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**Mutations of globalisation and local actors' agency:  
phenomena of the Social and Solidarity Economy  
in Uganda's Busoga region**

**Esther Kronsbein**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines transformations occurring in everyday life in Uganda's Busoga region as a result of globalisation and the population's responses to its manifestations. This is done with special emphasis on alternative economic practices, which can be classified as activities of the Social and Solidarity Economy. In the course of this study, several such practices have been encountered and turned out to be in a complex relationship with globalisation. A combination of postcolonial theory, the Post-Development approach, and world-systems analysis serves as a theoretical framework for the interpretation of the research results. The latter are based on empirical fieldwork carried out in the scope of a 34 months' stay in the Busoga region in Eastern Uganda. By focussing on the everyday experience of people living in the region, the study attempts to learn from actors in the global South rather than try to teach or even to "develop" them.

**Keywords:** globalisation; Social and Solidarity Economy; development; alternatives; Uganda

## 1. A “sophisticated mutation” of globalisation encountered in Busoga (Uganda)

As James Ferguson rightly points out, the current situation of Africa<sup>1</sup> is “not a lamentably immature form of globalization, but a unique ‘advanced’ and sophisticated mutation of it” (Ferguson 2006, 41). With regard to his book *The Anti-Politics Machine*, Ferguson clarifies that it is “not principally a book about the Basotho people, or even about Lesotho; it is principally a book about the operation of the international ‘development’ apparatus in a particular setting” (Ferguson 2014, 17). The same principle applies to this paper, which is not primarily meant as a study on Uganda or the Basoga people. Rather, it is supposed to trace manifestations of global capitalism and alternative economic practices in a local economy – in a particular setting, namely Uganda’s Busoga region. Nevertheless, the setting significantly influences the way the people concerned shape the objects under examination.

Uganda in general and Busoga in particular were integrated into the world economy through the colonial administration’s encouragement of cash crop production and the simultaneous introduction of the need of cash money, especially for paying taxes, from 1900 onwards (Asowa-Okwe 1994, 149-150). In addition, the British provided consumer goods, on which cash money could be spent (Fallers 1965, 55). This approach was typical for colonial administrations in Africa (Mbembe 2001, 40-41). The Ugandan economy belonged to those colonial economies that rather relied on smallholder farmers than on plantations for the production of cash crops (Bonger 2004, 254) Its strong cooperative movement has been involved in agricultural production for more than 100 years (cf. e.g. Develtere 2008; Nannyonjo 2015). The Busoga region is a good illustration of both these characteristics, given its intensive production of coffee and cotton by smallholder farmers in the first two thirds of the twentieth century, making it an important factor in Uganda’s export economy and providing it with one of the strongest cooperative unions in the country (cf. Hasselmann 1976). At the time Uganda gained political independence in 1962, it boasted one of the strongest economies in Africa, in large parts due to its favourable climate and fertile soils that granted self-sufficiency in terms of food (Ofcanski 1996, 93). However, the political turmoil and inconsistent economic policies that followed through to the mid-1980s bitterly disappointed its population’s hopes of a prosperous future (cf. e.g. Mutibwa 2016; Ofcanski 1996). In the 1970s, the political and economic destructions caused by then president Idi Amin’s administration devastated the

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Africa’ expands beyond the name of a geographical area to “a category that (like all categories) is historically and socially constructed [...] that is imposed with force, that has a mandatory quality” (Ferguson 2006, 5). Though Ferguson despises the generalisation and the stereotyped imaginations encompassed in the term, he admits that there is no alternative to using it (ibid., 7). In this paper, I use the term ‘Africa’ in his sense, endeavouring to avoid inappropriate generalisations and the reproduction of stereotypes wherever possible, yet being aware of the limits of that endeavour.

Ugandan economy (Mutibwa 2016, 260-264; Nabuguzi 1993, 53; Nayenga 2002, 43). It was a time of violence, public disorder and problematic economic policies that harmed the country severely (Mutibwa 2016, 272-276, 434; Ofcanski 1996, 42-48, 94-95; Whitworth/ Williamson 2010, 1), especially the expulsion of all foreigners and Ugandan citizens of Asian descent (Mutibwa 2016, 260-261; Ofcanski 1996, 44, 94). In contrast to the country as a whole, Busoga has been recovering only very slowly from that period of destruction (Busoga Development Plan 2017). The government of Uganda is oftentimes commended on having implemented “one of the most ambitious programs of economic liberalization on the African continent” since the late 1980s (Collier/ Reinikka 2001, 1). This implies that the process of opening the Ugandan economy has enabled globalisation to penetrate it and impact on people’s everyday lives. This eventful economic history, which has borne elements of globalisation and cooperation since the early twentieth century, makes the Busoga region a particularly interesting setting for this study.

This paper draws on empirical field work conducted in three of the eleven districts of Busoga, namely Buyende, Jinja, and Kamuli, during a 34-month stay in Busoga from 2016 to 2018. The methods of data collection were 40 qualitative problem-centred interviews, including 10 expert interviews, and document analysis. Documents were accessed at *Jinja District Archives*, provided by Ugandan government institutions, and accessed on the internet. The research was undertaken following a postcolonial approach, i.e., the attempt to reach a high level of self-reflexivity (in terms of positionality, power constellations, and privileges), transparency, reciprocity, cultural sensitivity as well as respectful treatment of the researched<sup>2</sup> (for details, see: Kronsbein 2021).

The prevailing view of Africa’s integration into the world economy is that it has strong impacts on the lives of African populations – even though the question whether this is to their advantage or disadvantage is highly controversial (Cooper 1993, 84). Although these perspectives point to the need for myriad studies on the effects of globalisation on people’s everyday lives across the continent, research in this area has been surprisingly sparse. According to Ferguson, this is due to the tendency of globalisation theorists from neoliberal, critical, and ostensibly neutral camps alike to integrate into their respective theoretical frameworks Africa’s experiences with globalisation. Out of the findings on the topic, a considerable part is neither evidence of African economies turning into newly industrialised countries and winners of globalisation, nor do they seem to confirm the critique of the global North’s increasing exploitation of Africa (Ferguson 2006, 26). The findings of my study are no exception to that rule. The seemingly contradictory

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<sup>2</sup> (e.g., through learning their language, having them decide where to meet for the interview, respecting their priorities with regard to the research topics, providing them with feedback concerning the research results and giving them the chance to comment on them)

nature of the findings at first glance indicated that a one-dimensional theoretical framework would not suffice to make sense of them. It was only through a three-dimensional interdisciplinary theoretical framework consisting of postcolonial theory, the Post-Development approach, and world-systems analysis that their complexity could be covered.

Post-Development thinkers and alter-globalists have long been searching for alternatives to capitalist development. A concept frequently under consideration is the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) with its manifold manifestations. I examine in this study what kinds of SSE activities are practiced in the Busoga region and how they react to the impacts of globalisation. In addition, I analyse the potential of such activities to help their members survive within the capitalist world-system *and* to pose alternatives to capitalist development.

In section 2, I present the concept of globalisation underlying this study and my research results concerning the effects of globalisation on everyday life in Busoga. In section 3, I briefly explain the concept of SSE and present its relation to my research results. Section 4 provides a conclusion on the research results.

## 2. Globalisation

*The most important aspects of globalization are the breaking down of national economic barriers; the international spread of trade, financial and production activities, and the growing power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions in these processes. (Khor 2001, 7)*

The process of globalisation as described above is enabled by technical innovations in terms of transport of people, goods, raw materials, information, and capital (Glenn 2007, 5; Greig et al. 2007, 165) that enable international corporations to source inputs and market products wherever they deem most convenient (Glenn 2007, 70; Greig et al. 2007, 165). I regard the undeniably important political, social, and cultural dimensions of that process as *consequences* of economic globalisation that functions through a capitalist mode of production and international division of labour. The permanent need for capital accumulation and competition in the market economy are the key features of capitalism that drive globalisation (Glenn 2007, 9-11). Large firms' continuous fight to remain competitive by reducing their production costs and endeavour to cope with market saturation by extending their product range and customer base expands across the globe the areas in which firms search for cheap inputs as well as new markets (ibid.). In order to attract those investors, governments create an environment that is favourable for investors yet destructive of the social security system and the natural environment (Hall et al. 2015, 9-11). As even some globalisation-friendly thinkers admit, global economic growth has not led to wealth for all, but rather to growing social inequality (cf. e.g.

