacity to create, produce, disseminate and access a wide diversity of cultural expressions. (Ottone Ramirez, 2021: 1)

The *Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda* project shares its name with projects implemented in, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Rwanda, and Uzbekistan, and ran between 2015 and 2019. Its local partners included the Uganda National Commission for the UNESCO, was implemented by the NACCAU, and was further strategically supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, the Export Promotion Board and the Arts and Culture Department of Makerere University.

For this project, the 2005 *Convention* serves as a framework as well as an initiator. It is *because* of the convention and the therein articulated need to globally strengthen the creative industries that the K-Fit was established, which made the strengthening-project in Uganda possible. Regarding the status-quo of the creative industries in Uganda, the project took a deficit-oriented approach and a proposed set of interlinkages that establish discursive dependencies of local collective actors such as the NACCAU:

The objective is to strengthen the artistic, design, marketing and management skills of Ugandan craft workers in order to improve the production and quality of their products for economic and sustainable development. It aims to identify, promote and safeguard traditional know-how in crafts making in the diverse cultural

expressions, [...] and create awareness about the importance and role of the crafts industry in the economic development of the country. (UNESCO, 2017: n.p.)

The title of the report introduces the same people who here are described as needing to improve on all levels of their engagement with creative and artistic work as “cultural professionals”, and it is by means of foreign-funded and -headed projects such as this sustainability project that traditional expertise can be safeguarded. Both claims are incoherent, but they do powerfully demonstrate the major incentives of this project. The cover page of the project leaflet (see Image 4.1) repeats the controversy between “strengthen[ing] the artistic, design, marketing and management skills,” on the one hand, and the target population, who are addressed as “Ugandan Women Professionals,” on the other hand. The aim of the 2005 Convention is the protection and the promotion of cultural diversity, while the strategies to do so apply marketing strategies and approaches to professionalization conceptualized elsewhere and which, in the research situation, remain alienated to the current lived realities of the very handicraft artists it seeks to support.

Content-wise the project was divided into four stages: First, the UNESCO executed a mapping and assessing of artistic handicraft activities in three selected regions of the country. The assessment then informed the development of a draft training manual, which was tested in those three regions by the NACCAU members who executed the trainings in the respective regions. In the last stage, the manual was revised, and the idea was to make it available for future trainings so that, according to the project partners, “artisan and craft products *“Made in Uganda”* will be synonymous with quality, creativity, employment and sustainability” (ibid, emphasis as in original).

Here, engagement with the creative industries and artistic creation is apolitical. Its objectives are placed first and foremost within the notion of overcoming *income* poverty. Again, the *cultural professionals*, as they are called here, remain implicit. It is assumed that economic development is their major concern. The issue of women empowerment is mentioned without being contextualized in most parts; at times, the project aims to support all cultural professionals, whereas at other times it addresses “Ugandan Women Professionals” (Project Leaflet, n.d.) only, emphasizing on the importance of the project for the “trained women creatives” (ibid). The initiation of the *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries* project overlaps with the Ugandan ratification of the 2005 UNESCO Convention. It is thus the first project that builds on the convention’s rationale, and although the subsequent cooperative projects do not necessarily refer to the convention as explicitly as the *Strengthening the Sustainability* project, its impact on meanings associated with artistic handicraft work, jointly with the 2006 NCP and the 2005 UNESCO Convention, are so dominant that other forms of meaning making are pushed to the margins of the discourse and to the periphery in the situation of inquiry.

The “Marketability of East African Cultural Crafts” Project

The *Marketability* project of the Ugandan Tourism Association (UTA) in collaboration with the NACCAU has very similar objectives as the *Strengthening the Sustainability* project, with a particular emphasis on the establishment of an online sales platform. The project received funding from the GIZ. In the project proposal, the major objective is described as follows:

The idea is to further support women and youth who are currently engaged in crafts production and earning very Low [sic] earnings in Uganda and Kenya [...] The ultimate goal of the Idea [sic] is to enable Craft [sic] producers who are mainly women and youths [sic] in Uganda and Kenya build their capacity in terms of production of Quality Products [sic], through benchmarking from each country and improving their Marketing [sic] skills, as well as avenues to enable their crafts reach the final customers internationally through the Online Platform [sic]. (UTA, 2019: 3)

The *Marketability* project echoes the 2006 NCP, which assumes that visual arts and handicrafts “have the potential to reduce income poverty if their quantity and quality is *deliberately* enhanced” (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006: 22–23, emphasis added). Furthermore, the project proposal directly refers to the SDGs and the Uganda Vision 2040, which are two additional policy elements of relevance in the research situation. The former is particularly closely associated with discursive, hegemonic power as it has become the reference for most activities in the development realm (Ziai, 2016). The focus on women and empowerment, inclusive of women’s empowerment, of the SDGs is emphasized upon in the project proposal, in addition to the involvement of local communities and the ecological sustainability of materials, which “are mainly local material from plants” (UTA 2019: 3).

In the logic of the *Marketability* project, artistic handicraft products first must be improved upon before they can be successfully promoted internationally by means of an online platform. Again, the NACCAU is the executive partner in this project. It will provide the “trainers with expertise in crafts production skills” (ibid: 11) and the host of the online sales platform to be developed. Partnering tourism actors will support the marketing strategy by guiding tourists to the respective locations where crafts are sold as well as to the online platform. The *Marketability* project, although smaller in scale, can, to a certain extent, be seen as a continuation of the UNESCO *Strengthening the Sustainability* project, at least for the NACCAU. Those members who already supported the implementation of the UNESCO project, including Nuwa Nyanzi, find themselves in the similar position of trainers to enhance the quality of the handicraft products. For Richard Kawere, then CEO of UTA and main author of the proposal, the creative industries and tourism are two sides of the

same coin because it is the handicraft product, the souvenir that “keep[s] [tourists] memory of the destination of Uganda and Kenya alive” (ibid: 5). In our interview, he re-emphasizes this understanding. He tells me:

So, the whole, entire – why tourism industry is attached to the crafts – emerging as a result of: One; is the demand of the souvenirs by the tourists that come to the country. Two, is the need to work with producers to transform their lives, because as they transform their lives, it’s the tourism industry that actually benefits in the end. (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO UTA, 11/03/2020: 176–178)

Therefore, while associations such as the NACCAU are dependent on support from actors such as the UTA, who, by means of their structures and network, have better access to funding, both the UTA and the NACCAU members emphasize the mutual dependencies between artistic handicraft products and production and tourism. For Nuwa, tourism is more of a byproduct of “natural and built cultural heritage sites. Period. Both tangible and intangible” (Interview with Nuwa Nyanzi, 26/01/2020: 616–617). Therefore, for him, it is no contradiction to the value of artistic handicraft production if the products artists and artisans create are positioned as souvenirs in the tourism sector. In the situation of inquiry, the *Marketability* project manifests the directions taken by the *Sustainability* project, and both are pushed even further by the *Souvenir and Handicrafts Development* project, a US \$1.5 million initiative under the direction of the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, which is funded by the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), a partnership of countries and donors who jointly support *least developed countries* in establishing trade structures that enhance development and reduce poverty under the World Trade Organization (WTO). In the project description of its first Quadrennial Periodic Report of the Implementation of the 2005 Convention on Cultural Diversity, the authors refer to both the SDGs and the 2005 Convention, thereby referring to SDG Goals #8 (decent work and economic growth), #10 (reduced inequalities), and #17 (partnerships), and the #2 Convention Goal “Flows and Mobility”.

Constructing the Subaltern-Artisan-Others

All policies and projects in the situation have one thing in common, their target population. As I have demonstrated throughout the results chapters of my research thus far, in project negotiations, gatherings, commissions – in brief, in moments where the meanings of artistic handicraft production and the items produced are debated – artistic handicraft artists remain largely absent. With Clarke’s analytical instruments for the reconstruction and analysis of the situated phenomena that are subject to my research, in the relational analysis of the situation, they remain implicated or silent actors (Clarke et al., 2018).

At the roundtable discussion on Art in International Development in February 2019, for example, Nuwa spoke about the *Handicraft Souvenir and Development* project headed by the Ministry of Tourism as one strategy to make artistic practices more sustainable. When I asked him what exactly he means when talking about souvenirs, he replied:

Things to show that you were in Uganda – and you got something from there, to show that you were there, because this is their interest [of the Ministry of Tourism]. They [the ministry members] think they can make more money from it. (Nuwa Nyanzi, roundtable discussion ‘Art in Intl. Development’, 27/02/2019: 147–149)

I then continue to ask about the artists and artisans who make the products and about their perspectives regarding the terms used, wondering whether what is meant to empower them does not ultimately lead towards the opposite. Nuwa is not concerned with this. Instead, he replies:

Is the word not being ‘politically correct’? Because the word souvenir may not sound as alarming to the average Ugandan as it is to an English-speaking person. What I am saying is they don’t know that by selling your [sic] work as a souvenir is [sic] actually undermining the value of that bead work. So, they have no feelings towards it until [they] find out that that is what it is. Probably they will have a view to or against. But for now, they are glad for their work to be sold. (Nuwa Nyanzi, artist and art-entrepreneur, roundtable discussion ‘Art in Intl. Development’, 27/02/2019: 155–160)

In this quotation, Nuwa addresses two important issues. The first issue is the issue of language and terminology. Language matters and is always already culturally encrypted, as I demonstrated at length in the theoretical discussions around *art* and *civil society* in chapters 2 and 3 as well as with regard to cultural interpretations in chapter 4. He suggests that *to the average Ugandan*, the word souvenir is not associated with a threat of devaluing and altering the meanings of material culture as apparently understood by me or an English-speaking person. At least, the average Ugandan does not yet know about the associations others might have with the term. Nuwa also implicitly suggests that the information could be withheld from artisans and handicraft artists, who, currently, readily sell their products as souvenirs. The information about the dynamics connected with labeling something as a souvenir is not shared with them.

Structural, intersectional factors are not considered, nor do the framings of the projects in the situation provide space for alternative meaning making of engaging with artistic handicrafts. I argue that although handicraft artists are essential actors in the creative industries, they are generally not considered as people who partici-

pate and co-constitute the discourse. This is the second important issue addressed in the quote above – the appointed positionality of handicraft artists who at times are frequently from low-income households, but generally also understood to be unknowing subjects, individuals, and groups who are assumed not to care about issues other than economic gains or who might care but are not informed.

The here discussed projects both emphasize the need to professionalize people who are presented as professionals, and the projects propose to teach them price calculation and marketing skills. When I spoke to a small number of handicraft artists in rural Eastern Uganda, it did not seem like they did not know how to decide on an adequate price for their products. At times, however, one woman from the women's collective said, she needs money fast, and hence sells at any price a customer is willing to pay, even if it comes at a loss for her.

Overcoming Poverty

The narrative of all three third-party funded artistic handicraft projects discursively individualizes poverty and proposes individualized strategies towards economic empowerment as the solution to overcome it. At least the two trainers I already introduced, Nuwa Nnyanzi and Bruno Sserunkuuma, both believe in this philosophy as well, which for them is connected with their own biography, albeit in different ways. Sserunkuuma grew up being raised by his mother. For him, it is clear that it was because of her tireless efforts that he was able to attend school, continue to pursue a university degree, and become a successful artist (unrecorded conversation, 08/2018). This personal biographic experience motivates him to support and engage with project that aim to empower women, mostly mothers, who are in similar situations. He is convinced that supporting mothers is automatically always also to the benefit of their children. Artistic handicraft production, to him, is an activity that will help them in establishing their financial independence, just like he was able to make a living from making art, thereby creating a brighter future not only for himself, but for his entire family.

Nuwa lived in political exile in Kenya from the late 1970s till the early 1990s. It is in exile where he started pursuing art and established himself as an artist among the Ugandan expats residing in Kenya at the time. In his narrative, his dedication, passion, and patience were the companions that made success as an artist possible. Therefore, he assumes that everyone should be able to achieve similar successes, provided they are dedicated enough to overcome hardships. Therefore, he has little understanding for those round-table discussion participants who are skeptical about the sustainability of time-bound projects:

For three years they have taught you how to make this craft, they have made a market for you and you want to tell me you have not been empowered – and when I

leave you collapse?! Then, there is something fundamentally wrong with a person who has been taught how to create a product but cannot go further than that. That will mean there has to be another expert to come and teach them marketing. And then after that they will have to have another person to come and teach them selling, because the is different from marketing. So – when will it stop?! (Nuwa Nyanzi, artist and art-entrepreneur, round table discussion ‘Art in Intl. Development, 27/02/2019: 274–280)

In the debate another participant, who introduces himself as Philip Balimuni, points towards the fact that what worked for Nuwa may not work for others who live with very different circumstances and who may not have the same objectives and initiative. While Nuwa mentions that he had been a trained professional working in the medical military system prior to his flight, that he had had a cousin who gave him some money, that he had met a supporter who took one of his artworks to the US, where he was “making connections with sponsors to support refugees in Kenya” (ibid: 271–272), and that he had had an aunt who at the time lived in Nairobi, owned a restaurant, and provided him a roof over his head, he does not link any of those factors with his success as an artist. It appears as if he does not recognize these aspects as supportive elements that impacted the course of his career as an artist. Therefore, maybe out of humbleness, maybe out of naïveté, or for reasons about which I can only speculate, he believes that after having received training, others should be able to build their artistic careers on that. After all, he had succeeded in doing so as well.

As trainers, Nuwa and Sserunkuuma are powerful and convincing because both tell their visions through their biographic experiences. Both are successful artists who travel abroad and who live well from their art. They are the living proof of the authenticity of the narratives they tell, and I met several people who told me that during the UNESCO (the *Strengthening* project) training, they were told to continue to work and push through hardship, and that it was because of the training they were able to gather new hope, continue with their work, or resume it.