Stiglitz 2002, 5), an observation obscured by average indicators such as the gross national product (GNP), that provide no information on the dispersion of wealth within the population (Latouche 2019, 282-283) or on the amount of money foreign investors extract from the respective country.

In the following, I describe the central contributions of each of the three elements of my theoretical framework to the understanding of globalisation in this study (section 2.1). Postcolonial theory as my fundamental approach towards the research topics (and the research method) provides the basis. The Post-Development approach and world-systems analysis complete the picture. In section 2.2, I outline the results of my research with regard to globalisation's effects on everyday life in Busoga.

## **2.1 Globalisation as a continuation of colonialism and the development discourse**

Postcolonial critics distinguish colonialism from coloniality, the latter referring to power structures that oppress people far beyond formal decolonisation in all spheres of life, e.g., in economic, cultural, and epistemological spheres (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 332-333). From that point of view, globalisation is defined as a continuation of colonialism's *involuntary integration* of the global South into the world economy (Eckert/ Randeria 2009, 25; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 292). The postcolonial view of globalisation as a continuation of colonial expansion rather than an historically unprecedented phenomenon corresponds to the world-systems perspective. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, the capitalist world-system roughly originated in the sixteenth century (Wallerstein 2011, 67-68).<sup>3</sup> As a result, I consider globalisation a phenomenon with a long history, originating from the sixteenth century, though the process accelerated from the twentieth century onwards, due to increasing saturation of home markets of the core countries, neoliberal ideology, and technical innovations.

For Wallerstein, a world-system refers not necessarily to a system encompassing the whole world, but rather to a system that *is a world in itself* (Wallerstein 2007, 16-17). A *capitalist* world-system is characterised "by an axial division of labor between core-like production processes and peripheral production processes, which resulted in an unequal exchange favoring those involved in core-like production processes" (ibid., 17). Wallerstein emphasises the relational character of the core-periphery-concept (ibid.). Beyond that dichotomy, there are

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<sup>3</sup> One of the strongest criticisms of this timeline came from André Gunder Frank, who, in his book *Re-Orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, presented a five thousand years old China-centred world system. European domination turned out to be just a short interlude in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Frank claimed that Wallerstein had overlooked this due to Eurocentrism. In reaction to this accusation, Wallerstein responded that his *capitalist* world-system was different from Frank's *worldwide* economic, though *not capitalist* system (in his later writings) (Wallerstein 2011, xxvii-xxix). While Frank's approach can serve better as a comprehensive economic history of the world, Wallerstein's is still a worthwhile read on the history of capitalism.



semiperipheries characterised by “a near even mix of core-like and peripheral products” (ibid., 28). The periphery of a world-system – an important part of it that produces goods that are cheap yet essential for the core zone(s) – must be distinguished from areas external to the system (Wallerstein 2011, 301-302). The latter may trade with members of the system, but only in luxury goods that are dispensable without serious consequences for any party (ibid.). Wallerstein calls this relationship “a win-win situation”, whereas the relation of *unequal* exchange *within* the system leads to a “transfer of surplus value from the peripheral zones to the core zones” (Wallerstein 2011a, xv). This is important for understanding the difference between globalisation and simple cross-border trade activities, which have existed throughout human history. Globalisation in this conceptualisation refers to the integration of more and more areas into the capitalist world-system. The world-systems perspective is too limited in its point of view to provide a holistic understanding of globalisation and especially of the global South’s situation within it. Nevertheless, it opens our eyes to an essential point: Integration into the capitalist world-economy does not automatically mean advancement. If an area is integrated into the system as a periphery, it is placed into a specific role. Though advancement is theoretically possible, it is by no means a goal of core zones to see many peripheries becoming semiperipheries and eventually new core zones. That would threaten the old core zones’ privileged position and their access to cheap raw materials, labour, and goods (Rowden 1999, 156-157, 176). This insight calls into question the strategies forwarded by champions of globalisation and capitalist development to ‘develop’ global South countries by integrating them into the world economy. The results of this study provide evidence for the firm position of a periphery (in this particular case, the Busoga region) within the capitalist world-system, even under changing circumstances (see section 2.2).

In that context, in addition to examining global power constellations, postcolonial critique examines the role of neoliberal ideology in processes of globalisation (cf. e.g. Hall et al. 2015, 13-20). According to Joseph Mensah, neoliberal ideology

*seeks to further expand global capital accumulation through free trade, financial deregulation, privatization, and other tenets of the so-called Washington Consensus, spearheaded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and kindred organizations [...].” (Mensah 2008, 1)*

Influential theorists of globalisation refer to the above-mentioned institutions, namely the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO, as “the three main institutions that govern globalization” (Stiglitz 2002, 10; see also Khor 2001, 12). In the 1980s, the global economic system in general (Hall et al. 2015, 9), and North-South relations in particular, faced “the rise of the neoliberal discourse” (Ziai 2017, 115). By then, the latter started influencing the policies of the IMF and the World Bank (Stiglitz 2002, 11-13; Ziai 2017, 117) with neoliberal principles such as “trade liberalism, privatisation of state enterprises, the deregulation of markets and the increasing

commodification of social relationships and nature” (Ziai 2017, 106). Global South countries are principally influenced by this through IMF and World Bank loan conditionalities (Khor 2001, 12-13; Stiglitz 2002, 43-44), WTO trade agreements and WTO legal frameworks<sup>4</sup>. The application of economic principles to all spheres of life has far-reaching effects on the societies concerned. In numerous African countries, neoliberal policies led to high prices for essential goods such as food or health care (Ferguson 2006, 70) and to unemployment or corruption among government workers (ibid., 39). In Uganda, women are particularly negatively affected by neoliberal policies, as they experience continuously increasing workloads and the need for cash money forces them to work outside the domestic sphere without any reduction of their duties at home (Tamale 2002, 174). As a result of being overburdened, women assign more tasks to their daughters, causing absenteeism at school and reduced educational opportunities for girls (Kasente 2002, 189).

Through its critique of development policies, institutions, or even the ideological framework of the concept of ‘development’, postcolonial theory enters the sphere of critical development studies, through which the ‘Post-development’ school of thought has emerged (Escobar 2012, xii; Kerner 2012, 110). In contrast to other (critical) development studies approaches, the Post-Development school of thought not only analyses specific areas of ‘development’ intervention, but rather exposes the errors within the concept of development itself and calls for *alternatives to development* (Kerner 2012, 112-113). It questions the implicitness and authority of the capitalist, linear development model of the global North (cf. e.g. Escobar 2012, 58-59; Shanin 1998, 65-69) and unmasks it as Eurocentric, technocratic, and authoritarian (Ziai 2007, 8-9). Post-Development thinkers not only seek a reform of capitalist development or a single alternative to it; most of them identify the belief in a one-size-fits-all solution for social change and the creation of a good life as an integral part of the problem. In addition to a “deconstruction of development” and its epistemological hegemony (Escobar 2012, 223), Arturo Escobar calls for research on alternative practices already present in the global South (Escobar 2012, 222-223). The underlying idea is to discover the potential of such alternative practices rather than destroying them in favour of capitalist development, economic growth, liberalisation, or globalisation. The gradual superseding of the development discourse by the globalisation discourse since the mid-1990s (McMichael 2012, 80; Ziai 2017, 106) has taken place “not because development is dead but because its coordinates have changed” from the national to the global level (McMichael 2012, 112, see also 113, 126).

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Hunter Wade uses the example of TRIPS (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) to demonstrate how WTO-agreements disadvantage global South countries (Wade 2009, 241-254). Nikita Dhawan and Shalini Randeria illustrate how the rural population in India suffers because business enterprises patent biogenetic material like seeds thanks to WTO regulations (Dhawan/ Randeria 2016, 564).

Postcolonial critics also analyse the cultural impacts of globalisation. Some consider how people create new hybrid cultures through interaction between cultures (cf. e.g. Appadurai 1990; Eckert/ Randeria 2009, 22-23). Others involve material aspects like the worldwide re-orientation of people towards culture, citizenship, and participation expressed through mass media and commodity consumption (García Canclini 2001). In such an environment, participation and political mobilisation take on new shapes (ibid., 154-155) yet new forms of marginalisation are introduced. Many people, especially (though not exclusively) in Africa, are excluded from new consumer cultures due to poverty (Ferguson 2006, 21). This is aggravated considerably through the exclusion of impoverished populations from public services such as health care through privatisation (Amin 1998, 33; Logan 1995, 56, 63) and from political representation through the preferential treatment of investors' interests, e.g., in terms of labour law or land acquisition (Castro Varela/ Dhawan 2015, 204). While small elites in the global South join the global middle class, enjoying commodity consumption and privatised services, a growing number of people all over the world are excluded from access to elementary resources (Illich 1998, 96-97; Sachs 1998, 291). These observations show how closely the cultural and the material dimensions of globalisation are interconnected.

## ***2.2 Everyday life in globalised Busoga***

Busoga is one of the 15 sub-regions (UBOS 2018, 4) of Uganda, a landlocked country in East Africa with a population of almost 43 million people.<sup>5</sup> Importantly for the majority of Busoga's approximately 4 million inhabitants<sup>6</sup>, the sub-region is a cultural kingdom<sup>7</sup> with its own language: Lusoga (Nayenga 2002, 42). Interviews for this study were conducted in the three Districts of Buyende, Jinja, and Kamuli. With the exception of Jinja town (one of the earliest and once most important industrial towns of the country, cf. e.g. Mutibwa 2016, 204), Busoga is a rural area in which people are mainly engaged in the agricultural sector and incomes are low in comparison to the rest of the country.

This study has identified a number of general trends that can be traced back to globalisation in the districts under examination. Trends that were rated positively by respondents of this study derive from increasing **availability and affordability of goods**, especially non-food items. Respondents remembered well the extreme scarcity of consumer goods and transport

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<sup>5</sup> According to the "Population clock" on the website of the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the country had a population of 42,809,262 people on 15 July 2021, at 05:06 p.m. (<https://www.ubos.org>).

<sup>6</sup> After having failed to find a current figure for the whole of Busoga, I added up the population figures for the ten districts of Busoga (in 2014, they were 10 and they encompassed 3,583,196 people, in total) that can be found on the interactive map on the home page of the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS): <https://www.ubos.org>, last access on 15 July 2021, at 05:15 p.m. Indeed, considering the population growth of the country as a whole from 2014 to 2021, Busoga's population can now be estimated above 4 million.

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive history of the kingdom of Busoga, see Gonza et al. 2016.

facilities (due to lack of spare parts) during the reign of Idi Amin in the 1970s and its aftermath in the early 1980s. As a result, they appreciate the **countless shops, even in rural areas**, now supplying them with more products than most of them can afford to buy. In addition to that, they now find many **transport facilities** (taxi-buses, motorbike- and bicycle-taxis) and, thanks to keen competition, transport is cheap. **Technical innovations** mainly enrich people's everyday lives when it comes to **communication**. More and more people use mobile phones, including internet and mobile money services.

Study respondents decried typical effects of globalisation such as **urbanisation** and sharp increases in the **cost of living** as well as in **social inequality**. They generally agreed that the cost of living is rapidly increasing while increasing household income remains very difficult. The majority of people in Busoga have neither much land for commercial agriculture nor capital to invest in large-scale trade or running the only profitable economic activities in the region such as shops or maize mills. Jinja town has only recently begun to slowly recover from the economic shock of Idi Amin's reign. Respondents reported that the few remaining factories in Busoga provide only few jobs to locals and pay low salaries, in part due to automation as well as the provision of qualified jobs to people not originating from Busoga, but rather stemming from Kampala or abroad, from whence the companies originate. In terms of household expenditures, respondents rated **educational expenditures** as the highest, followed by **health care** and **food**. IMF economic liberalisation programmes like those experienced in Uganda since the 1980s cut food subsidies (Stiglitz 2002, 20) and the country's integration in the global trade regime allows financial speculation to impact on food prices (Tandon 2016, 37). Daniel Bendix and Aram Ziai aptly point out that even "[i]ncreased income can nevertheless mean growing impoverishment, if formerly free resources (water, education, health) are provided against payment" (Bendix/ Ziai 2015, 163, translation by E.K.). In his principally liberalisation-friendly study, Paul Hutchinson admits that the policies implemented since the breakdown of the health system under Idi Amin have not delivered as expected. The emigration of qualified personnel due to poor payment and the fees charged in Ugandan health facilities have led to poor services and high costs for patients (Hutchinson 2001, 408-413, 431), illustrating the effects of austerity in the health sector. Numerous respondents in my study confirmed this observation, deploring – in addition to the high costs – the lack of medication and the unofficial fees (corruption<sup>8</sup>) charged in health facilities. In schools, lack of didactic materials as well as official and unofficial fees likewise pose challenges to pupils and parents.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on respondents' comments and my own observations, it is safe to assume that corruption is wide-spread in Uganda and disables social and economic improvements on all levels. It was already present prior to economic liberalisation (Asowa-Okwe 1994; Hutchinson 2001). Examining the entirety of its causes requires a separate study. However, there is proof of globalisation aggravating such tendencies (Ferguson 2006).

In terms of agricultural **production**, Busoga's significance for the global market has reduced to almost zero. As cotton and coffee are no longer profitable due to low prices and low demand in the world market, respondents report having turned to food crop production for sale, a trend promoted by government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through agricultural training programmes. Diverse food crops – among them most prominently maize – and animal products are produced for the local, national, and regional<sup>9</sup> markets that have seen a proliferation through urbanisation, given the high demand for food crops in towns. The rising meat consumption in the big cities of East Africa has changed Busoga farmers' attitude towards livestock. While, in the past, farm animals were kept for prestige and for supplying the family with meat, milk, and eggs, most farmers nowadays keep them exclusively for sale. Some respondents reported cases of children suffering from malnutrition, which could have been prevented through consumption of eggs or milk from the family's farm. In the past, profits came from the production of cotton or coffee and unused food crops were useless. Today, the contrary is the case: Many small- to medium-scale farmers **sell (almost) the entire harvest** in order to pay educational and health expenditures and to purchase items (e.g., agricultural inputs for the next season, household items, clothes, building materials, etc.). As a result, they suffer from food insecurity as soon as the money is spent, even though they may have produced enough for their family's survival up to the next harvest. Granaries for storing harvested crops, once a central component of any household, are almost non-existent in Busoga today. The impact of food commercialisation was tellingly described by one respondent who stated that, in the past, "we didn't know that cultivating was a job, but cultivating is a job" (respondent from Jinja District, 2017).

**Farmers in Busoga face many challenges**, most urgently among them limited production capacities due to access to only small portions of land, pests and livestock diseases, the loss of soil fertility, and the shifting of rainy seasons. Those challenges can be traced back to a combination of land shortage (due to population growth and migration) and globalisation. The latter leads to excessive use of land and exhaustion of soils for agricultural production, as the need for money in everyday life increases constantly. Farmers harvest two to three times per year from the same field without allowing it to rest, or they mortgage or sell their fields to sugar cane producers. Monocultures and rising numbers of farm animals increase the risk of pests and livestock diseases and farmers often lack the resources to afford pesticides or animal medication. Globalisation also accelerates climate change through industrialisation and transport as well as through the 'modernisation' of agriculture. Nevertheless, without 'modernised' farming inputs, the above-mentioned circumstances (land shortage, pests, and livestock diseases) would reduce the output of agriculture in Busoga even further. Another

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<sup>9</sup> referring to neighbouring countries

serious challenge reported by respondents of this study is the inferior position of small- to medium-scale farmers in relation to intermediaries in the liberalised market. In the past, cooperatives and marketing boards provided a safe market with fixed prices for their cash crops. Today, individual farmers, especially those living far from the main roads, have to accept any price offered to them by intermediaries.

In terms of **consumption**, Busoga's significance for the global market seems to be increasing. The growing engagement with "commodity consumption and mass media" diagnosed for other regions by Néstor García Canclini (García Canclini 2008, 15) and the creation of "new social wants and needs" by firms looking for new markets at home and abroad (Glenn 2007, 11) have been observed in Busoga in the scope of this study. More and more consumer goods – according to several respondents as well as my own observations goods imported from Asian countries (especially China) – are becoming available to the population.