6.4 Conclusions

Of Being and Not Being in Art and Civil Society

The NACCAU as an organization traces its roots back to 1994, the year in which the monarchies were reinstated as cultural institutions. With its restructuring in 2003, it became the National Arts and Cultural Crafts Association of Uganda. In its name it brings together art, craft, culture, and the aspiration to be(come) an association of national importance. Yet, it is also a member-based association whose activities by and large cluster around its main site of action, its crafts village. As a mem-

ber-based association, its objectives and positions with regard to arts and (cultural) crafts are negotiated among its members. In this inward orientation, the members find various strategies to organize and support each other, and to establish a culture of mutual support. As far as the findings of my analysis goes, this occurs in at least two ways: the first strategy is the engagement in the savings circle in which NACCAU members organize themselves in a smaller group with a strong sense of commitment to joint investments, facilitated by their engagement with artistic handicraft products. Jointly, they decide how to invest and whether a grant, e.g. for the purchase of handicraft products or raw materials. As such, individual investment choices are always also supported by the collective. The second strategy is followed by members such as Reste Kaddu Lwanga, who finds comfort and a sense of efficacy in being part of an association rather than being an artist/ dealer selling art on the street. Furthermore, she considers her shop as a space of mutual empowerment which serves as a platform for fellow visual artists. Informed by the incentive of having to make a statement against a government that allegedly neglects cultural practitioners, she finds the NACCAU to be a base for advocacy and for mutual empowerment whereby members and affiliated artists demonstrate appreciation for each other's talents, skills, and persistence.

However, those processes remain almost invisible in the NACCAU's outward orientation. As an association that strives to move ahead and hopefully evolve, the most prominent actors in and around the association strive to position its activities as pivotal for national economic development, poverty eradication, and, importantly, gender equity. Since its management senses a lack of recognition for its past achievements for the wider Ugandan society from the respective ministry in charge, its strategic and operational leaders have turned towards new allies to seek strategic and financial support. In this outward orientation, the NACCAU subsumes innovation, creativity, uniqueness, or variation of artistic handicraft products under the commercial value and marketability of products designed to suit the assumed taste of (foreign) consumers.

While this may be so, its leadership remains intrinsically motivated to use the empowering potential of artistic and creative expression and to use its agency to support artistic handicraft artists adapt their skills to contemporary styles and to safeguard what is understood to be the material cultural heritage.

The NACCAU and its members promote, in multiple and at times seemingly contradictive ways, societal change. This notion is shaped by external and internal forces, interests, by power dynamics as well as by the need of its members to make a living off of their (artistic) engagement. In the situation, the NACCAU manifests itself as an actor in-between, co-opted to consent by logics of a market economy dominated by foreign concepts of aesthetics, development agendas and notions of cultural tourism on the one hand. Yet, it is also an actor who facilitates the encounter of a culturally marked product and the tourist customer, which positions

the NACCAU members as powerful cultural ambassadors and intermediaries. It is those moments of intimate encounter, and the ability to move within and engage with multiple actors with specific interests that would allow for the NACCAU to promote the interests not only of their members, but also of the artistic handicraft producers and the positionality of artistic handicraft products in the nexus of art, craft, development, and (cultural) ownership.

Chapter 7: Crafting a Different Story

Independent Handicraft Groups in Rural Eastern Uganda

Jointly with Barbra Khoba Loyce and Dorothy Wanyama¹

7.1 Introduction

Turning up the Volume. Focusing on Minoritized Discourses and Silenced Perspectives

By not analytically reproducing the power relations of domination and instead offering analyses that represent the full array of discourses, we turn up the volume on lesser but still present discourses, lesser but still present participants, the marginalized, the quiet, the silent, and the silenced. (Clarke et al., 2018: 226)

In the previous chapters, I set the empirical scene of my research situation and then elaborated upon the challenges of local associations such as the NACCAU to negotiate their positionality in the discursive arena of power, action, policy, and symbolic meaning making. With this third and last empirical chapter, I now leave Kampala and its international, national, state, non-governmental, and business actors behind, with the aim of meeting those people who, until now, have existed only through discursive constructions in my research situation. This following chapter is dedicated to those who are referred to as producers, cultural crafts persons, master crafts people, businesspeople, custodians of culture, or, at times, artisans. Thus far I have either used terminologies applied in my empirical data or, more frequently, referred to them as handicraft artists. In doing so, I wish to follow the argumentation of local art scholars such as Kyeyune (2001), Sanyal and Kasule (2006), Nabulime and McEwan (2011; 2014), who seek to avoid the hierarchization of forms of *symbolic creative expression*. By doing so, they contribute to a situated conceptualization of Ugandan art.

¹ The two women's contributions to the realization of this chapter are of crucial significance. Any presentation of the results in this chapter is an interpretive co-production our collaboration. Therefore, I consider this chapter to be co-authored by Barbra and Dorothy. For more elaborations, see the next page.

Yet, as previously stated, none of the handicraft artists referred to themselves as artists, crafts persons, or producers. Rather, they introduced themselves as people who make conscious and active choices in their lives, as people, who began to organize themselves as individuals after betrayal, who simply do *what they know how to do best*, people who continue the work of their forefathers as they have been taught, or people who perceive themselves as the backbone of a rite of passage. Their stories, interests, and motivations are diverse and unique, and while they all have an economic interest in pursuing handicraft work, I came to understand that for many of them, there is a lot more to their engagement with artistic handicraft production than it being a means of generating an income.

I wish to acknowledge that without the work of Barbra Loyce Khoba, who supported me as a research assistant with organizational issues, her language skills, and sharp mind, and whose family hosted me with the greatest hospitality, and the help of Dorothy Wanyama, who dedicated her time and was willing to share her knowledge as well as her network with me, the otherwise unheard and unseen positions and discourses of the actors in this following chapter could not have been considered in my research. Without them, my analysis would have remained within the scope of reconstructing “the major or master discourse[s] that usually trump[s] others” (Clarke et al., 2018: 226). For me, Barbra and Dorothy, although they did not write the following pages, are both co-authors of this chapter.

Turning to Overheard Positions

In my encounters with the handicraft collectives, it was referred to as “the UNESCO seminar”, which is the term I will use as well. My idea was to meet with several collectives for a first conversation and then return to Kampala with my recordings and field notes. Based on the principle of theoretical sampling, my plan was to do some preliminary mapping before I would return to spend more time with one or two selected groups. Unfortunately, the second part of this plan could not be put into action. Due to Covid I ended my field stay early and would not return to Uganda for gathering more empirical data.

What I did not know when Barbra and I boarded the bus to Mbale was that Dorothy had already set up a tight schedule for our week together. Nor did either one of us know that my research would be the reason for a small family reunion (Dorothy is Barbra’s paternal aunt), which we only realized after our arrival in Mbale as we entered Dorothy’s handicraft shop. This coincidence had an impact on the relational dynamics of the days to come. Barbra’s parents had invited me to stay in their home, meaning that I was a guest in the family twice at once; during the day it was Dorothy who hosted me, and in the evenings, it was her brother and his wife. During car rides, niece and aunt frequently engaged in conversations about the family, but also in discussions regarding faith, economics, or gender roles in contemporary

Ugandan society. Since we spent a lot of time in the car together – on our way to meeting groups, coming back from having met groups, trying to find a place that sold lunch at a late hour, and continuing the journey to meet with another group – these in-between conversations became very valuable to me, as they helped me to understand how these two women make sense of their world and how it differed from mine.

On our way, we got lost several times, and just when I had hoped that Google Maps would be our solution in finding our way faster, we got stuck downhill on a steep slope. It took the help of several people who were passing by to get the car back on a road that was drivable. During this week, I became aware of many challenges with regard to mobility, which I will summarize here as “getting market access”, though it manifested itself in rather different ways than anticipated based on the conversations and interviews I had led in Kampala. I will get back to this issue as the chapter unfolds, as it is an element that has significance, among others, for materialities and aesthetics.

The field notes, Barbra’s protocols, recorded verbal memos, and group conversations are thus the empirical foundation for the chapter to follow. Here, I will introduce two of the handicraft groups I met with in more depth. I argue that their group formations, facilitated by joint artistic work, should be acknowledged, among others, as civic engagement. Furthermore, I will particularly emphasize three non-human elements: the sociocultural element of *spirituality*, the non-human actant *materiality*, and *gender* as additional key element, which structure this chapter.

7.2 Gendered Spaces in Civil Society

Wickerwork

So, I discovered one thing about my people in the village; these are people who moved their lives on a [sic] certain things. So, for the women it was basically weaving. (Interview with Jackie Katesi 18/02/2020: 46–47)

In the interview with artist Jackie Katesi, she proceeds to speak about the various meanings that weaving had for her grandmother – or rather, the meanings she assumed her grandmother had. Wickerwork and weaving are genuinely understood to be female activities in Uganda, although exceptions exist, which I will get to later. Uganda has a long tradition of wickerwork, including various types of baskets in multiple forms, sizes, shapes and functions, and mats (see also chapter 2.3.2). The floor of the newly rebuilt *Kasubi Tombs*, for example, is covered with woven mats called *omukeeka* (Muwanga Senoga, 2021).

Basketry is believed to be the oldest handicraft in Buganda and possibly beyond in the wider boundaries of what today is known Uganda. Maureen Muwanga Senoga

refers to basketry as an “Indigenous Industry” (ibid: 224), which reaffirms the difficulties in finding adequate terms that grasp meaning and functions of the artefacts and the people who make them. Baskets, depending on form and function, are either woven or coiled. Muwanga Senoga describes the coiling process as follows:

Basket making begins at the centre, forming the base, and successive fronds are coiled around and around until the desired size is attained; each coil is stitched to the neighboring coil by cane or banana fibre. An iron awl is used to make the holes in the cane through which the end of the coil is tapered and stitched down firmly to the coil below it so that it should not be undone or untidy. (Muwanga Senoga, 2021: 245)

Image 7.1 illustrates the result of this rather technical description by showing how the cane holds the coil and the form. For Jackie Katesi, the act of weaving itself is symbolically loaded. During our interview, she demonstrates on video how to begin weaving a basket (Image 7.2). Meanwhile, she tells me how, in her opinion, weaving can teach us about life:

So, when you're starting, just like in life, when you're faced with challenges, you're broken into pieces. But then you have to pick up the pieces and bring them together. So, when you weave – up-down – just like in life, you have ups and downs, bad moments and good moments. So, these are the bad moments [moves the fiber down] and good moments [moves the fiber up]. [...] And these are still the bad and the good on top. So, when you look at this, it has a relationship with the one on top. [...] So – why weaving?! I feel it communicates more to the people I want to reach out to. Why?! Just like I said: in life, when you're faced with situations you're broken down to invisible pieces, which we cannot see, but you can feel them. [...] You get another part of yourself and you start weaving yourself – getting yourself back. (Interview with Jackie Katesi 18/02/2020: 444–459)

For Jackie, weaving is about the individual relationship between the artist and the material with which they are working. My encounter with her had been accidental. I had met her about a month prior to the interview at the workshop site of an NGO that seeks to prevent human trafficking and supports people (mostly women), who have been affected by human trafficking. Weaving, in Jackie's elaborations, has agency in communicating that the weaver is taking “me time” – as in the case of her grandmother. But its agency stretches beyond that. It is what could best be described as therapeutic. Jackie is a painter and a sculptor, with all her sculptures being created making use of mixed materials. In my situation, this differentiates her from the other socially engaged artists whom I previously introduced. In her individual artistic practice, she works with the same materials and techniques as when engag-

ing with groups in socially-focused art-making. She knows the character traits of the material and assumes that others are able to relate to the process similarly:

To me I feel this communicates to my target group, to show them that despite having been trafficked, despite having been not empowered as women, with those issues you have handled, you can still build yourself up. [...] I feel how these girls open up and their pain, their sorrow comes out as they share with us. So, they get relief and become better people, they hope for a better tomorrow. That's my weaving. (Interview with Jackie Katesi 18/02/2020: 476–483)

Image 7.1: Cane stiches of coiled basket.



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With those words still in my mind, I left Kampala, but amidst the myriad impressions, they quickly fade. However, on my fourth day in Mbale, when I meet with several women of a group engaged with wickerwork, I am reminded of Jackie's meaning making of weaving. The handicraft artists in this group mainly make mats and baskets, but also toys from banana fiber – balls and dolls – for children to play with. They live and work in Supa, which is located on the road from Mbale westwards in the direction of Pallisa.

Image 7.2: Weaving demonstration by “The Kalange” Jackie Katesi.



©Anna-Lisa Klages, 18/02/2020

At the time of my visit, the road to Pallisa is under construction to be turned into an asphalted highway. Wherever the pavements have been completed, the ride is smooth and fast; where it is still under construction, the ride is curvy, bumpy, and very slow. Looking outside the window, I see some of the costs the residents had to pay. The new road is wider than the ancient one; hence trees, sidewalks, roadside shops, and a few buildings had to make space for the new highway. Upon our arrival in Supa, several members of the group are already awaiting us. They have spread out their materials and some finished products on mats they had previously placed on the ground in the shades of a large tree (see also Image 5.9). Some have young children with them. The tree is about 10 meters away from the already asphalted road. There is thus enough distance between us and the road for the cars, bodas, and trucks passing by not to disturb us. At the same time, we are close enough to the road for it to remain in sight and for us to be visible from there, which, as I will learn, is a conscious decision. The tree stands on the premises of a church congregation. Its main building, the church, was constructed further inland and away from the street (Image 7.3). When working together, Suzan, one woman of the group, tells me that this is where they meet for work (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa 27/02/2020). About twice a week, they come together for joint work. Through-

out the rest of the week, the women work individually in and around their homesteads. Like the other handicraft artists I have met and will meet during my stay in Mbale, they weave in their spare time and frequently in-between attending to their everyday chores and responsibilities. Coming together on two days of the week and on neutral grounds is a break with those everyday routines, an opportunity to socialize and learn.