My study findings also suggest that **processes of commodification** have found their way into Busoga. In the agricultural sector, modernisation of technologies and the commercialisation of former subsistence crops have brought about essential changes in rural life. Formerly useless items have been turned into merchandise (for details, see below). Health services have likewise been commodified. Several respondents reported that paying for health care (once free of charge in Uganda) has become one of their biggest financial challenges, together with educational expenses. These processes of commodification in the material sphere have led to processes of commodification in social relationships, as further elaborated in section 3.1 of this paper.

Liberalisation policies have turned Uganda's highly regulated agriculture-based economy into a free-market economy. The global market exposure that began in colonial times has been pushed further by dropping protectionist and regulative policies. The 1987 *Economic Recovery Programme* for Uganda, which was designed and financed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Mutibwa 2016, 434-436), aimed at economic liberalisation and growth as well as macroeconomic stability (Whitworth/ Williamson 2010, 32). Among other measures, it encompassed the abolition of governmental price controls (Kiiza 2008, 190; Mutibwa 2016, 436), massive privatisation (Collier/ Reinikka 2001a, 37-38; Kiiza 2008, 190-191), and other measures of promotion of the private sector, e.g., generous incentives for private investment like exemptions from import duties and tax holidays (Whitworth/ Williamson 2010, 13). However, the original euphoria for Uganda's resolute and seemingly successful implementation of the neoliberal IMF programme (cf. e.g. Kuteesa et al. 2010; Reinikka/ Collier 2001), in the meantime, has reduced. In its 2017 report on Uganda, the UNDP (*United Nations Development Program*) decries an "upsurge of poverty" (UNDP Uganda 2017, 3).

The results of this study presented in this section demonstrate the effects of those processes on the everyday lives of people in Busoga. Liberalisation has created markets and made available consumer goods yet the socio-economic environment it has created is favourable for elites, while for most of the region's population, the disadvantages prevail. This phenomenon is typical for economic liberalisation processes (Rowden 1999, 157). A guiding principle of the capitalist world-economy is that "ceaseless accumulation of capital requires and generates ever-greater polarization of real income" (Wallerstein 2017, 59). Uganda has been integrated into the capitalist world-system at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the role of a periphery. Though it has undergone many changes since then, its position within the system has never changed. In Busoga, the exploiters of the region's production capacities have changed from global North (i.e., core) actors to local and regional players. The consumer market suppliers have changed from global North actors to mainly suppliers from Asian semiperipheries. As the core has lost interest in Busoga, system actors who can accept lower profit margins have replaced it as buyers and sellers. Nevertheless, Busoga's role as a periphery has remained the same: It enriches actors holding a higher position in the system (semiperipheries) more than it enriches itself and there is no sign of upward movement of the region within the system in the foreseeable future.

This is Busoga's peculiar "sophisticated mutation" of globalisation (Ferguson 2006, 41) as I have been able to analyse it. Admittedly, the prospects look less than rosy for the largest part of the population. Post-Development thinkers and alter-globalists have been searching for alternatives to capitalist development for a while. The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) with its manifold manifestations is one promising option. In the following section, I present the concept in brief and describe it in relation to my research results.

### **3. The Social and Solidarity Economy – local actors' chance to exercise agency?**

Responses to globalisation's invasion of everyday life can take on different dimensions. In addition to demonstrations and other actions that attract publicity, quiet resistance is performed in the scope of quotidian practices. This study aims to provide insight into such quotidian alternative economic practices, which are based on values like solidarity, cooperation, and distributive justice rather than capitalist values like competition and endless accumulation of capital. The theoretical framework in which these practices are accommodated is the *Social and Solidarity Economy* (SSE). According to Peter Utting, the number of SSE activities worldwide has recently increased alongside "a surge of interest within scholarly and advocacy

circles to explain what exactly SSE is, to analyse its alternative potential, measure its scale, document good practices, examine its regional manifestations and variations, and identify public policies and legal arrangements that can enable SSE” (Utting 2015, 3). In the absence of an exhaustive list of possible SSE activities, scholars have identified types of activities considered SSE activities, such as “cooperatives, community associations and mutuals” (Satgar 2014, 4) as well as “myriad types of self-help groups organising to produce goods and services”, “community-based saving schemes” and other similar activities (Utting 2015, 1). Generally agreed upon principles of SSE are “cooperation, democratic decision making, collective ownership, bottom-up processes, caring and sharing” (Williams 2014, 59). Specifically in the context of Africa, writes Norman Chipakupaku, parts of the population have always been practicing a peculiar kind of SSE he calls the “People’s Economy” (Chipakupaku 2008). The purpose of the People’s Economy is to *serve the local population* to produce the products and the income it really needs, create local economic cycles with just distribution of resources, and refrain from destroying the natural resources upon which its future depends (ibid., 138). Though more pragmatic in nature than many politically motivated definitions of SSE, Chipakupaku’s description of the People’s Economy aligns well with SSE’s partiality towards distributive justice, cooperation, and a local focus over capitalist principles of endless accumulation, competition, and global expansion. In the course of this study, I applied Williams’ and Chipakupaku’s criteria regarding what constitutes SSE to the activities encountered in Busoga. Limiting the category of ‘alternative economic practices’ to those explicitly opposing capitalism would mean overlooking interesting initiatives with “emancipatory potential” (Santos/ Rodríguez-Garavito 2007, xxii). Such practices need a certain “ability to survive in a capitalist context” in order “to open up spaces for further transformations of capitalist values and socioeconomic arrangements”, (ibid., xxi).

The search for alternatives to capitalist development and expansion is inherent in the theoretical framework of this study. Representatives of the Post-Development approach hope to find “alternatives to development” in “local culture and knowledge” and “localized, pluralistic grassroots movements” (Escobar 2012, 215). Drawing on his analysis of the capitalist world-system’s state, Wallerstein concludes that the system will collapse in the foreseeable future (Wallerstein 2007, 76-77; 2017, 64, 92-102). In his view, this is a natural process through which all world-systems ultimately go. However, the system(s) to come after cannot be regarded as a natural course of action. Wallerstein calls upon the world population to get involved actively into the negotiations of the system(s) in which they want to live after the collapse of the modern capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 2007, 76-77, 89-90; 2017, 64-65, 95, 102, 104). Wallerstein attributes high importance to African populations – typically not winners within the current system – in the process of thinking about alternatives for the future (Wallerstein 2017, 64-65), prioritising a combination of “short-run local meliorations with middle-run



transformation of values and structures” (ibid., 65). As “much contemporary theorising on SSE is grounded in real-world practices” (Utting 2015, 33), this study examines what kinds of SSE activities exist in Busoga and how they interact with globalisation’s impacts on people’s lives.

### **3.1 Autochthonous solidarity structures and their responses to globalisation**

**Autochthonous<sup>10</sup> solidarity structures** within a society should not be confused with modern<sup>11</sup> phenomena of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). Patrick Develtere clarifies that such activities like “work-sharing groups and burial societies in most countries [of Africa] have always involved large parts of the population”, yet they do not have organisational structures akin to those of modern SSE groups (Develtere 2008, 2). Nevertheless, analysts of SSE activities in Africa have found places in which such autochthonous structures exist or until recently existed explicitly favourable for the successful implementation of SSE activities (Develtere 2008, 2; Thomas 2015, 10-11). Study respondents told me about five kinds of solidarity structures in Busoga that I classified as autochthonous: rotating farming support, ‘Christmas groups’, clan structures, the practice of sharing and giving for free, and burial support. I present these structures, in turn, below.

**Rotating farming support** refers to a group of people joining to work sequentially in members’ fields until every member has received the group’s support. This is the only activity of which I could hardly find any trace in present times. Some respondents remembered that it existed in the distant past and recalled attempts to formalise it in the 1960s. However, it is no longer practiced in Busoga, likely due to families’ smaller plots of land they can cultivate without requiring additional help, in contrast to the previously larger fields that meant farmers were dependent on others’ support and, accordingly, supported their neighbours in return.