Dorothy Wanyama, who, in reference to the UNESCO seminar considers herself as the “Eastern region coordinator in handcrafts”, opens and closes every group meeting with a prayer (see transcripts). The prayer is always in Lugisu, and in two groups – the *imbalu* initiation uniform makers’ group (see chapter 7.3) and the potters’ group from Burukuru, it is also a political decision, as most members there are Muslims, as I learn in one of the car rides (field notes between 23/02 – 01/03/2020). By introducing herself as Eastern region coordinator of handcrafts and disclosing that the purpose of our visit is to investigate “what you learnt from the seminar, [how] it helped you, or [if] there are any gaps as well. Or do you still have some challenges. She [meaning the main researcher] will give you the details” (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa 28/02/2020: 40–41), she very early sets the tone for the discussion to follow. I remain unaware of this introduction and thus only understand later why the response to my question on how members became engaged with making handicrafts could have been initiated with a reference to the UNESCO seminar from 2018:

The question you have just asked – that – how did we learn how to make crafts? We thank God we had a seminar in 2018. And we were taught these things, we decided that ‘let’s go and put them in practice to come up with products.’ (ibid: 69–71)

This emphasis on the UNESCO seminar is then repeated by Barbra, who translates my question, but directly relates it to again the seminar: “She wants to know when you started and how you started since you went to the seminar” (ibid: 78–79). Throughout the conversation, the seminar will remain a point of reference we return to frequently. Interestingly, the most important lesson taken from the seminar is the demand to teach more community members handicraft skills. It is interesting indeed because in most groups teaching others has been a core activity of the group since its establishment; the seminar thus taught them something they already did. Yet, in the conversations, many people referred to this aspect as a pivotal information taken from the seminar.

The seminar, in which the training manual from the *Strengthening* project was tested, took place in Mbale. Bruno and Nuwa had travelled from Kampala to Mbale to meet the handicraft artists, who were recruited by Dorothy Wanyama. During one of our car rides, Dorothy remembers how challenging it was for her to convince the

handicraft artists to attend the seminar. Some were excited, she told me, while others needed to be convinced, almost persuaded, because they had never spent a night away from their families, or in a hotel. They did not know what to expect and were suspicious (field notes from 26/02/2020). Given the hat makers' group members' experience with the *munjankole man*, I immediately believe that their skepticism may not have been misplaced entirely.

As we sit underneath the branches of the large tree, Suzan now begins to talk about how she learned weaving and coiling at the age of 35. A woman from the village taught her and other group members. The formation of the group was also the initiative of this woman, who is no longer present (meaning that she has passed away). While one group member says she was taught in elementary schools, most of the women were taught by other women. The social dimension of handicraft work, which facilitates conviviality and shared responsibility, is important for the group members. As I already mentioned in chapter 5, for the women in this group it is important to work in a public space so other women see them, as can be seen in Image 7.3:

It is also to attract other members in the community to join us. So, once we are in a group like this, if somebody passes by and sees us, they are compelled to also join our group to also learn. [...] We all need to work together to come out of poverty, because you will find your fellow woman badly off – she joins when she sees us. We fight to come out of poverty. (Sarah Akumu, conversation with wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 281–286).

Unlike Suzan, who was taught in their home community, Winnie learned how to weave mats when living in a different region of the country. She tells how she initially worked in the swamps to harvest papyrus – *ensasa* – without knowing what exactly it was for. She was then encouraged to learn how to weave and knit mats “by some women who loved me so much” (ibid: 91). Among the *imbalu* initiation ceremony costume designers, the artistic work is, among other things, a generational responsibility; fathers teach their sons who are obligated to teach their sons as well (chapter 7.3). For the women of this group, learning the skills is less about a spiritual or cultural responsibility and more the consequence of social relations and activism. This also means that copying from each other is not considered something that should be avoided, but a sign of dedication and the willingness to learn more:

For example, when making my mat, and I find my colleague is better than me, [I] am able to copy from the one who weaves more neatly than me. (ibid: 279–280)

Abigail, a third group member, emphasizes the advantages of copying, as she states the following in regard to the benefits of the UNESCO seminar:

We copied from our friends – what they do. Because we initially went with these mats [points towards mats made from banana fiber mainly used to sleep upon], but when [...] we came back – we started making new products such as those baskets, because we found them there; our colleagues in the training were making them. (ibid: 209–211)

Copying allows the women to learn from each other and to widen the scope of their knowledge and skills and to gain experience. They consider it one of the most important benefits of the group, and it is clear to the women that sharing ideas and skills means to “complement” (ibid: 275) each other. In our conversation, the women present themselves as a group of people who firmly believe that they can advance and improve their wellbeing only collectively by working together and sharing knowledge. Suzan specifies this even more when she tells me it is imperative for the group members not to be

selfish in our knowledge but to share it with other people. [...] Because we are unemployed women who decided to not just remain idle in our homes without any income. (ibid: 288–292)

Image 7.3: Wickerwork Women Collective from Supa, who have arranged some of their products for the photograph. With dried banana leaves (raw material for baskets, dolls, mats and balls) in foreground, and church in background.



©Anna-Lisa Klages, 28/02/2020

In the conditions of the local situatedness, community members depend on one another. Here, government is present mainly in its absence; national cultural or arts and crafts associations that advocate for their interests are far away, as are international or foreign NGOs. Handicraft artists thus need to be able to rely on their social networks, and joint engagement with crafting artefacts is one way to do so. Working together in a group does not mean that the productivity and output are most important at all times. During a malaria outbreak in their community, for example, the hat makers group decided to spend their joint savings on medication rather than on raw material. The women of the wickerwork group understand that only collectively they can move forward, hence positioning conviviality over short-term economic profits. With conviviality, I here refer to the conceptualization of Francis B. Nyamnjoh, who understands conviviality in the following way:

Conviviality is recognition and provision for the fact or reality of being incomplete. If incompleteness is the normal order of things, natural or otherwise, conviviality invites us to celebrate and preserve incompleteness and mitigate the delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness. [...] Conviviality encourages us to reach out, encounter and explore ways of enhancing or complementing ourselves the added possibilities of potency brought our way by the incompleteness of others [...], never as a ploy to becoming complete [...], but to make us more efficacious in our relationships and sociality. (Nyamnjoh, 2017a: 341)

In the conditions of the group members' lived realities, this appears more sustainable. It helps them to establish and maintain their network of trustworthy allies, who jointly have more capacities than the sum of their individual skills. Drawing on Jean-Pierre Warnier (2009), who further argues that "a subject is always a subject-with-its-embodied objects" and as such, "identifying with a subject entails identifying with its bodily *cum*-material culture" (2009: 468, emphasis as in original), Nyamnjoh concludes that because of the interwovenness of subjects and objects, jointly they "draw on in the process of identification through mutual production, shaping and transformation" (Nyamnjoh, 2017a: 341). Working in a group that is connected through the joint artistic activities facilitates this conviviality, and it has the power to support the (re-)establishment of agency.

Sharing Knowledges and Conviviality

Becoming engaged with one of the three wickerwork groups I met with thus means to agree to the lived group values of sharing knowledges, acknowledging incompleteness, and complementing each other's work. And while teaching others, and therefore partially sharing knowledge, was emphasized during the UNESCO training,

copying, in most other interviews and conversations I had, was met with a critical eye:

And that's what we encourage [meaning to contribute to an "emerging global culture"], try to encourage [...] Because that is not something I see everywhere when I look around, unfortunately they're not – they're more interested in – they don't want to be creative. [...] No, they think whatever they have seen, which has been popular, it's what they should copy. Instead of being inspired by that. That's the most unfortunate part. Where does that come from? Intellectual-ness, just being lazy. Nothing goes intellectually. If you have the talent to draw, then create it, put two-three-four things together. But if you refuse to think, [...] 'cause you have the ability to copy; go ahead. That's what you do. (Interview with Nuwa Nnyanzi 26/01/2020: 1217–1225)

Copying, for Nuwa, is synonymized with the unwillingness to think, to engage intellectually, and to put two, three, and four together. The two very different interpretations of the same practice reflect two ways of conceptualizing the self and the other – one leaning on liberal thinking and the other emphasizing mutual co-dependencies between the self and the other, which resonates more with conviviality as understood by Francis B. Nyamnjoh or, for example, *ubuntu*-concepts. As a philosophical concept, *ubuntu* is frequently summarized as *I am because we are* (a person is a person through other persons (e.g., Eze, 2020: 933; van Norren, 2022: 3) and is highly debated in the contemporary discourses on appropriating sustainable development to the complex and multiple realities of post-independence African countries in the twenty-first century (van Norren, 2022). *Ubuntu*, *botho*, or however it is called in local languages, is not only a philosophical concept, but also a “key value associated with African humanism” (Eze, 2020: 928). In a book chapter originally published in 2012 under the title *Ubuntu/Botho: Ideology or Promise?*, and republished translated into German in 2021, Michael Onyebuchi Eze takes the reader through the contemporary debate on epistemological controversies regarding the question what makes a “human person” in a Bantu notion. In his recommendable elaborations on the controversies associated with personhood being subordinated to the society on the one hand and personhood as processual notion of becoming a subject within a society on the other, he conceptualizes the ethical implications of *ubuntu* as inclusive of the will to creatively engage with one another. “He has no *ubuntu/botho* means that he lacks humanity (not that he loses his humanity),” Eze writes, and continues:

Being a person through other people strikes one as an affirmation of an otherness-dependent subjectivity. It entails recognition that one's humanity is constituted by the “other”, with their differences and uniqueness. This otherness-dependency is not an abstract procedure; to be human, it is not sufficient to be in a passive relationship, but rather in a relationship of creative human engagement, as

Metz and Gaie persuasively argue: ‘in a typical African ethic, the **only** way to develop one’s humanness is to relate to others in a positive way’ [Metz & Gaie 2010: 275]. This means that if and when one’s relationship to the “other” is not considered “positive”, in a community where ubuntu is practiced, one’s humanity comitantly depreciates. (Eze, 2012: 251, emphasis as in original)

Among the women of the group from Supa and the members of the hat makers’ collective from Ishibira, individuality in handicraft activities is conceptualized as belonging to and being part of a group. The concepts of caring and of conviviality are here most present. If group members cannot sell, they make items for their homestead. If one or multiple group members are in need, joint savings are dedicated to whatever is needed most. If material is lacking, members meet to converse and share. Together, they demonstrate that they are “not idle women”, and through defining themselves as group members who produce visible, material output, they subjectify themselves as belonging to a collective bigger than the sum of the individuals that comprise it.

Although the two wickerwork groups here are organized differently, with one (the hat makers’ group) having a clear leader and the other one not, the techniques and materials used are not the only thing they have in common; they are also, by and large, female, as their activities are generally associated with female handicraft work, and their artistic results in measurable output that can either be used at home, be sold, or be rented out (for example for *kwanjula* weddings). They have a strong argument to legitimize their presence in public (for a more detailed analysis of how women groups establish themselves in the public sphere, see also Kasozi, 2019). With Michel Foucault, these actions and processes can be regarded as “technologies of the subject” and “techniques of the self” (Martin et al., 1988), through which he looks at subjectivity from both sides of the coin. First, he reconstructs how a particular governmentality acts upon a subject. Second, he considers how this very subject regards themselves as the object of their actions with the aim of shaping their own subjectivity. In doing so, they also position themselves with respect to various kinds of power.

By saying “we are unemployed women who decided to not just remain idle in our homes without any income” (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 291–292), the women from Supa respond to the governmentality that acts upon them. By then positioning themselves as women “who decided to not remain idle in our homes”, they shape their subjectivity as people who take responsibility and shape their lives. While they consent to the social order that executes hegemonic power upon them, they use their artistic skills to apply the techniques of self, which allow them to re-negotiate the hegemonic governmentality that discursively constructs them as needy and dependent. For Foucault, too, the question of subjectivity is a question of power and agency.

So, the need to establish market access can be regarded from multiple perspectives. Beside the economic interests, however, the needed access to a market is a result of the subjectivity the women (and few men) have established. However, it is also a push into the public, which they enter as a group, not as individuals. Per their public existence and visibility as a group, their activities become political, as they, quietly and by means of weaving, negotiate the silver lining between public and private according to their own terms, thereby pushing the boundaries of the governmentality that acts upon them and, possibly, questioning the social order.

Relating to Civil Society

In 1998, Aili Mari Tripp criticized most of the literature on civil society to be gender blind. In arguing with Carole Pateman, she stresses that “women cannot participate fully in public life without changes in the private sphere. Thus, the family is at the heart of civil society, and not seen as irrelevant or separate from it” (Tripp, 1998: 86–87). The subordination of many women in the private realm, she argues, holds inevitable consequences for the presence of women in the public realm. In 2019, Dorah Kasozi did not find significant changes to this situation, especially among women from rural areas with little or no formal education – meaning western style education. Engagement in women’s groups, however, may still be tolerated and under the pressures of poverty is more easily accepted, especially when it involves activities associated as female activities (Kasozi, 2019). The conscious decision of the women from the wickerwork group in Supa to meet and work in public must be considered in the political nature that negotiate between public and private. For, as Tripp reminds us, these boundaries are but the current status-quo of cultural, social, juridical, and political constructions. In the late 1980s, women in Uganda, she writes,

began to participate in large numbers in multi-purpose women’s associations. [...] The multi-purpose associations did not generally ‘engage’ the state unless provoked. Although their participation tended to cater to the needs of their members, they could under various circumstances become involved in local struggles over resources and power on issues that affected them. (Tripp, 1998: 94)

These associations were at times formalized and at other times remained informal. A little over ten years later, Ben Jones also argues that it is organizations and structures based on family and kinship obligations that are, among others, important sites of social transformation (2009). For the women from Supa and members of the hat makers’ group, it is through weaving that they were able to establish a space of, for, and to themselves. Even if they do not have any raw material to work with, according to the group leader Isaiah (one of the two male members of the group), the hat makers’ group still meets on Mondays to come together, discuss, and encourage each

other. The content of their activities, weaving mats, hats, and baskets (which can be both, woven and coiled, but in the women's group from Supa I only saw coiled baskets) as well as children's toys, is mainly considered to be a female activity in Uganda (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). One affirmative confirmation of this observation comes from a conversation I had at the very beginning of my research. In one interview I conducted with Assoc. Prof. Philip Kwesiga, he proclaimed that men,

if they are so desperate, they can do mats. And if they are very, very desperate, they would do baskets. But it is very, very rare to find a man who would do a basket. Very rare. And again, the basket is for serving ... So that would be the role of a ... where you serve from. (Interview with Assoc. Prof. Philip Kwesiga, art historian and sculptor 29/08/2018: 200–203)

Kwesiga raises another issue related to hegemonic dynamics in the social order that has been lingering around throughout the results chapters – the issue of class. In Kwesiga's words, a superlative does not suffice to exhaust the level of desperation needed for a man to turn to basketry – for even if he is very, very desperate, baskets are for serving, and serving would be the role of a woman. Kwesiga hierarchizes handicraft products from a male perspective. Since their *traditional* craft, blacksmithing, has almost died out due to industrialization, modernization, and its heavy, hyper-productive machines, the next best thing would be to turn towards pottery, only then would they assume weaving (of course, there are many other handicrafts, but here I only refer to those mentioned by Kwesiga). And being very, very desperate, for Kwesiga, means that a man would assume mat or basket making only if all other attempts to improve upon his (economic) situation have failed. Involuntarily maybe, Kwesiga positions more typically female handicraft activities at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder. Women and their products, then, are structurally subject to intersecting dimensions of marginalization around gender and class, which here are to be considered alongside formal education (or the lack thereof) and rurality.

Artistic Handicraft Objects, Materiality and Aesthetics

Only we don't have the material [enjulu- meaning cane fiber] as those that were planted by our forefathers have been destroyed due to land scarcity. Others sold the land where they grow, so we have remained with very few people who in turn – who have them on their land, and they also resorted to now just sell them. (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa 28/02/2020: 345–348)

Materiality matters. The *imbalu* uniform is considered complete only with the fur of the Colobus monkey. The bamboo for the festivities needs to come from within the

Mount Elgon National Park because of its quality and the spiritual meanings of bamboo for the rite of passage. For wickerwork products, local customers usually prefer natural products for ancestral worship and polythene-based artefacts for everyday purposes. Polythene-based artefacts, such as woven bags made from polypropylene strapping band bags (Image 7.4), mats, or baskets made from polythene bags and gift-wrapping paper (Image 7.5) over bags from natural fibers, are considered more durable and modern. Foreign customers on the other hand tend to prefer natural fibers (or fibers they assume to be natural), which resonate with western trends on interior design that communicate rootedness with nature, coziness, and responsible cosmopolitanism, and who hence prefer an ecological touch to the products they purchase.

Project writers and product promoters in Kampala and in the virtual space frequently point to the ecological sustainability of the materials used – either because they are recycled or because they are made out of plant-based natural products, “readily available” and hence both inexpensive and not exploitative towards nature. The material texture of the products responds to different aesthetic preferences as well as to the purposes of the artefacts.

At the *Kasubi Tombs*², baskets have maintained their original material texture (*enjulu* – cane fiber and *obukeedo* – banana leaf straws); also, the techniques and the tools used have remained the same. At the *Kasubi Tombs*, it is considered essential that baskets in which gifts are presented are made with natural materials and colors (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). Furthermore, all offerings made are covered, usually by a second basket reversed on top. The naturality of the objects that facilitate the offerings are in harmony with the overall architecture of the *Kasubi Tombs*, and bear symbolic meaning, as Muwanga Senoga explains:

The materials, technique, shape and uses of baskets signify respect, comradeship, beliefs and a sense of belonging and within the KRT [Kasubi Royal Tombs] they are found under a thatched roof that itself is derived from basketry skills. (ibid: 246)

The architectural design of the roofs of the *Kasubi Tombs* are also inspired by coiled basketry techniques. but in a different dimension. The process of reconstructing the tombs after a fire in 2010 has resulted, among other things, in the *Introduction guide to the preservation of Traditional thatching of the Buganda community in Uganda*,

2 For a detailed study of the symbolic meaning of handicraft objects at the Kasubi Tombs and the coiling techniques applied during their reconstruction, I refer to Maureen Muwanga Senoga's contribution in the co-edited volume *Craft and Heritage: Intersections in Critical Studies and Practice* by Susan Surette and Elaine Cheasley Paterson, titled *Craft narratives from heritage sites in Buganda* for the former. For the latter, I refer to Sébastien Moriset's *Introduction guide to the preservation of traditional thatching of the Buganda community in Uganda*, published by the UNESCO.

which includes the description of creating the ‘inner rings’ of the round ceiling in the shape of an “inverted basket shape” (Moriset, 2020: 11). Though much larger, they too are coiled, although the raw material here are reeds tied together with sisal rope. During my field stays, the plain *enjulu* baskets were frequently referred to as “Buganda baskets”. One of the reasons is their close relationship with worship at the *Kasubi Tombs*, but also, as I have learned, their function in ancestral worship in people’s homesteads (e.g., round-table discussion on ‘indigenous knowledge systems’, 28/02/2019). Another reason, especially in Eastern Uganda, for why they are called “Buganda baskets” is the lack of availability of *enjulu* – cane fiber – locally. It does not grow as readily in Eastern Uganda because the swampy areas needed for *enjulu* are few and land frequently privately owned.

Image 7.4: Woven Bag from Polypropylene Strapping Band



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During my meeting with the wickerwork group from Supa, I am told that baskets are important elements in ceremonial life – for the preservation of culture, for instance in weddings³ and for everyday activities, such as smashing Matooke. It is in the irony of the subject matter that *enjulu* baskets are high in demand locally, however, scarcely made by the members of the collective, because of the not-so-readily availability of the materials needed:

Only that we don't have the materials as those that were planted by our forefathers have been destroyed due to lands scarcity, others sold the land where they grow,

3 Meaning here introduction ceremonies, *kwanjula*, which is a traditional wedding ritual that originates from Ganda culture. Nowadays it is performed throughout Uganda

so we have remained with very few people who in turn – who have them on their land, and they also resorted to now just sell them. (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020: 345–348)

The hat makers' group mainly works with papyrus that is purchased in sacks of 2000 Ugandan Shilling each (at least in 2020). Papyrus, similar to cane, grows primarily in wetlands; Supa and Ishibira are not. The need to buy raw material – or at least some materials – is a common issue among the handicraft groups in Eastern Uganda. For the hat makers, the price of the raw material regularly results in a lack of material altogether. Market access, in this regard, does not begin with the question of where and how to sell artistic handicraft products. It begins with the availability of materials and the lack thereof, which itself is related to environmental changes and the mobility of people that increases the “flow of forms” (Pinther and Weigand, 2018) and of artefacts, I should add. This is true for both international and regional mobility.

Functional baskets either as household items or in ancestral worship aesthetically emphasize the materials used, and the technical skills applied in producing them. While in ancestral worship they facilitate the offerings that are an important asset to maintaining a relationship with the ancestors (see also round-table discussion on ‘indigenous knowledge systems’ from 28/02/2019; Muwanga Senoga, 2021), *enjulu* baskets in households are used for smashing Matooke or for cleansing nuts from dirt and cobble. Lidded baskets made out of banana leaf stalks (*obudeku*) and, nowadays frequently, polyphone bags apply a different aesthetics. They are used for storage of, e.g., rice or groundnuts (often, but not always peanuts), and have a decorative purpose as well. Their coils are much thinner in diameter, and designs are usually single colored (in a dark brown or black) patterns based on or resembling traditional geometrical decoration designs (see also Image 5.1).

Ceremonial baskets for introduction ceremonies can be plain *enjulu* baskets (for a detailed description about the function of *bibos* in *kwanjula* ceremonies, see chapter 2.3.2; Tumusiime, 2011). More frequently, though, they have an oval shape and a flat bottom. Rather than having a conical shape that becomes wider towards the top, specially made *bibos* (decorated *kwanjula* baskets) are coiled straight above one another. They have lids and handles, and they are predominantly designed in white with patterns in glossy gold, rosé, green or blue (see Images 7.5). Like other coiled baskets, *bibos*' foundational material is *obukeedo* (banana leaf straws). Unlike *enjulu* baskets though, the surface is made from polythene bag stripes, combined with glossy wrapping paper in gold, rosé, green, purple and/or blue (called *buveras*). *Bibos* are an eye catcher because of their color and the reflections of the glossy wrapping paper; their colors symbolize wealth. In their symbolic communication, they remind of Christian symbolic aesthetics that established white as the color of purity and can be, I argue, understood as both a colonial continuity, by which the symbolic and economic meanings of modernity and civility shape the contem-

porary aesthetics, and as cultural appropriations of foreign influences, which are integrated into local customs and ceremonies.

In her article *The White Wedding*, Natasha Erlank reconstructed the evolution of symbolic meaning of Christian weddings in South Africa in the early twentieth century and concluded that Christian wedding ceremonies were used to proclaim

the value of family life, and importantly, broader social networks as well as status-based associational life in an era of family disintegration. At the same time weddings were often a double-edged indicator of status through their references to sexual purity by means of white frocks. (Erlank, 2014: 29)

Erlank further observes that by the 1930s, Christian weddings had become the standard among black South Africans. According to Erlank, these developments must be understood as an act of self-empowerment, for black weddings were considered as “racial misappropriation” by white South Africans (ibid: 29). While this analysis is particular to the South African situatedness, in modern Uganda, the white wedding is also an element of Christian heritage. What the aesthetics of *bibos* in *kwanjula* ceremonies also display, however, is the integration of colonial elements into contemporary celebrations, which, in its visual and material components of *bibos*, are fused into the post-colonial realities. As Collin Hinamundi of the Daily Monitor, one of Uganda’s national newspapers, observed, currently “introduction ceremonies have become marriages in some cases” (Hinamundi, 2021 [2010]: n.p.). Hinamundi associates this decision with the high costs of *kwanjula* ceremonies, leaving couples without the financial means to be able to afford a church wedding. As a consequence, many couples favor their *kwanjula* ceremony over a church wedding thereby altering and adapting the ceremonial customs, with *bibos* acting as a symbol and an expression of these developments.

The gifts presented in *bibos* are either lidded (the lid of the basket in the left image in Image 7.5 is laying just beside it outside the picture frame) or wrapped in wrapping paper that leaves the baskets visible but hides the content. In both cases, the content of the baskets remains invisible. *Bibos*, I learn from the women from Supa, are needed in large numbers – a man should present at least 30 *bibos* to the family of his future wife, filled with goods, which include “salt, curry powder, cooking oil, tomatoes, onions and other vegetables, fruits, bread, margarine, sugar, washing soap, paraffin” (Kaduuli, 2010: 42) and dresses (both for men and women) for family members of several generations. Nowadays *bibos* are frequently rented for the occasion, but their white and glossy interpretations remain absent from crafts markets and souvenir shops.

Images 7.5: Baskets from Polythene Bags and Gift-Wrapping Paper. Used in Kwanjula (also okwajula: Introduction Ceremonies) (left) and as Collection Baskets (right) at a Church in Kampala.



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Enjulu baskets are also rarely found there. Their material textures directly relate to the particularities of the situations in which they are used. It is not by accident that baskets used in more inward-oriented rituals, such as presenting gifts to the *deceased kabakas* during ancestral worship, are natural and reserved in design and patterns, while *bibos*, delivered by women who carry them on their heads visible to all attendants of the *kwanjula* ceremony, are laboriously decorated with glossy colors that obey to contemporary fashion trends.

Eco-Sustainability and the SDGs in Artistic Handicraft Production

Aesthetically disconnected to those two poles of a design/materiality spectrum remain baskets that can be found at crafts markets and shops. Here, the aesthetic expectations include tourist perceptions of African authenticity and an increasing ecological sensitivity that results in a wish for souvenirs to be not only culturally embedded and soaked with historical importance but also ecologically sustainable. These character traits cannot be separated entirely, but increasing awareness for climate change and, more importantly, the UN-SDG emphasis on making everything *sustainable* are significant in the outward orientation of associating meanings of baskets, as I will proceed to demonstrate.