In contrast to that, several people in Busoga told me (during the interviews as well as informally) of a group system that flourishes these days, though nobody could name the activities they described. To capture mentions of such groups during the coding process, I labelled them ‘**Christmas groups**’. They offer a strategy for affording meat for a special occasion (e.g., Christmas). Group members pool their money in order to buy an animal for slaughtering and sharing. Some eat jointly, while others disperse the meat among the members for celebrating with only the family. Such groups thrive under globalisation because

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<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid the use of the word ‘traditional’, which can either be mistaken as a synonym for ‘backward’ or as a romanticisation of the aspect to which is attributed, I use the somewhat dated term ‘autochthonous’ (for instance, the term is used in a 1987 study by Hans Dieter Seibel (Seibel 1987, e.g., 1)). Its meaning is very similar to ‘indigenous’, but as it is a technical term, it circumvents the problematic implications of the alternative.

<sup>11</sup> Though this term is also problematic, I have failed to find any satisfactory alternative to express that these phenomena are, on the one hand, relatively new to the region (that is, arising in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century) and, on the other hand, have emerged due to influence from outside.

high living costs and the high marketability of animal products make people reluctant to slaughter their own farm animals (should they own any). In such groups, members can buy the quantity of meat they can afford, making them a viable solution for many.

During my 34 months' research stay in Busoga, I observed Basoga giving high importance to **clan<sup>12</sup> structures**, once (and, in some places, still) the most important social institution, representing the original solidarity structures – or the original social safety net – of Busoga. Respondents explained to me that, in the past, belonging to a clan involved obligations, e.g., asking the clan for approval prior to getting married or contributing money for a clan member's burial. In return, the clan was to assist its members in any kind of problematic situation. Over time, however, many factors have eroded these clan structures. For one, globalisation encourages job migration and urbanisation as well as individualistic values. Conflicts, famines, or diseases that occurred over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and forced people to leave their ancestral lands and disperse also contributed to this erosion (Nayenga 2002, 44). Despite these challenges, some clans are still powerful within the lives of their members.

Numerous respondents described a previously common practice of **sharing and giving for free**. Neighbours could share farming inputs like seeds or manure, possibly with the expectation of a future favour from the suppliant. The same applied to food. Yet respondents' evaluation of the present situation varied; seven of the 17 respondents who commented on this issue suggested that this practice of sharing and giving for free continued to take place in their area, while ten others lamented its disappearance, commenting for instance that “nowadays, things turned into money, (s)he can't just give you anything” (respondent from Buyende District, 2017). As mentioned above, food crops are no longer planted only for subsistence but rather for the primary purpose of being sold. As a result, farming inputs have turned into business investment and there are no more harvest 'leftovers', as every single grain can be sold. Under these circumstances, giving food or farming inputs to others for free is much harder than it once was.

Furthermore, commons have been turned into private property. Promoting private property in order to enable the accumulation of capital is a cornerstone of the programme of capitalist development in general (Chang 2002, 1; Wolf 2018, 25-26, 46-48) and of neoliberal globalisation in particular (Altvater/ Mahnkopf 2002, 263). An expert interviewee explained: “Thirty years ago, people just pass by and someone picks a passion fruit from your tree. But these days, you'll be arrested [for doing that]” (representative of Jinja District, 2017). Similar

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<sup>12</sup> Though this term may have negative connotations in some settings, I use it in the sense of the Basoga, for whom it is a positive term that encompasses belonging, identity, and social protection (Gonza et al. 2016, 8-9). A clan in Busoga is defined as “a patrilineal descent group, including all those who recognized a common ancestor through male lines” (Cohen 1972, 6).

statements suggested that fruit, vegetables, and land had previously been shared commonly, whereas today, people have started to insist on their property rights. With regard to fruit and vegetables, the above-mentioned switch from using such items for subsistence only to producing them for the market likely underlies this change in attitude. In terms of land, the reasons are twofold: Land is an essential input for commercial agricultural production and commercial animal keeping, yet fierce population growth has led to a severe shortage of land, as almost all respondents and many people I spoke to informally emphasised.

As a result of land shortages, people can no longer allow their neighbours to graze their animals<sup>13</sup> on their land. This has facilitated the success of the ‘zero grazing’ approach in Busoga: Farmers have begun to keep their animals in paddocks, such that, for the first time, they must provide them with food and water. Items formerly deemed useless have gained economic value as a result of this development: (guinea) grass and the leftovers of harvested plantain plants have become fodder. A cattle keeper explained that “now, ‘zero grazing’ came in, we even started buying plantain stems, grass, that elephant grass, we started buying them” (respondent from Buyende District, 2017). An additional outcome of ‘zero grazing’, in combination with exhausted soils and the promotion of natural fertiliser by agricultural training programmes<sup>14</sup>, is the marketability of cow dung. Another cattle keeper told me about her ‘zero grazing’ project that “within six months, you have like two tonnes of cow dung. You have not been able to use all of it, neighbours take it and they do what? [...] they buy it [...] it is also there as one of the business items” (respondent from Jinja District, 2017). Even cow urine is being collected and sold as an ingredient for an organic insecticide. For those who have those items in plenty, these are quite acceptable new opportunities for earning money. However, to many small-scale farmers, those additional production costs pose a serious challenge.

The above-described trends have severe consequences for the social relationships within a neighbourhood. Neighbours and friends are turned into buyers and sellers. The long-term reciprocal relationship they used to establish among each other by exchanging favours over time has been replaced by the immediate exchange of goods for money. Respondents also described a new preoccupation with prestige. While many mentioned that, in the past, borrowing things from neighbours or friends was common, it has now become embarrassing. For instance, one respondent mentioned that these days, “a person has to work, to have your own things at home. Because of this modernisation that came about” (respondent from Kamuli District, 2017). An expert interviewee stated that “you must BE SEEN<sup>15</sup> carrying, uh, a cell phone in your hand, hm? Then, they think you’re okay” (respondent from Kamuli District, 2017).

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<sup>13</sup> This is the case especially with cattle, but also goats or sheep.

<sup>14</sup> Such programmes are provided by Ugandan government institutions like NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Services) and by various non-governmental organisations.

<sup>15</sup> Capitalisation demonstrates a special emphasis on the respective words by the respondent.

People take pride in having their own things and do not want to depend on others who might look down on them or refuse to support them. On the one hand, this sense of independence and the new opportunities to reach individual goals can be considered quite positive – and many respondents do so. On the other hand, sharing, giving for free, and borrowing would be helpful in order to offset the increased cost of living and other challenges described above. However, such practices are generally phasing out.

Respondents of this study generally agree that **burial support** is by far the most important solidarity structure of which they are aware. Losing a relative occurs to them often and causes emotional as well as considerable financial challenges. This challenging situation, including collective approaches to deal with it, have been identified in a variety of African countries (cf. e.g. Develtere 2008, 2; Ntombi 2004). The multilevel transformation process through which burial support in Busoga has gone, involving surviving outside influences without incurring losses, makes it a particularly interesting topic for this study. These processes have resulted in two autochthonous forms (clan support and village support) and a modern form (Muno Mukabi groups) of burial support existing alongside one another in Busoga. Almost every resident can rely on at least one of them, sometimes even on more than one.

The distinction between **clan support** and '**obutaka**' (**support on village level**) arose due to migration. In the distant past, people were born and died in one place, their 'ancestral home', where their clan resided. It was taken for granted that their fellow clan members would take care of their burial, or of their relative's or spouse's burial, or of the dependents they left behind. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, diseases and conflicts as well as work migration and urbanisation encouraged further dispersion over regions and across the country, splitting autochthonous burial support into two: clan support and village support. '*Obutaka*', as the Lusoga word itself suggests, refers to *residency*: In case a village resident dies or loses a relative, the community takes care. They implement the kind of support that has always been implemented, namely attending the burial ceremony, providing food, water, and firewood (for cooking) for the ceremony. In addition, they support the bereaved with the infrastructure for hosting the mourners and for the arrangement of the burial itself. In the past, this was done practically, e.g., by constructing shade for the visitors and digging the grave. Today, in most cases, community members contribute money to pay for such services. The clan system has adapted to the new circumstances and obliges every clan member, no matter where he or she lives, to contribute to a pool of money for burial expenses for all clan members. Very often, giving money to the bereaved is the only activity of the clan. In some cases, services comparable to the above-described obutaka-activities are added.