In the conversation with the women from the wickerwork group from Supa, the main speaker, Suzan, explains about the different materials. This includes the information that they also use *buveras* – which here includes polythene bags and gift-wrapping paper. Suzan explains that they buy the plastic material at the market –

similar to the polypropylene strapping bands used for the bags they produce – the *buveras* because of their aesthetics and the polypropylene strapping bands because of their durability. My response to this information is a long-stretched “Oh!” Both Dorothy (DW) and Barbra (BKL) then quickly take the word, and specify that the use of plastic materials is actually re-usage and about protecting the environment. Suzan Echima (SE), though, did not say anything about protecting the environment. For me, in this particular moment, the information seems to be sufficient. I reply, “Oh, okay,” and then return to the conversation about the materials, how much is needed and how it reaches there:

SE: *Now [for] the small one, you buy obuso [fibers] and knit them using the fivers and sue the obukedo made out of dry banana leaves. However, they are pulled [ripped] off before they are dry. [Points towards the bibo basket] We also use obukedo, then we buy the white material, sewing them together.*

ALK: *What is the white material, and also the golden material*

SE: *Those are buveras.*

ALK: *Okay. Can you tell me, what buveras are?*

SE: *They are polythene bags*

ALK: *Ooooh!*

DW & BKL: *And gift-wrapping papers. Polythene re-usage protecting the environment.*

ALK: *Oh, okay ... It sounds like you need to buy a lot of material in order to make a basket like that?! (Conversation with wickerwork group from Supa 28/02/2020: 146–157)*

This little sequence of about 30 seconds demonstrates the disconnectedness between the Social Worlds of Dorothy, Barbra and me, and the Social World of Suzan. To Suzan, who is the artist and the creator of the baskets we are discussing, the functionality and corresponding aesthetics of the baskets are most important; they communicate their purpose in their form, their colors, and their patterned geometric designs. Dorothy and Barbra, however, are familiar with the importance of recycling and ecological sustainability in the marketing discourse. As the owner of a craft shop in Mbale, Dorothy regularly meets with foreign customers, and, after having interpreted my “oh”, immediately re-positions the meaning of using plastic materials in handicraft artmaking as contributing to ecologically sustainable social change. Meanwhile, I am preoccupied with following my own agenda and finding

the next *relevant* question to ask. I am willing to easily accept the new information, even though in that very moment I have serious doubts that this statement is correct. I cannot reconstruct whether this “oh” was simply an utterance of surprise or whether there may have been disappointment in my voice when I said it. Whatever it was, it provoked the felt need among Barbra and Dorothy to further contextualize Suzan’s statement into a direction that resonates with the goals of, for example, the *Strengthening* project (and hence the wider UN/UNESCO discourses) because here I am regarded as the person who does follow-up research on the impact of the UNESCO seminar. In doing so, however, Dorothy and Barbra address the discourse of sustainable development rather than to the discourses Suzan was addressing, which are more occupied with the functions of the products she was just showing me.

While Suzan’s answer to my question was in Lugisu, then translated into English, Dorothy and Barbra did not translate their complementary statements back into Lugisu, which excluded Suzan and her colleagues from being able to further engage in the discussion. Later in the conversation, I specifically ask them to also translate side discussions we were having into Lugisu, but here I did not do that. I may have had my thoughts about the information at that moment, but did not share them, which also means that I did not allow for them to be deconstructed. The analysis of this little sequence makes the power dynamics at play visible. It exemplifies a means by which positions of independent groups are silenced in the situation at hand, especially when they do not confine to the major discourses and position taken in the situation. The products, however, remain firm in their communication and continue to articulate the (purposefully) overlooked position.

7.3 Negotiating Lived Culture

Imbalu Initiation Ceremony Costume Designers

For the encounters with the wickerwork groups whose work and positions I discussed in the preceding chapter, I traveled westwards from Mbale. The lands where the hat makers’ group members live are dry lands. In the car ride before our meeting with them, Barbra looked out the window and commented the scenery, saying, “These people here really are poor, their land is so dry” (field notes from 26/02/2020). The Northern slopes of Masaba mountain⁴ where Bubyangu parish, home to the members of the *imbalu* costume designers’ group, is located, present themselves in different colors to us. Here, at almost 2000m above sea level, what I see most are shades of green.

4 Also known as Mount Elgon after the Elgonny tribe, who used to live in caves on the southern slopes. The Bagisu name is Masaba Mountain. According to Bagisu belief, it is the embodiment of the founding father, who came down to earth from the sky (Were, 1982).

I have come to the center where *imbalu* costumes are designed. Here, the center does not refer to the physical place where we have gathered for our encounter. The center are the men who possess the knowledge of making *imbalu* costumes, the spears, arrows and the knife for the execution of the circumcision, who are cultural and community elders who guard the knowledge of *imbalu* and guide through the ritual. They are an archive of the lived cultural heritage, both in terms of the material culture and the intangible cultural practices, and therefore, Bubyango parish here is referred to as the center of the “culture of the Bagisu” (Conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers’ group 26/02/2020: 397–398). *The culture of the Bagisu*, or rather, the *imbalu* rituals of the Bagisu in Uganda and Kenya, have been subject to several studies, especially sociological and anthropological, from late colonial days until today (Heald, 1982; La Fontaine, 2004 [1963]; Makwa, 2021& 2012; Odutsa et al., 2019; Were, 2014), to name but a few. Common throughout the literature on *imbalu* is the attention paid to the wording used when talking about *imbalu* rituals, as they cluster around music and expressive dancing⁵, expressed in terms such as “*khusina imbalu* (dancing circumcision)” (Makwa, 2021: 127, emphasis and brackets as in original) or “*samba imbalu ni kamani nga unusani* (dance *imbalu* with strength/energy like a man)” (ibid: 145; Heald, 1982: 18). Evans Nyongesa Odutsa, Beatrice Busolo, and Seline Oketch observe that “circumcision songs and dances pervade the whole ritual process”, and conclude that men who do not participate in the rituals “do not have the same status as those who “danced” *imbalu*” (Odutsa et al., 2019: 590). Today, *imbalu* songs and the *kadodi* dance are “used as a major tool of mobilizing voters at all campaigning rallies” (Written exchange with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 28/09/2022) and have thus found symbolic impact in politics way beyond the rite of passage into adulthood.

Unlike scholars and researchers who specifically aimed at studying *imbalu* and its implications for gender roles (Heald, 1982; Khanakwa, 2016), those who investigated the role and agency of music and dance during *imbalu* (Makwa, 2012; 2016, 2021), or colonial and post-modern influences on contemporary developments (Odutsa et al., 2019), my focus was different in two ways. First, I was interested in the material culture, first and foremost in terms of the costumes worn by candidates, and second, it was through theoretical sampling and by following the route of the UNESCO *Strengthening* project that *imbalu*, and more specifically, the costume designers who dress the *imbalu* candidates, became a focus in my research. The more I learned about *imbalu*, its meanings for families and the community but also for cultural identity and its agency in politics, the more I wondered about the computability with the aims and the content of the *Strengthening* project. Because of its importance to many people who identify as Bagisu and the complexity of

5 At times also meant as stomping the ground/earth, which is associated with the bodily (and mental) strength of the candidate (Makwa, 2021).

the interconnectedness between music, dance, food, family, worship, and dress, in what follows I will briefly elaborate on the meanings of *imbalu*, exemplified with selected practices I learned about during my encounter with the costume designers that usually involve ancestral worship in one way or another. Proceeding, I will then discuss the costume and its role during the actual *imbalu* ceremony. In closing, I will return to Nelson Kasfir's (2017) take on African civil society and Antonio Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony in light of the processuality of the costumes as a material carrier of change, continuity, and self-determination.

Imbalu

Technically, *imbalu* means male circumcision. Socially, however, *imbalu* means building community, ancestral worship, the establishment and negotiation of norms and values as well as gender roles (Khanakwa, 2016). In a similar conceptualization, Odutsa and colleagues describe the functions of *imbalu* as follows:

Among the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda and most African tribes, being non-technological societies, circumcision ritual plays a very significant role to its people. [...] [I]t ensures the community develops a sense of confidence that they have in themselves through its traditional practices such as initiation rituals. Since every member of the community is practically involved, ritual serves to create a sense of unity. [...] Initiation ensures that people of the community uphold the communal values and beliefs are re-enacted. (Odutsa et al., 2019: 587)

Furthermore, songs and dances performed during *imbalu* “educate, empower and play the role of transforming boys into men by telling them what society expects of them” (ibid: 588) and are increasingly politicized by having found their way into political rallies, among others (ibid). Independent of their age, male members of the community would remain ‘boy children’ until having *danced imbalu*. In her historical analysis of the impact of colonization on *imbalu*, Pamela Khanakwa (2016) writes that until the early postcolonial period any ‘boy child’ was not allowed to own land within the community nor was he allowed to join the *council of men* and become involved with politics at the local level.

Imbalu is not limited to the ritual of pen-surgery but includes a complex and strict set of rituals. They begin months prior to the actual ceremonial celebrations. Those begin with the child approaching family elders for them to allow for him to become a candidate, dancing and singing (and learning the dances and songs) in preparation. Closer towards approaching the zenith of *imbalu*, community members gather bamboo and ask for ancestral blessings (field memo from 9/02/2020) from Masaba Mountain. The candidates migrate to the swamps two times. The first time to fetch water for locally brewed beer (*buusera*), and the second time in close

timely proximity to the pen-surgery, to smear mud on their faces (which makes them look fierce) (Conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group 26/02/2020; Khanakwa 2016). The rituals also include the slaughter of a goat, and the candidate moving from the maternal family to the paternal family to receive blessings for their participation before they proceed towards the respective cultural grounds dressed in special costumes. It is because of those costumes that I initially became aware of the *imbalu* rituals. As I was following the traces of the *Strengthening* project back to Mbale, I learned that some of the members of the designers' group had also participated in the training executed in 2018. The information left me puzzled for several reasons. I wondered how costume designing (and blacksmithing of knives, bells, spears, and arrows) could be conceptualized together with the various interpretations of wickerwork activities, with doing pottery, or with beading. I further wondered how questions of standardization played a role here. Mostly I wondered how the logics of commodification and sustainable development as delivered by a depoliticized, humanitarian creative industries empowerment project would work alongside the understandings of cultural expressions here, among those who, borrowing from Bruno Sserunkuuma, could be considered *custodians* of Bagisu culture. Those local community elders, cultural and political leaders of the parish, whom Odutsa et al. (2019) refer to as *traditionalists* because of their beliefs about the centrality of *imbalu* for their individual and communal sense of self as well as the associated meanings of their artistic work.

Kumusambwa Kwe Mbalu – The “Spirit of Imbalu”

Imbalu, I understood within minutes of my arrival at the *center*, is very important to the costume designers. Upon arrival, I am told immediately about the importance of slaughtering a cow or a goat and about hanging its heart on a Nile tulip tree – called *kumusoola* tree by the members of the costume designers' group. *Kumusoola* is also the totem of a Bukusu (also Babukusu) clan. Furthermore, the

kumusoola tree is an indigenous African tree, which is believed to be the strongest in terms of resistance to wind and storm, draught, attack by wild pastes, survival and all types of soils. It is also medicinal, and because of its strength and resistance to hard conditions, it is used for covering graves. The kumusoola tree is therefore looked as a link between the living and the dead. The young man being circumcised is being initiated into manhood and adult life full of challenges, and so he's expected to pick the character traits of kumusoola. (Written exchange with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 28/09/2022)

The Bukusu and the Bagisu are very likely to share a common history, for members of both people believe to have come into this world from Masaba (Were, 1982). For

certain they share a common culture (not only) of *imbalu*, including rituals, dances, music and costumes involved (Were, 2014). Tradition, customs, rituals, and language hence travel back and forth between artificially established country borders, hence a shared name for the *kumusoola* tree. For the men present, hanging the animal's heart into the tree is part of *imbalu*:

There is one animal that must die, then they get its heart, then they put [it] on that tree called kumusoola. [...] Everyone who passes will know they are going to circumcise a boy there, once they see that kumusoola with a heart of the animal on it, they just know they are going to circumcise a boy there. (Conversation with members of the imbalu costume designers' group 26/02/2020: 8–13)

The visible heart on the tree has an encoded communicative function to those who pass by as it informs about what is happening in the house stead. However, this is not the sole purpose of the heart on the *kumusoola* tree, and so Sulaiman Kanyike adds:

To put the heart, it shows that – in any culture – the boy won't settle if you just circumcise minus putting the heart. And it also shows that the dead of the clan are seeing what they [the family] are doing. Because this is culture. The dead can also see that there is happiness in the home. (ibid: 16–19)

The ancestors of the candidate's family and the wider community, I learn throughout this conversation, are important actors all throughout the period leading towards the actual *imbalu* processes, also referred to as *xuwetsa imbalu* – searching for *imbalu*. The beer is brewed partially to please the ancestors, and resisting pain during the pen-surgery is imperative not only to becoming a man, but also for the family's reputation among the living and the dead and access to being able to reside among the ancestors in eternal life succeeding death. Ancestral blessings are thus essential, and a successful rite of passage partially depending on their goodwill. Hence, Muhamed Sande Odongo further specifies Kanyike's additions:

The ancestors. And also, he was saying when the ancestors know that the ceremony is taking place, the ancestors won't disturb the boy getting circumcised, they will embrace it. (ibid: 20–21)

Danny Nabende Wamakote, a lecturer at the Mbale Campus of the Ugandan Christian University, is Barbra's father, my host during our stay in Mbale, and an individual with a lot of knowledge about customs, traditions, and the history of the Bagisu. After my return we keep in touch irregularly, and when I ask him about the meaning of the heart on the *kumusoola* tree, he has the following to add:

Imbalu is believed to be a spiritual ceremony and spirits are believed to feed on blood; that is why the goat is sacrificed – to appease the gods and the late ancestors as to make the young man courageous and bold. The gods/spirits use symbolic communication via the heart of the slaughtered goat and it is the head of the clan who can interpret the message from these gods by looking at how the heart of the goat reacts, i.e. is the candidate going to be brave or not. (WhatsApp Interview with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 28/09/2022)

Imbalu, I observe, is a topic that moves everyone around. My meeting with the *imbalu* costume designers is lively throughout. Everyone present is engaged in explaining *imbalu* to me and discussing the importance of the rituals with each other – not only the costume designers and cultural leaders from the group, but also Dorothy Wanyama and our driver, Geoffrey Manana, are actively involved in discussing the importance of and problems associated with *imbalu*. Dorothy considers herself a devoted Christian; throughout the week we spend together we pray every morning in the car before we set off, we pray prior to every meeting and before we part after every meeting. Now she remains ambivalent about her opinion regarding the rituals; on the one hand she clearly distinguishes between herself and other people “who love God” (meaning the Christian god) and those who do not believe in it. On the other hand, she is in awe about the skills of the *umushebi* (circumciser), a doctor who did not go to school:

You know, circumcising within seconds! By a doctor who did not go to school. It attracts everyone. Even these young boys and girls will run and follow the one going to be circumcised. – Except those religious people – for us who love God, we don't follow. We just take our boys to the hospital to circumcise. But those who don't believe in God must attend. (Dorothy Wanyama, conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group 26/02/2020: 50–53)

Later during the conversation, she returns to the special doctors without having attended formal education⁶:

[Ahmed], he is the one I have been communicating with. He is the special doctor who knows how to do the surgery – without having to go through school [laughs a bit]. (Dorothy Wanyama, conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group 26/02/2020: 259–261)

In listening to those words, Geoffrey becomes agitated and firmly replies that taking the boys to the hospital means “killing culture” (Geoffrey Manana, driver, con-

6 Circumcisers do, however, receive training that follows a strict protocol. The training includes teaching about healing herbs that facilitates the healing of the wound post-pen-surgery.

versation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group, 26:02/2020: 54). In their study on post-modernist influences on the practice of *imbalu* initiation, Odutsa and colleagues (2019) conclude that religion, western education, technology, migration, urbanization and politics affect and change the ceremonial procedures and their symbolic meanings. In her reconstruction of the historical genealogy of *imbalu*, Khanakwa (2016, 2018) associates the developments that Odutsa et al. conceptualize as post-modern factors with colonialism. She elaborates on how Christian missionaries sought to move circumcision away from public cultural grounds they associated with immorality and into hospitals instead (ibid). My findings suggest both historical and post-modern factors are at work with regard to *imbalu*, as the quote above and the reaction upon it indicate. Danny, too, understands religion (both Christian and Islamic) and education to be the major threats to *imbalu*, as religious and medical actors "use schools and worshipping places as for demonizing the rituals accompanying circumcision" (WhatsApp Interview with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 28/09/2022).

While this may be so, manhood and manliness continue to be closely associated with how a candidate performs during *imbalu*. And so, all political endeavors began (and, according to Wamakote, still do) with a successful initiation, which in turn heavily depended on dancing, singing and the mastering the costume thigh bells (Image 7.6). And while the political and social meanings of dancing and musicking *imbalu* has been discussed elsewhere at length (Makwa, 2012; 2016, 2021), the costume and its associated meanings has, with the exception of Wotsuna Khamalwa (2012) and Pamela Khanakwa (2018), thus far received little scholastic attention.

Of Bells and Beads: The Imbalu Costume

Culture as an idea is about how human beings teach and learn "proper conduct" within a specific setting. Through language and role models, humans learn how to behave from other beings, and this transmission of knowledge carries across generations. (Eicher, 2000: 59–60)

If culture is about teaching and learning proper conduct, then ceremonial dress is the articulated outward orientation of this teaching and learning. With regard to the *imbalu* costume, the bells – *bizenze* – hold this function.

Uncircumcised men amongst Bamasaba/ Bagisu have no respect accorded to them and therefore cannot hold any responsible position in community. To make community aware of your becoming a serious and responsible [man], you are supported to demonstrate this publicly and the young man goes round the entire community as the bells ring inviting the community to witness his initiation into manhood. Bells also help in demonstrating the skill of dancing, which was an

attraction to young girls preparing to marry. When the boy is being circumcised, he is supposed to stand still, and so if he shakes or moves, the bells sound noise [sic] and that means he has failed the test of circumcision. Lastly, should he try to run away, then he can easily be identified. (WhatsApp Interview with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 28/09/2022)

In part because of *imbalu*, the Bagisu is “the community [...] regarded as the most patriarchal and fearsome tribe in Uganda” (Oduisa et al., 2019: 588) – a phrase I also read in many newspaper articles. Heald (1982) associated *imbalu* with the control of anger, which made men fearsome to others. Oduisa and colleagues find her analysis falling short in that *imbalu* and the transition into manhood is more than about controlling anger. Rather, they argue, it is about teaching and learning how to become a *man* as expected from society. They understand for *imbalu* to be first and foremost as empowerment of boys, who, through dancing and musicking and by visually taking on a new costume, are encouraged to take an active role in shaping their families, communities, and society. Indeed, in Danny’s elaborations, the bells communicate to family and community members. They inform about a transition about to occur. They issue an invitation for them to take part in the ceremony. In earlier days, the candidates moved from their paternal family home to the maternal family home, before proceeding throughout the community (Khanakwa, 2016). Although this has shifted and candidates move around less, the bells still inform the nearer neighbors and community members. During my visit in Bubyango parish, the costume designers eagerly showed me the various parts that make a complete *imbalu* costume. After some pointing to parts and a demonstration of a hat in the process of making (Image 7.7), it is decided that one of this year’s candidates⁷ who lives in proximity should dress for a demonstration (Image 5.2). It takes about twenty minutes until we can hear bells jingling; getting louder as the dressed candidate approaches us. The bells themselves are heavy, made from one piece of bent round iron plates formed into a semi-circle, convex both on the upper and lower half, and open to the side. Inside are marble-shaped pieces of iron that jingle whenever the wearer moves.

During *imbalu* (with the exception of pen-surgery), the initiates constantly move. As elaborated above, dancing is essential in *imbalu*. Candidates who dance wildly and agilely are believed to be better prepared for the pen-surgery, and the jiggling of the bells accompanies and emphasizes the stomping of the dancing candidates and the sound of the drums beating. In citing John Roscoe, who observed *imbalu* during the 1920s, Pamela Khanakwa writes about the interplay of the bells, dancing, and stomping:

7 Eventually, the *imbalu* ceremonies of 2020 were cancelled due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. During our meeting in February 2020, though, the virus had only begun to spread across the globe, and there had not yet been any reported cases in Uganda.

Three or four iron bells like cow-bells, strung around the right thigh so that they rattled as the wearer stamped to the rhythm. [...] By stamping their feet and causing the bells to jingle, the candidates invite lookers to join in the dance and cheer them on during this important moment in their lives.” (Roscoe 1924: 28, as cited in Khamalwa 2012: 366)

Image 7.6: Demonstration of iron thigh bells as worn by imbalu candidates during ritual.



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The bells thus not only issue an invitation for spectators of the community to watch but also to become part of the moment and co-shape the experience of the candidate. Combined with the cheering, the drums, and song, the candidates might transcend into a state of ecstasy which is associated with performers reaching a different, trance-like level of consciousness that allows for bodily experiences to be perceived differently.

The bells accompany the candidate and communicate to supporters and allies to join him and to become part of his rite of passage. They do, however, also control him, and give him away when he moves during pen-surgery, which Danny describes as *failing the test of circumcision*. *Imbalu* candidates wear bells around their upper thighs,

but also around their arm wrists and ankles, I am told, meaning that every move will be heard.

Alongside the bells, the beads – *kadaali* – are the second most important asset to the costume. As can be seen in Image 5.2, candidates wear many beaded necklaces around neck and shoulder. They cross both on the back and the chest of the candidate, and jointly with the bells, this part of the costume alone can weigh up to several kilograms (Khanakwa, 2018). I was surprised to see that the beaded necklaces are entirely of plastic. Jointly with the decorations of the hat and the handkerchiefs worn around the neck, their materiality and colors create a sharp contrast to the natural materials including leather, cowrie shells, sticks, and the fur of the Colobus monkey. Such developments are, in the UNESCO heritage discourse-dominated contemporary debates, often associated with a loss of cultural heritage (e.g., 2003 UNESCO Intangible Heritage Convention or 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* and succeeding debates, see, for example, de Beukelaer, 2017). During the round-table discussion in 2019, the question of materiality and keeping the “traditional ways” was debated controversially as well, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Prof. Kizito Maria Kasule: I think his point, he has a point because what is happening is this; traditionally for example, you will find water in shrines [in a masilo, meaning the Royal tombs] in these clay pots and also in baskets and also in gourds. Today if you have been to the shrines and of course you have been there [all laugh] this is what you find there. You find plastic basins and jerricans. While in the past for example some of these dry herbs would be kept in gourds, today they are being kept in sacks, plastic or polythene bags. And this is where he is having a point. What is the intention of that?

Dr. Joan Kekimuri: *But that takes you back to the functional object.*

[...]

Prof. George Kyeyune: *I am saying that the ancestral way that is still progressing and changing because of interventions from European modernity, from Chinese products, adjustments are being made [laughter] and this has implications on – if we take the example of a ritual, even the ritual is changing, because of a-b-c-d. So it is that kind of transformation I am interested in and it has not been the same. And when we say Buganda artifacts, and it is fixed in a certain space and it has remained the same for thousands of years; I am interested in the impact of western intrusion, I mean modernity – and it has actually happened only that you are not paying attention to it.*

Dr. Joan Kekimuri: *No, I do pay attention to it. It has happened, but I argue that whether this object has changed from a clay pot to a plastic pot, within the context of the practice, the meaning at that particular time does not change.*

Prof. George Kyeyune: *Has always changed!* (Roundtable discussion on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, 01/03/2019: 618–647)

The three participants debate the question whether practices facilitated by handicraft objects change when the materiality and origin of the artefacts are altered. While Joan Kekimuri is convinced that the meaning of a practice does not change if a clay pot is replaced by a plastic pot, George Kyeyune believes the opposite to be true. He also emphasizes that cultural, artistic practices have always changed and refers to European colonization in the past and cheap Chinese products in the present. The debate, which circles around the question of authenticity and meaning making also includes the question of African bead art, especially when European glass beads are or were used (Oberhofer, 2018; Oehrl, 2016). However, Michael Oehrl and Kerstin Pinther and Alexandra Weigand (2018) remind that the flow of materials and ideas of form are much older than one might think; cowrie shells and carnelian beads, for example, “have been found in Celtic tombs in Central Europe, far from their source, as has Baltic amber been in Egypt” (Oehrl, 2016: 11).

In my initial conversation with the costume designers, we speak mostly about the meanings of *imbalu* and about the designers’ struggle to keep the rituals and associated costumes alive, which is challenging also because “everything now it’s about money here,” as Sulaiman Kanyike puts it (conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers’ group 26/02/2020: 37–38). In terms of the costume, we speak more about the leather belts, the hat, and the animal fur (which is a controversial issue around here). So, in my WhatsApp interviews with Danny, I specifically ask about the beads, which, according to the literature, are essential, yet were not specifically addressed by the group members I met. Danny refers to beads being another medium of communication with ancestral spirits and the gods. In addition, they allow for the elders to judge the dancing skills of the candidate:

The way/style, which the candidate uses to shake the beads portrays the various dancing skills. The rhythm of these drums keeps varying at different times of the dances, thus [the] need to shake the beads to match each beat. [...] Beads have since time memorial in Africa have been used [sic] in shrines as a means of communication with their gods. Elders are believed to have the powers to interpret messages depending on how the beads land when shaken and thrown to the ground. The movement and position of beads as the candidate dances can be used to predict whether the candidate will be brave or not. (WhatsApp Interview with Danny Nabende Wamakote, 30/09/2022)

No one among the independent handicraft groups I spoke with were preoccupied with the possibility of altered associated meanings of their products due to the integration of non-indigenous materials. Meanings of materiality were more associated with the aesthetics of the product (e.g., the tinsel on the hat of the *imbalu* costume, see also Image 7.8, or the glossy gift-wrapping paper for the *kwanjula* baskets) or with longevity (i.e., baskets made from polypropylene strapping band). It appears that alterations and adaptations are welcome, as long as they are being developed from within and not forced upon, such as the prohibition of hunting the Colobus monkey for the purposes of using its fur for the costume. As I previously mentioned, the fur of the Colobus monkey is an important asset of the costume. It is used for the cone-shaped hat, and the long hair of the black-and white fur of the animal sways back and forth, up and down, thereby following the rhythm of the dancing candidate. It is also used for the decorations of the two sticks the candidate holds in his hands, and on the leather belts, which are decorated with cowrie shells, seeds and plastic straws cut into little pieces and assembled hanging on the belt with the seeds and fur. For the members of the costume designers' group, in our conversation also referred to as "engineers, who were not formally trained" (conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group 26/02/2020: 394–395), it is imperative that "the animal must die" (ibid: 395), even though it has been prohibited by the National Government. The fur has since become very expensive because in addition, the poachers need to shoot the animal on Masaba mountain, which has been declared a National Park, making hunting illegal. Environmentalists also heavily criticize poaching and frequently report a drastic decline in Colobus monkeys, which is commonly associated with *imbalu* (but less with deforestation and environmental degradation) (Walukamba, 2020). During the UNESCO seminar, I am told, the trainers also demanded the designers to consider alternative artificial materials that could replace the animal fur:

And you know government of Uganda they condemn killing that animal. We challenged those officers during the UNESCO seminar when they trained to train use to use sisal instead of this animal. Our LC5 Mr. Mujaasi said: "No, that animal – that animal must die for the circumcision." [Laughter] He challenged those officers and he said: "NO! NO! NO! It must die, we don't want you to kill it, this is our culture and that is our uniform. It is a very special uniform." So that is a very big brand. Because when they go in the forest to hunt it, the government at times arrests them for killing it. So, the culture is not balancing. (Sulaiman Kanyike, conversation with members of the *imbalu* costume designers' group 26/02/2020: 345–351)

While we are speaking about challenges of the group, the topic of the Colobus monkey is addressed with more urgency, and I am asked to promote their interests regarding the hunt elsewhere. Sulaiman, who speaks frequently, elaborates how ille-

galizing their activities affects the group and how my advocating for their interests might help to improve their situation:

We make them [the costumes with fur] but we pray you help us that when we are making them, we are not in panic that we shall be stopped from making them by the legal authorities. That will help us a lot. Because with a legal document, you can invite us anywhere with our items and we come without anybody stopping us on legal grounds. (ibid: 365–368)

Image 7.7: Imbalu costume designers' first demonstration of unfinished costume elements. Mixed materials.