**Muno Mukabi groups** qualify as modern SSE groups due to the voluntary nature of their membership. In terms of activities, the three kinds are difficult to distinguish. Though it is more common for obutaka to provide services (like bringing food, water, and firewood) and for clans and Muno Mukabi groups to be limited to providing money, there are exceptions to that rule. Ultimately, the three forms of burial support are only identifiable according to their membership criteria: While membership in the two autochthonous forms is compulsory (for clan structures by birth, for the village community by residency), membership in a Muno Mukabi group is completely voluntary. Though residency in a certain area (village or urban quarter) is a prerequisite for participating in the local Muno Mukabi group, residents are not obliged to participate.

According to Bruno Baeriswyl, in numerous African countries, “various forms of *collaboration within the socio-economic system of the extended family* played an important role” until the “*dissolution of traditional social structures* brought about further development of these collaborations into new organisational forms with a co-operative nature” (“...mit genossenschaftlichem Charakter”; Baeriswyl 1988, 17-18; translation and emphases by E.K.). This is what happened to burial support in Busoga. Interestingly, however, in Busoga the older forms of burial support have not disappeared. Although in some places, respondents told me that older forms of burial support had been replaced by a Muno Mukabi group, in other places, the older forms were alive and well. I even encountered cases in which two forms of burial support existed side by side. It seems that support in case of the loss of a relative is such an important matter for people in Busoga that they always find their way of implementing it, no matter what the circumstances. As there is no external support for them – neither from actors of the market economy, nor from the government – they organise self-help activities that work within their current situation.

Several authors hypothesise that globalisation “broke down community ties” (Escobar 2012, 22) and caused “increasing commodification of social relationships” (Ziai 2017, 106). To a certain extent, this seems to be the case in Busoga. In many places, neighbourly support has been turned into a business-like relationship. The three phenomena of clan structures, the practice of sharing and giving for free, and rotating farming support share the fate of having been decimated by globalisation. However, there are still places in Busoga where the first two of these have not yet declined. Furthermore, some solidarity structures respond differently to recent changes in the local economy. ‘Christmas groups’ flourish under globalisation, whereas burial support reacts flexibly and keeps on successfully transforming.

## 3.2 The Social and Solidarity Economy in globalised Busoga

### 3.2.1 Cooperatives

All authors and activists whose work on the Social and Solidarity Economy I reviewed for this study named the *cooperative* as an example of SSE activities. According to Brazilian economist Paul Singer, “[t]he production cooperative is the basic unit of the solidary economy” followed by other forms of cooperatives, such as consumer, commercial, and credit cooperatives (Singer 2007, 4). The definition of cooperative values by the *International Co-operative Alliance* (ICA) reads as follows: “Cooperatives are based on the values of **self-help**, **self-responsibility**, **democracy**, **equality**, **equity**, and **solidarity**. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others” (ICA 2021, emphasis in the original). Cooperatives are supposed to follow the ICA’s internationally acknowledged “seven cooperative principles”, namely: “1. Voluntary and Open Membership”, “2. Democratic Member Control”, “3. Member Economic Participation”, “4. Autonomy and Independence”, “5. Education, Training, and Information”, “6. Cooperation among Cooperatives”, “7. Concern for Community” (ibid.; see also: Santos/ Rodríguez-Garavito 2007, xxvii). All members are owners of the cooperative and an executive committee that they elect among themselves takes care of the daily administrative business (Singer 2007, 3). Unlike other forms of SSE, a cooperative is a highly standardised institution the organisational structure of which should look mostly indistinguishable regardless of its location in Buyende, Buenos Aires, or Berlin. This advanced level of standardisation is likely due to the long history<sup>16</sup> of cooperatives (in comparison to other kinds of SSE activities). In many countries, including Uganda, cooperatives must officially register with the government and pay taxes. Given that many other SSE groups such as community associations are much smaller than cooperatives, they are not necessarily obliged to do so.

Uganda has a long history of cooperatives, yet it is important to distinguish between two historical periods. The first Ugandan farmers’ association (retrospectively) defined as a cooperative was founded in 1913 (Develtere 2008, 6; Mrema 2008, 153). In cash crop production, Ugandans of African descent were kept in the roles of farmers and labourers while Ugandans of Asian descent, Asian immigrants, and Europeans claimed for themselves the processing and marketing activities. Farmers of African descent formed farmers’ associations, which later became cooperatives, “as a protest against the disadvantageous terms of trade

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<sup>16</sup> For information about the history of cooperatives in general, see: Santos/ Rodríguez-Garavito 2007, Singer 2007, or the ICA-website: <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/history-cooperative-movement>. For details on the history of cooperatives in Africa, see: Baeriswyl 1988 or Develtere 2008.

imposed on the peasants by the said middlemen” (Develtere 2008, 6). In Busoga, the cooperative movement became an important actor when four cooperatives formed the *Busoga Growers Co-operative Union* in 1951/52 (Hasselman 1976, 228).

From the 1960s onwards, African post-independence governments, including the Ugandan government, and several international organisations<sup>17</sup> promoted cooperatives as a development strategy (Develtere 2008, 13-17). After having been formalised through the Cooperative Societies Ordinance of 1946, Ugandan cooperatives went through a phase of intensive government interference (Nannyonjo 2015, 267-270; see also: Mrema 2008, 153). Several study respondents who were not involved in the cooperative societies of that time claimed that those cooperatives were government institutions. Others, who knew better because they have been involved, explained that those groups were initiated by farmers, yet the members had little to say within their own organisations. Rather, their cooperatives were steered by government officers, who told them exactly what to do. These kinds of ‘cooperative societies’ existed in Uganda up to the 1980s.

Following decades of overregulation through to the early 1970s and the collapse of the economy under Idi Amin (Nannyonjo 2015, 268-269), the Ugandan cooperative movement experienced a final blow from the liberalisation policies of the 1990s (Mrema 2008, 153). The latter bereaved cooperatives of their buying monopolies, their sources of finance, and other government services (Nannyonjo 2015, 270; Mrema 2008, 155). However, as Herment A. Mrema’s study and my study congruently suggest, one of the biggest challenges was the vacuum of power (and education) left behind by the withdrawal of government authorities. Mrema points out that the majority of members lacked knowledge to prevent a few individuals from taking over power within the cooperative and engaging in mismanagement, corruption, and nepotism (Mrema 2008, 155-156). The respondents of this study reported differing experiences. While some lauded the self-management, democratic structures, and solidarity within their group, others complained about phenomena like those described by Mrema. In general, the movement needed to re-invent itself in the 1990s, enjoying more freedom for self-organisation but less government support, no more protection from competition with other market actors (Nannyonjo 2015, 270-273) and more vulnerability to elite capture (Mrema 2008, 155-156).

The differences between ‘the cooperative societies of the past’ and the ‘cooperatives of the present’ were a central topic for some respondents of this study. The most important advantage of the new cooperatives identified by the majority of respondents is that, in contrast to their forerunners, they are actually member-owned. However, the most important advantage

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<sup>17</sup> (including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and diverse typical development agencies)

of the 'old cooperative societies' they named can actually be traced back to factors exogenous to the cooperatives themselves. Respondents celebrated the cooperative societies of the past for having granted high prices that remained stable throughout the entire growing season. Admittedly, it was the government that steered the market through marketing boards, using the cooperative societies merely as a link to the producers (Develtere 2008, 14). Nevertheless, the perception on the part of most people that it were the cooperatives steering the market leads to high expectations that the cooperatives of the present cannot fulfil. As they depend on a liberalised market, they are unable to grant to their members stable (and sometimes not even good) prices. They can only offer *slightly higher* prices than members can attain individually thanks to the higher bargaining power attained through their accumulated quantities of products. In addition to that, they can offer the same services as their forerunners: cheap inputs (as they are purchased in bulk), infrastructure (e.g., stores or transport facilities for products), and various kinds of trainings.

The above-described events have not changed the daily operations of cooperatives. Though the terms and the major products have changed over time, the system remained the same, as respondents explained to me: Farmers plant in their private fields agricultural products (in the past, primarily cotton and coffee; today, primarily food crops like maize). Sometimes, they also produce other things like milk or handicrafts, yet they do it individually. They take their products to the primary society (their cooperative). In some cases, this cooperative has means of processing (e.g., a maize mill or a milk cooler) and marketing. In other cases, it takes the products to the area cooperative (in the past: cooperative union) for those purposes, from where they are taken to regional or national markets, or even to neighbouring countries. In one case, the handicrafts produced by the members were even sent to the USA.

In terms of cooperative memberships, I encountered two variants. The typical and more successful type respects the cooperative principle of collective ownership: A new member must buy shares, as a result of which he or she becomes one of the cooperative owners, whose money is used to finance the group's activities. Apart from storing, processing, and transporting products, these activities usually encompass trainings and distribution of inputs (e.g., seeds, pesticides, or farm animals) to the members. The second option for financing those activities is a regular financial contribution. However, the few groups in which this was done faced conflicts among their members. Those less successful with the group activity became unwilling to pay their contribution, feeling they were simply financing other people's success. This illustrates the importance of collective ownership in cooperatives. The groups' assets, apart from few exceptions, belong to the group as a whole. Although the government may provide some material support, there is no longer such fierce government intervention as had previously been the case. Whether seen from the viewpoint of the above-cited ICA



cooperative principles or neoliberal principles, a reduction of government intervention is a success, as it allows cooperative members to engage in their business freely. Especially the principles of self-help, self-responsibility, and democracy can only be implemented with little to no intervention from outside the cooperative. Nevertheless, that deregulation was executed without addressing the above-described vacuums of power and education that were left behind in the cooperatives. As a result, they were rather weakened than strengthened by the measure, which was undertaken overhastily and without considering the context.

### 3.2.2 Savings and credit groups

As several respondents explained to me eagerly, savings and credit groups are extremely popular in Busoga. I had originally planned to exclude such groups from analysis in my study due to some prejudices I hold against them, yet the respondents' insistence, combined with my postcolonial research approach that urged me to follow the priorities of the researched, made me change my mind. Respondents typically described the need for savings and credit groups as follows: "They help them to be able to save a little money. Because, if you have it at hand, at any time, it gets finished. A problem comes and you use it – but when you have not saved" (respondent from Buyende District, 2017). As elaborated above, costs of living are on the rise in Busoga even though incomes remain low. Money is quickly spent on school fees, hospital bills, medicine, consumption, family celebrations, or simply by helping out a friend or relative, as several respondents told me. The latter case is particularly important as refusing to help while having money in the house would lead to serious social consequences, no matter how valid the purpose for keeping the money. Accordingly, many view savings and credit groups as the only option for saving, as they come with an obligation to bring money to every meeting. The social obligation to help relatives and friends is replaced with the engagement for the group. Everybody knows that a member who does not deliver his or her contribution gets into trouble with the rest of the group.

The role of savings and credit groups is thus problematic when considered in terms of solidarity. On the one hand, they threaten social cohesion between family and community members and further the individual accumulation of capital. On the other hand, the majority of their members would take out loans anyway. In the absence of these groups, they would be obliged to go to commercial loan providers (banks or microfinance institutions). As Milford Bateman aptly points out, for low-income earners, community-based savings and credit groups are a much safer option than commercial loan providers (Bateman 2010, 166-168). Several study respondents explained why in similar ways like this one:

*And also, there, the people of the group, the way they demand, is not how a bank demands. [...] For us, you can be considerate with your friend. So to say, (s)he has a patient in the hospital and (s)he has not been able to bring back the money, but has a patient in the hospital, (s)he*

*has not been working, and you say that, "Ok, (s)he'll bring it back next month", and you leave him/her to go to attend to his/her patient, and (s)he brings the money later. But the bank, for it, it doesn't know that you are sick, it doesn't know maybe you have lost someone, it doesn't know challenges. (respondent from Jinja District, 2017)*

Members can thus profit from their fellows' understanding in case they are really unable to pay back their loan. In contrast, "those of the bank, they come with the police officers" (respondent from Jinja District, 2017). It is also much easier to gain access to a loan through a community-based group than through a financial service provider. At times, the solidarity among the group members even expands beyond the group activities, although the contrary can also be the case. Several respondents reported how savings and credit groups, especially SACCOs and VSLAs (for details on different types of groups, see below), use the same drastic methods as commercial loan providers for recovering debts. When delay or even refusal of payment puts at risk the group's existence, solidarity and understanding among the members can easily turn into coercive power. Different forms of savings and credit groups have varying tendencies either towards solidarity or towards coercive relationships among their members. In the following, I present the kinds of groups I encountered in Busoga.

***Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs)***<sup>18</sup>, despite their name, are *pure savings* groups. Their most important characteristics are the absence of loans and, as a result, of interest, in combination with the element of rotation. The members pool money once or twice a month. Using a revolving scheme, each time money is pooled, one member receives the entire amount until all have had their turn. Every member contributes the same amount in every meeting. At the end of the cycle, every member has contributed and received the same amount. There is no interest and no need to pay back. At the end of the day, all the group has done is to help members plan their household expenses. They know in advance at what intervals they must take what amount of money to the group meetings. In return, they know when it will be their turn to receive the payout. As a result, they can easily plan the low, regular expenses (contributions) and the foreseeable payout. They can use the latter for any purpose they like (e.g., school fees, a certain purchase), unlike in commercial microfinance institutions or in many VSLAs and SACCOs (see below), where members are obliged to start a business that will help them to pay back the loan. Among savings and credit groups, ROSCAs pose the most radically alternative approach. Though their concern with the cash economy and consumption cannot be denied, they lack any aspiration to growth, profit orientation, or business. They pose a *real alternative* to commercial savings and credit business, whereas VSLAs and SACCOs pose rather an imitation of it, on a lower level. ROSCAs are closely

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<sup>18</sup> Only one respondent, an expert interviewee, spoke explicitly about ROSCAs. However, against the background of his description and the description in the literature (Ardener 1995), I classified as ROSCAs several 'small groups' or 'saving groups' about which I was told by respondents.

related to consumers' associations (see below), which are likewise based on a revolving scheme.

**Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)**<sup>19</sup> are rated more attractively than ROSCAs by study respondents, even though ROSCAs are much safer. While, in a VSLA, money *accumulates* (Anyongo et al. 2007, 12), in a ROSCA it *rotates*. Anyongo et al. state that the non-governmental organisation CARE brought the idea of VSLAs to Africa (ibid., 11-12). Since then, the idea of VSLAs seems to have gone viral, as all respondents of this study who are involved in VSLAs claimed that they started the activity on their own initiative. They described their daily operations as follows: For a certain period of time (usually one year), members collect contributions in every meeting (usually every week). The group's capital is lent out to members as loans. At the end of the aforementioned period, all loans must have been paid back with interest, such that members receive their payout, that is their savings plus interest. The regular contribution may be fixed or flexible, sometimes with a lower limit, sometimes even with an upper limit. The latter case, which I encountered twice among 12 VSLAs, is particularly interesting. A member of a group with an upper limit for contributions commented that "we want to be what? Equal." (respondent from Jinja District, 2017) Members seem to want to protect themselves from elites inserting comparably high amounts of money into the group's cash box and expecting the poorer members to take out loans that pay them interest. The members who are all low-income earners want to stay among themselves, such that they can be protected from taking out high loans they will not manage to pay back and in order to ensure they profit from the interests paid on the loans themselves. However, not every VSLA has such a protection mechanism. Another element that actually most VSLAs in Busoga have is a separate cash box for emergency loans in case a member is affected by sickness or death (of a relative). Some money is reserved for that purpose and lent out with softer conditions (e.g., with lower interest or without interest altogether). Some VSLAs offer additional income-generating activities, e.g., agriculture. Also very attractive for VSLA members is the groups' facilitation of applications for support to government bodies, NGOs, or financial service providers that would be inaccessible to them as individuals. A VSLA is a good instrument for such purposes, as its day-to-day business does not require materials and laborious activities such as a cooperative's business. Despite their advantages, I observed many VSLAs creating problems for their members. Many borrowers become overwhelmed with the responsibility of paying back their loan, especially when they have spent the money on daily expenses or when the income-generating activity started with the loan did not yield the anticipated results. Many

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<sup>19</sup> The term VSLA (spoken "ViSiLA") is much more common in Busoga than the term ROSCA. Several interviewees used it, yet some did not specify the kind of group they spoke about. In those cases, I classified the groups on the basis of the activities and rules described by respondents. Information about VSLAs can be found in Anyango et al. 2007.