Image 7.8: Imbalu costume hat and upper part of costume from above. Traditionally made from Colobus monkey fur, here combined with contemporary elements such as tinsel in gold and blue, white and red and bulbs as well as the skull of a female black-and-white-casqued hornbill.



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The group's strongest argument is their culture. As individuals who possess the "generational heritage spirit" (ibid: 469), which is in their blood (687), they consider it as their duty to keep the ritual alive and to establish alliances with individuals as well as groups, organizations, and other actors (such as the government) who will, ideally, advocate their interests. And should they not actively support their interest,

then at least not execute their legal power as with the government, whose members appear to forget willingly about the poached animal. When I ask about the this, I am told that government officials who attend the *imbalu* ceremonies either do not notice or “don’t even remember that we have killed the animals” (ibid: 371–372).

When asking groups about their challenges, their answers are varied. To some extent, however, they are similar. All groups talk about a lack of capital for investment to buy needed raw material (which is, unlike the story told on glossy project leaflets and websites, frequently not so readily available) for bulk production, so that when customers wish to purchase a larger amount of products, their interests can be met. The *imbalu* costume designers’ group has additional ideas about how their challenges could be met. They wish for a workshop, where the costumes can be put on display, ideally with a price tag. A price tag fixes a price, which currently is frequently subject to negotiations. A full costume can be very expensive, 700.000 UGX (which is more than the average monthly salary of a public-school teacher), and many community members have little money. During the UNESCO seminar, the attending members were given some ideas for innovations, which, among others, resulted in the tinsel now decorating the hats of those who can afford it. Not many can, though, and thus it remains a struggle for the designers to gain some income with their work. Their own workshop, they are sure, would help immensely, and so would machines with which they could work faster.

When talking about challenges, I notice a change in the wording and narrations similar to the one I elaborated upon in chapter 7.2. While talking about the *imbalu* ritual, the costumes, the importance of the knife and other customs, rituals, and activities associated with *imbalu*, keeping the culture and with it the relation with their ancestors alive is central; after all, the rite of passage welcomes new members into the adult society. Every member of the designers’ group is obligated to teach his sons, as three members, who in the original recording frequently interrupt each other, explain. Dorothy (DW) and Barbra (BKL) translate this sequence in the following way:

DW: *Yes, it [learning to make costumes] is compulsory to every son that is born in the family. It is like a spirit or taboo. It is just like how in every family for every child that is born is taken to school; immediately they start understanding. So, with this culture, even if the son went to school, they are still convicted by the spirit of circumcision and driven back home to learn these things.*

BKL: *So, just like taking a child to a government school in Uganda, it is compulsory that they must learn this. You must learn this, whether you like it or not. That’s why it is living from generation to generation.*

DW: *So, whether you go to school, this is like a spirit that must drive you back home to do these crafts, because it is a generational heritage spirit.* (Conversation with members of the imbalu costume designers' group, 26/02/2020: 460–469)

When talking about the challenges, the need for additional hammers is named first. If there is another seminar, “machines to produce these tools [hammers] to ease the work and save time” (ibid: 542–543) would be of use. Secondly, the lack of capital is an important issue, for one group member, whom I call Ahmad Aheirwe, says, “We are financially constrained, thus cannot afford to make in bulk for wholesale or instant selling. We make a unit item depending on the availability of the order” (ibid: 559–560). In terms of vocabulary used, depending on the topic, the language applied changes. When talking about training their children, the men speak rapidly and cut each other off, using words that roughly translate to “spirit or taboo”, “living from generation to generation”, or “generational heritage spirit” to refer strongly to the associated meanings of the group members.

Once the artistic activities are regarded as a business, though, it becomes about optimizing the work, potentially industrializing at least part of the production process (thereby direct references to the iron bells are made), and the costumes become mechanical products rather than a vital aspect of lived culture.

Cultural Heritage: On Whose Terms?

In terms of challenges or things needed, the people with whom I spoke referred to tools that would help them. They did not speak about the lack of skills or the lack of a market for their products. But they did speak about high prices for the materials needed, and customers who do not have a lot of capital themselves. When following Odutsa et al.'s categorization, families whose children partake in the full *imbalu* ritual are among the “traditionalists”, who “are the conservatives who have not been influenced by formalized education and Christianity. They undertake the ritual step by step, use traditional instruments and apply traditional medicine during the process of healing.” (Odutsa et al., 2019: 592). Although Odutsa and colleagues' argumentation falls short of differentiating between the inevitable influence of western education and Christianity (as well as Islam) on all structural levels and a conscious decision to position the community's very own tangible and intangible cultural heritage above or alongside once forced and nowadays commonly established structures, their observations are important in the situation. While some community members Odutsa et al. categorize traditionalists as living in urban centers or in the diaspora, the majority continue to live in small villages. Frequently they are farmers who, in Barbra's words, are not poor only because they live on fertile land. In monetary terms however, they may have little income hence little to spare to spend on costumes.

The tinsel, the plastic beads⁸, the straws, the light bulbs, and the handkerchiefs made from cloth are all fairly recent additions to the *imbalu* costume. Alongside the iron thigh and wrist bells, the leather belts with the cowrie shells, seeds, and, as controversial as it is, the long mane of the black-and-white Colobus monkey fur used for sticks, the hat, and the belts, the *imbalu* costume designers display the aesthetic acculturation and adaptation of foreign materials to practices that build on traditional techniques. In a lengthy conversation with Kizito Maria Kasule about the conceptualization and the meaning of the word *traditional*, he told me that when talking about traditional crafts in the Ugandan situatedness, traditional does not refer to “old” artefacts⁹. Rather, it is to be understood as an asset to or a development of traditional aesthetics and techniques with contemporary elements that extend the original meanings of artefacts without disconnecting them from their historical roots. The pre-colonial traits continue to play an important role in contemporary objects, grounded in local aesthetics; therefore, traditional here does not refer to the age of an object, but rather to its situatedness in the continuity of cultural objects and artefacts being “vital” elements of lived culture, to borrow again from Nannyonga-Tamusuza (Voice memo from WhatsApp call with Kizito Maria Kasule 21/06/2021).

Thus, while the *imbalu* costume designs are constantly adapted depending on aesthetic preferences, availability of materials, and financial resources, I understood that the group members, who are, in their various roles, the backbone of the *imbalu* ritual, have a very clear idea about the importance and value of their work and are not willing to let actors from the outside (e.g., government or the trainers from the UNESCO seminar, development, and/or heritage agendas) determine what should be changed or how. Instead, they form alliances with organic and traditional intellectuals, such as with LC5 Mr. Mujaasi and their cultural leader, teacher, and archive, the *umukuuka* (see also chapter 5.2.7), who are members of the community and hence can relate to the importance of, for example, poaching the Colobus monkey.

Considering the importance of *imbalu*, its dances, music, costumes, cuisine, and practices of ancestral worship, as a rite of passage that qualifies men to take part in politics and family planning is for many individuals, families, and communities among the Bagisu, the aims of the *Strengthening* project, which sought to equip artists and artisans with additional skillsets to improve upon their practice and maximize benefits, appear to be a misfit. The focus of the project was economically oriented and focused on the mechanical enhancement of skills and ideas about

8 Barbra refers to them as “Chinese beads” (Barbra’s observation protocol from 26/02/2020), and curiously plastic objects are frequently referred to as “Chinese items”. They are frequently cheap and durable, though I frequently heard people say that food prepared and served from pots and plates made the traditional way simply taste better

9 For a discussion about the meaning of traditional in the Arts of Africa, see also Pinther (2022).

“what else to integrate into artistic practices”. *Imbalu* on the other hand, is pivotal for the self-identity of a people, through which, by forms of ritual, dancing, music-making and dressing, community members negotiate the boundaries between self, family, and community, where the private is part of the public and vice-versa. It negotiates gender roles and hegemony as well as consent within.

The *imbalu* ritual powerfully displays the interconnectedness between material and intangible culture and supports the demand for an inclusive definition of art that regards music, dance, drama, and visual culture to be equally important elements of artistic and creative expression that are more than the sum of its parts. Here, the artistic practices alongside worship and culinary practices make part of a cultural practice that shapes the perceptions of the self as a member of an ethnic group and a community. With the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO member states acknowledge that

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO, 2003: Article 2.1)

I already discussed the role of the UNESCO in my research situation (both in chapter 5 and 6). In doing so, I elaborated on the discursive power of the UNESCO and its conventions on the local discourse on cultural heritage (chapter 5.2.4 and chapter 5.3), as well as on the discourse of the economic potential of the creative industries (chapter 6.3). Among the *imbalu* initiation costume designers, the UNESCO itself is no point of reference. And still, with regard to the objectives of my research it is worthwhile to consider the (critical) literature on intangible cultural heritage and its linkages to sustainable development discourses and, more importantly, the political dimension of heritage preservation and management. The UNESCO definition omits any reference to the political aspects of intangible cultural heritage. Instead, cultural heritage is positioned within the realms of particular histories, relations to nature and sociability among community members. However, in the case of *imbalu*, cultural heritage is not only deeply political, as it establishes, maintains and negotiates hegemony within the community, but it is also a site of resistance that opposes the enforcements of alterations from the outside – whether due to missionization, education, medicalization, forms of aesthetics, or environmental activism (Khanakwa, 2016).

In their co-edited volume *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, Helaine Silverman and Dede Fairchild Ruggles (2007) address the important questions of who defines cultural heritage, who manages and controls its stewardship, and who benefits the most from it. “Heritage is a concept to which most people would assign a positive value”, they write, and proceed in acknowledging that

heritage is also intertwined with identity and territory, where individuals and communities are often in competition or outright conflict. Conflicts may occur over issues of indigenous land and cultural property rights, or between ethnic minorities and dominant majorities disputing the right to define and manage the cultural heritage of the minority. [...] Heritage is by no means a neutral category of self-definition nor an inherently positive thing: It is a concept that can promote self-knowledge, facilitate communication and learning, and guide the stewardship of the present culture and its historic past. But it can also be a tool for oppression. (Silverman and Fairchild Ruggles, 2007: 3)

Imbalu promotes a particular form of community and demands members to play their assigned role in it. It establishes forms of inclusion and exclusion to varying degrees, depending on how individuals and families are willing to perform. Unlike the UNESCO approaches to cultural heritage, the tangible and intangible, including performative and discursive, elements that make *imbalu* are deeply rooted in political activity, making cultural heritage a site of civil society, rather than having civil society actors protect and safeguard cultural heritage.

Conceptualizing *imbalu* and with it the work of the *imbalu* costume designers’ group within a framework of civil society from a locally grounded perspective rather than of cultural heritage within a UNESCO discourse allows for the consideration of the political agency of the material and immaterial culture and bears the potential to understand the meanings of artistic handicraft production and products beyond the enforced paradigms of economic development and the preservation of culture.

7.4 Conclusions

Moving beyond Major Discourses. Turning towards Overheard Positions

Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. (African Proverb, as cited in Achebe and Brooks, 1994)

In an interview with Jerome Brooks, Nigerian writer, poet, and editor Chinua Achebe is asked about incidents or events that motivated him to become a writer. In his answer, Achebe first elaborates on his always existing interest in stories – of the stories told in his family, the Christian stories he learned at school and, as

he grew older, stories of adventure. In the interview he says that at first he did not understand that he “was supposed to be on the side of those savages who were encountered by the good white man” (Achebe and Brooks, 1994: n.p.). In succeeding he elaborates how in stories he read, he “instinctively took sides with the white people. They were fine! They were excellent. [...] The others were not ... they were stupid and ugly”, he continues. Then, he turns towards the danger of not having one’s own stories, exemplified by the proverb of the lions. Once Achebe realized that he did indeed not have a story, he tells Brooks, he *had* to become a writer and a historian, too.

In a similar narrative, Nigerian-American writer Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie gave her now famous TED-talk *The Danger of a Single Story* in 2009, in which, among others quoting Chinua Achebe, she rephrased the need to understand that, only by telling multiple stories about people, we can begin to grasp the complexities of their realities. Although she does not call it so, in her speech she describes a white hegemonic gaze upon Africans, who continue to be homogenized in spite of sharp and precisely articulated criticism from decolonial and postcolonial thinkers. She writes:

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate’s [at a U.S. university] response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner. (Ngozi Adichie, 2009: n.p.)

The artistic handicraft artists I met tell multiple stories about their work. Through their work’s agency they position themselves as engineers, doctors, businesspeople, hardworking women, or people who refuse to think of themselves as victims of a conman who deprived them of their savings. They tell stories of economic challenges, for sure. In addition, they also tell stories about people whose knowledge serves as archive for the cultural identity of a community, people who articulate their political interests, who form alliances, build communities, and recruit like-minded individuals, people who establish conviviality, and people who negotiate visibility and ownership of public spaces and who utilize their artistic skills in multiple ways.

With this third results chapter, my aim was to introduce a small selection of the many associated meanings about handicraft objects prevailing outside the dominant discourses in what today is called Uganda have with regard to artistic handicraft products. This introduction is selective as much as it is partial (Clarke et al., 2018) and incomplete (Nyamnjoh, 2017a), it is situated in the temporal, political, and societal pre-pandemic moments. Which conclusions, then, can be drawn from these fragmented stories, interpreted by translation by Barbra and Dorothy and analyzed

by me? What are the articulation possibilities of artistic handicraft practitioners in civil society, and what is the agency of their products? What are the roles of engagement with artistic handicrafts in Ugandan civil society, and how do they shape and co-constitute political articulation as well as authorship?

The two case studies I introduced and reconstructed, the work of two independent artistic handicraft collectives – one women's group engaged with wickerwork from the plains of Supa and one men's group who are the “engineers” of the *imbalu* initiation costumes worn by candidates on the day of their rite of passage. Throughout the pages of this chapter, I described how and where their associations with the creative work they are engaged with differ from major discourses around sustainable development and heritage production on the one hand and poverty reduction in form of economization of activities on the other hand. Ngozi Adichie argues that those who are in positions powerful enough make other people's stories “the definitive story of that person” (Ngozi Adichie, 2009: n.p.).

The *imbalu* initiation costume designers' group, for example, have what they consider to be a generational and cultural responsibility towards their families, communities, cultural leaders, and ancestors. Furthermore, *imbalu* is as much political as it is spiritual (and cultural). Their importance in politics and ancestral worship and their knowledge around the ritual and handicraft skills equip them with agency that allows them to push for their interests. In their work, Kamruzzaman (2019), Kasfir (1998a; 2017), Kleibl (2021), Mamdani (2012), Obadare (2011; 2014), and others have, in various ways, articulated the needs for situated and nuanced conceptualizations of civil society capable of capturing and understanding the relationalities and processuality that shape the public sphere in post-colonial African realities. The findings from the two case studies discussed in this chapter follow this notion. They exemplify the political dimension of cultural rituals and practices, which are frequently depoliticized by the heritage discourses used to reconstruct their symbolic meanings in the realm of “traditional African art” or “intangible cultural difference” that remain indifferent to time and historical developments (Pinther, 2022: 31). Furthermore, both case studies emphasize the need to also consider gender aspects (Tripp, 1998) and the agency of artistic and cultural expression as important non-human elements that co-constitute civic articulation. In this conclusion, I will thus return to and elaborate on both.

The Gender Dimension

When I met Richard Kawere, then CEO of UTA, he also introduced me to his female colleague, though not without informing me that she is a feminist. She, Aisha, he says, “is not like me. For me, I want equal balance of society” (Interview with Richard Kawere, CEO of UTA 11/03/2020: 404–405), meaning that feminists want to concentrate on “one side of humanity” (407) and therefore produce inequality. Nuwa

Nnyanzi tells me how there is no gender imbalance in African societies. Rather, he tells me, gender issues and structural discrimination of women is a western issue, exported into the world historically by colonizers and missionaries and currently by development agendas. Acclaimed novelist and critic, Arna Ata Aidoo seems to back this perception when already in 1986, she wrote, “Feminism. You know how we feel about that embarrassing western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from [North] America to ruin nice African homes” (Aidoo, 1986: 34). Clenora Hudson-Weems, too, argues that feminist thinking, also in forms of *Black Feminism*, fall short of being able to conceptualize the Africana women’s realities into the established feminist paradigm. She writes that

‘Black Feminism’, is some Africana women’s futile attempt to fit into the constructs of an established White female paradigm. At best, Black feminism may relate to sexual discrimination outside of the Africana community, but cannot claim to resolve the critical problems within it, which are influenced by racism and classism. (Hudson-Weems, 2006: 40)

She argues for the need for Africana women to be able to engage in self-naming and self-definition, inclusive of valuing what Hudson-Weems calls “the quality of Africana life” (ibid: 40). Like Tripp (1998), Hudson-Weems observes that Africana women may have different needs than those dominating feminist gender debates in other regions. Even more so, to “remain authentic in their existence”, Africana women need to be able to prioritize their needs

even if the needs are not of primary concern for the dominant culture. The ever-present question remains the same: what is the relationship between an Africana woman and her family, her community, and her career in today’s society that emphasizes, in the midst of oppression, human suffering, and death, the empowerment of women and individualism over human dignity and rights? (Hudson-Weems, 2020: 17)

In leaning on Mahmood Mamdani and Ernest Wamba Dia Wamba (1995), Emanuelle Bouilly, Ophélie Rillon, and Hannah Cross conceptualize activism and mobilization beyond common theories of social movements that refer to “the idea of an overt, conflictual, disruptive, collective and organised action targeting the state and aiming for social change” (2016: 339), which allows to make meaning of the “ways in which they [individuals] commit themselves, resist or protest against oppression, and how precisely they respond to multiple oppressions where gender, class, racial/ethnic, and other power relations interlock.” (ibid: 339).

Even before I left Kampala during my last field stay, it became apparent to me that the dimension of gender and assigned gender roles are a dimension of rele-

vance. When I met with the handicraft groups, I was reaffirmed in this observation; only one group included members of both genders, and in that group the sole male member I met with (though officially the group has two) is the initiator and leader of the group. Both case studies I presented in this chapter are groups that communicate their own narratives by means of their artistic practices. The women's group from Supa, though, are committed to conviviality in the understandings of Nyamnjoh (2017), whereby togetherness, complementation, and mutual learning are central. In doing so, the women, seemingly by the way, establish their visibility and a space in a public realm, which they fill according to their needs, facilitated through their artistic handicraft work, which is widely acknowledged as a female activity that allows them to inhabit the spaces they claim. Furthermore, by submitting to the governmentality of overcoming poverty through the commodification of everyday activities, the women can also establish themselves as subjects who are not willing to remain idle but are active, self-sufficient and, in consequence, more powerful.

It was and continues to be argued that village communities, small-scale formal and informal credit associations, and spiritual groups are too inward-oriented and as such detached from the state and the market to have an effect on public policy (Chazan, 1992; Mehler, 1999; Obadare, 2014; Omach, 2016). Tripp (1998), however, observes that “many women see their organisations as an alternative to the exclusions and marginalization they face in more conventional political arenas” (93), and continues to explain that

after 1986, urban women began to participate in large numbers in multi-purpose women's associations (usually with income generation at the core of their activities) and in credit and savings associations. Most organisations [...] involved a combination of activities that ranged from producing handicraft or other goods for sale to cultural activities (music, drama, dance), providing assistance to orphans or other people in need, [...] and involvement in community self-help initiatives of various kinds, for example, buildings, roads, wells, and assisting rural women's groups with their skills. The women's groups would switch emphasis on various activities as the needs of the members changed and as new opportunities presented themselves. Men were more likely to be in single-purpose organisations such as co-operatives, sports clubs and burial societies. (Tripp, 1998: 94)

Tripp further states that the objectives of the groups, which she describes as processual and changeable, could, under various circumstances, turn towards local power struggles on “issues that affected them” (ibid: 94). Conceiving civil society more broadly, Tripp concludes, allows for understanding how “many of their struggles were intensely political and significant” (ibid: 94). In my conversation with the women's group from Supa it became clear to me that the symbolic meaning of their wickerwork emphasizes conviviality and visibility alongside the wish to generate

income. Their focus may be inward-oriented, but to me their aims seem far from apolitical. Their conscious choice of location, their favoring mutual learning over outdoing one another in design and artistic skills, and the choice to work jointly to *come out of poverty*, to me, should be considered as Africana womanist engagement in civil society.

In chapter 7.2, I further concluded that the artistic products of the women's wickerwork group from Supa keep firm in their communication and articulate positions that hence create a counter-moment to the cultural hegemony executed in the particular moment by Barbra, Dorothy, and me. In the situatedness of the group conversation with the women seated underneath the large tree and the need to overcome language barriers, they became non-human actants that did not submit to the narrative of sustainability and recycling. When elaborating on situated conceptualizations of art Kerstin Pinther (2022) informs about the need to

[kritisch] scheinbar universale Vorstellungen wie die des unbelebten Objektes [...] zu hinterfragen, da Gegenstände auch in der Kategorie von Subjekten und als aktiv Handelnde wahrgenommen werden können. Neben den Bezeichnungen, dem Sprechen und Urteilen über die ästhetische Gestaltung von ‚Objekten‘ manifestieren sich die verschiedenen Kunstauffassungen auch im Gebrauch, zum Beispiel in besonderen Formen des Zeigens und des Displays von Artefakten. (Pinther, 2022: 11)

critically question seemingly universal assumptions such as those of the uninhabited object, as objects can also be perceived in the subject category and as active actants/actors. Besides their names, the talking about and judging of the aesthetic layout of 'objects', the various conceptions of art also manifest in their use, for example in particular ways of showing and of the display of artefacts. (my translation)

Pinther here refers to an aesthetic *dispositif*, which direct a particular gaze upon objects, and that can be both more permanent in nature, for example in ritual or ceremony, or rather short term and situated in a particular moment. As such, the artistic handicraft products become allies of the women artisans who made them and do not submit to the positions posed upon their creators.

Cultural Expression in Civil Society

Equally gendered but entirely different in the aesthetic and symbolic communication of their art, associational organization, and demonstratively outward oriented is the work of the *imbalu* initiation costume designers. *Imbalu*, I concluded in the preceding sub-chapter, is as spiritual as it is political and cultural. Here, too, Pinther's elaborations on the aesthetic *dispositif* facilitate an understanding of the

agency of the *imbalu* costume in ritual; for her conceptualization not only allows for the artefact to direct the gaze upon it but also emphasizes the processuality of creative and artistic articulation, which attributes meaning to the ephemeral and temporal, meaning the situatedness of art in a particular moment, for example, in ritual or ceremony. As co-constituents of a particular moment, embedded in performance, they are capable of generating new themes of aesthetic and social (and political, I argue) practices. As such, they are actants in a web of complex relationalities that negotiate consent as much as they provoke counter-hegemony and become vital agents in civil society.

The fur of the Colobus monkey, to some an essential element of the *imbalu* costume that “has a special skin [...]. [I]t has that design” (conversation with *imbalu* ritual costume designers, 26/02/2020: 108–112), to some a demonstration of the dancing skills of the candidates, and to others a custom that must be changed to protect the endangered animal, is one such moment where political and hegemonic powers are highly contested, and the social order in place is challenged. As the Colobus monkey has a long black-and-white mane, the fur follows the rhythms of the dancing candidate. To the costume designers, it is an important part of the costume, and the fur is used for the hat, the belt, and the two sticks the candidate carries and holds onto during the ritual (see also Image 7.8). The costume designers’ group, among which cultural leaders and community elders, consider the animal fur as important element in ritual. In the conversation, the LC5, Mr. Mujaasi, becomes a point of reference in two ways; Mr. Mujaasi, a member of the community but also a politician, is a person with authority. As LC5, he holds the highest political mandate on communal level, and since he is a member of the community who knows about the meanings and roles of *imbalu*. In the conversation, it is through Mr. Mujaasi, who allegedly said “that the animal must die for the circumcision” (ibid: 347) that the group members receive recognition for their activities and are able to justify it. For it is a highly respected member of their community who publicly supports the killing of the black-and-white Colobus monkey for the sake of the costume.

In the elaborations, Mr. Mujaasi even went so far to “challenge those officers” (ibid: 348). To me, it ultimately remains unclear whether those officers are the government of Uganda (345) or “those officers during the UNESCO seminar” (346) – although the wording might suggest for them to be the latter rather than the former – but the words used explain where the alliances lay because it is “the” government of Uganda, “those” officers from the seminar, and “our” LC5 Mr. Mujaasi. To this end, Mr. Mujaasi not only legitimizes the killing of the animal and the use of its fur, but also, in the role of a traditional intellectual, becomes the spokesperson of the interests of the costume designers’ group and their self-governance regarding subject matters revolving around *imbalu*. Neither the government of Uganda nor the officers from the UNESCO seminar, who had proposed to replace the fur with sisal instead, are recognized as holding authority over decisions made here. They provoke resis-

tance instead, and Mr. Mujaasi is a provider of authority for this resistance, thereby confirming their own authority, which they possess through their roles as artists who are the bearers of creative cultural knowledge and in possession of the “generational heritage spirit” (ibid: 469).

Regarding the adaptations and changes to the costumes they make, the uniform designers’ group demand artistic and creative liberties, and their works are testimony to continuities and changes within the community, public, and political life, as well as the private and semi-private realm of family. The artefacts and objects that in sum make the *imbalu* costume should be understood and reconstructed with what Pinther refers to as their intrinsic complexities as “created works, as art, as archive and memory, as example of locally situated aesthetics and cultural practices and to be considered through all of their intrinsic complexities and mobilities and hence conceptualized through the sum of their potential meanings” (Pinther, 2022: 32, my translation).

Development initiatives such as the UNESCO *Strengthening* project favor conceptualizing artistic handicrafts from their particular positionality as entities that submit to their own agendas as set in their conventions. The 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which provides the theoretical framework upon which was built the UNESCO seminar in which Suzan, Sulaiman, Isaiah, and Ahmed participated, assumes that artistic handicraft artists lack professionalism and artistic skills, which hinders the ability of their work to be successfully sold at an adequate price that allows for the artists to survive on their work. By means of equipping them with additional design, artistic, and marketing skills, the project writers assume that economic prosperity will be the consequence – provided artists keep “working hard” and learn to turn their creative potential into economic gains. Embedded in this conceptualization are agendas of poverty reduction and the safeguarding of the diversity of cultural expressions, which here are considered as creative industries that are possibly, but not necessarily, part of the cultural heritage of a nation-state.

The case studies of this chapter highlighted some of the multiple shortcomings of this attempt to “professionalize” “underprivileged women” while safeguarding “traditional knowledge” and harvesting the “economic potential” of the creative industries, which can make “up to 11% of a country’s employment”, and introduced some of the perspectives of the handicraft artists, who too often remain implicit in approaches to development. By proposing to conceptualize the creative and artistic work and engagement of the two groups from artistic, social, and civic perspectives as interlinked, co-constitutive, and interdependent, I demonstrated how art objects and artefacts participate in meaning making, while negotiating (but also affirming) concepts of community living, local aesthetics, gender roles, authority, and ultimately, development.

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-Tamusuza, 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 adaptations 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.

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