VSLAs react like commercial loan providers, exerting pressure on their default borrowers and thereby turning the climate of solidarity within the group into a climate of fear.

**Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs)** function similarly to VSLAs, though with more members and larger sums of money being handled. The major difference between VSLAs and SACCOs is the obligation in the latter to buy shares (as they are cooperatives). As with VSLAs, SACCO members also save money on their account and take out loans with interest whenever they like. The number of shares a member buys determines his or her yield on capital. In this study, I found that SACCOs were prone to elite capture, involving well-off members buying many shares and expecting high dividends from the loans taken out by less well-off members. The latter usually feel like mere bank account holders, sometimes even like delinquents, and certainly not like decision makers or members of a mutually supportive group. The establishment of a SACCO is usually initiated by the government, often in combination with the granting of government funds. Accordingly, many people consider SACCOs a distribution point for free government money, not a community-based solidarity initiative. The fact that most SACCOs are large groups, often composed of people who never met before following the call to enter the group, makes them anonymous. Under these circumstances, members have no overview over the group's membership or finances. This leads to a poor repayment morale and minimal commitment to the group. As a result, elites tend to take the lead and other members withdraw. Either the group disintegrates as soon as the start-up funds are exhausted, or a dynamic of elites violently trying to recover their money from the borrowers evolves.

In summary, savings and credit groups' prospects of success are better the smaller they are. Members who know each other trust one another. Members who live close to each other can visit a default borrower, evaluate his or her situation, and agree on prolonging the grace period. The inhibition threshold to run away with the fellow members' money is very high among members who are simultaneously friends or neighbours and, conversely, low among anonymous members living at considerable distance from one another. External capital destabilises such groups, whereas trainings on handling money would be helpful for most of them. What applies to SSE-groups in general holds even more true among savings and credit groups: They work well when members trust one another – though trust within savings and credit groups is particularly fragile. Furthermore, debts always contain certain risks, especially for low-income households.

### *3.2.3 Consumers' associations (Mukenkede/ Gema Kumwino)*

In Busoga, small consumers' associations call themselves either Mukenkede (Lusoga for: "my beloved one") or Gema Kumwino (Lusoga for: "hold on to your friend" or "support your friend"). Like ROSCAs, such groups collect contributions from their members and distribute them on a

rotating basis (see section 3.2.2), though members receive material 'gifts' in lieu of cash. The principle of both forms of associations nevertheless remains the same: At the end of the cycle, every member has received exactly the same, and what he or she received corresponds to the money he or she has contributed. In that way, members can save for household utensils or building materials that they would not have been able to buy without the group's help (see section 3.2.2 for information on the difficulties of saving individually). A very important element in those groups is the celebration of the gift shower in the home of the member whose turn it is to receive presents. This periodical event during which the group members eat and celebrate together, creates social cohesion among them. This group activity ensures that they live close to each other, that they meet every member of the group frequently, and that they regularly enjoy time together. As a result, there is much trust and often even friendship among the members. During my study, I did not hear of any conflicts within such groups. The only negative comment was a respondent's regret that she could not afford to join such a group, feeling she was unable to provide the regular contributions. While this appraisal demonstrates the seriousness with which (potential) members take their obligations towards their fellows, it also illustrates the requirement that members have certain financial capacities in order to make sense of such an activity.

### *3.2.4 Burial support (Muno Mukabi)*

When burial support in Busoga takes the shape of an SSE-activity, it is called Muno Mukabi (loosely translated from Lusoga: "Your friend in bad times"). A respondent, who is a member of both an obutaka group (autochthonous village support, see section 3.1) and a Muno Mukabi group, explained the peculiarity of the Muno Mukabi group as follows:

*It had its initiators, they explained it [...] not for saying that it gets residents (abataka), it gets/ it is a law that every resident in this region or person on that land that is taken by the resident council is meant to be. But this one where I am, it builds on agreement. (respondent from Buyende District, 2017)*

Muno Mukabi groups clearly fulfil important features of SSE activities, namely voluntary membership, bottom-up processes, and democratic decision making. By contrast, autochthonous forms of burial support do not fulfil these criteria, given the compulsory nature of membership and the non-negotiable rules contained therein (see also section 3.1). Muno Mukabi groups are different in this respect, as members decide conjointly the nature and content of their support to one another. They may decide to support each other only in case of death of the closest relatives or in case of death of anyone for whom the member feels responsible. They may decide to support the member only with cash or with a combination of cash and other support like bringing food, water, and firewood for the burial ceremony. They

may decide to attend the burial as a group or to refrain from doing so. They discuss and fix the amount of support conjointly.

Many SSE-activities in Busoga, especially cooperatives and savings and credit groups, contain an *additional* element of burial support. Mrema writes about Ugandan cooperatives: “Typically for African organizations, social protection mechanisms are built in by the members”, referring to burial support as one of those mechanisms (Mrema 2008, 169). At first glance, supporting each other in case of death of a relative may not look like an economic activity. At closer examination, it turns out to be an economic activity, as burial expenses pose a serious financial challenge to most people in Busoga (and many other places). The answer of the market economy to that issue would usually be a commercial burial insurance, an option that virtually nobody in Busoga can afford.

### 3.2.5 General observations on SSE activities in Busoga

The following statement by Post-Development scholar Majid Rahnema corresponds to the findings of this study:

*On another level, a shift of focus from bigness and quantity to the right size and quality could help us to understand that a **small, human-sized and familiar group** of friends, who **know and trust** one other, is often the ideal place for them to learn from each other, to act in truth and eventually to change the only worlds they can truly love and care for. In such concrete and recognizable worlds, people are no longer abstractions to each other. (Rahnema 1998, 394, emphases by E.K.)*

In Busoga, the groups I encountered that worked well were usually the smaller or the older ones. Groups that did not work well had too many members (to the extent that they did not know each other and never met), too much capital (inserted by NGOs, the government, or by elites that expected returns on their investment and thus pressured the group’s members), or too much pressure from government authorities to rapidly expand their membership or their activities. Groups require considerable time to evolve, especially when they consist of people with low incomes. Members need time to build trust among each other and to establish small activities with their own meagre resources. As soon as they lose track of their resources or activities, or are unable to call their fellow members to account because they live far away or are not even known personally, the group disintegrates. Capital inserted from external sources can provoke embezzlement, as it reduces the transparency of the group’s finances for the majority of members. Members’ demotivation often leads to punitive behaviour by the executive committee. This does not mean that such groups are not in need of any support. In addition to likely benefitting from a favourable political environment, they need training on all levels (e.g., trainings in group management or in the areas of the respective group’s activities).

Their members' level of education is often low. This circumstance facilitates their exploitation by elites and hinders their successful implementation of group activities and management.

In Busoga, the revolving scheme, in which every member receives the same kind and amount of support on a rotating basis until everyone is served, is another success factor of SSE groups. In ROSCAs and Mukenkede/ Gema Kumwino groups, the main activity is based on a revolving scheme. Some groups with agricultural activities apply a revolving scheme to provide materials to their members. This study suggests that, at least in Busoga, members of such groups are generally more committed than members of groups that do not apply that principle (SACCOs, VSLAs, other cooperatives). The equality in distribution of wealth to each member has such importance for the members' sense of reciprocity and fairness that they do not even mind waiting for their turn. On the contrary, they are very committed to ensuring that the cycle is completed, regardless of whether their position in it is first or last. The team of ENDA-GRAF has made an observation that may explain this finding:

*Many African societies still live according to the model of reciprocity. 'I receive, therefore I exist. I give, therefore I am respected.' According to this logic, the gift is the main point of reference [...] it is never an isolated act: the gift creates or reinforces the social ties; it calls for a counter-gift [...]* (N'Dione et al. 1998, 371).

Though I endeavour to avoid any romanticisation of supposed 'African reciprocity', the data I collected support this claim. Like a giver who is assured of the right to a counter-gift, members of the above-mentioned groups can wait patiently for their turn in the cycle. One respondent compared Mukenkede/ Gema Kumwino groups to a blood pact that makes relatives of the people involved, with the distinction that they no longer exchange blood but rather gifts. Other groups like VSLAs or cooperatives lack such an element that makes comparable to everyday life or to cultural practices the social relations built within them. In many such groups, members do not feel like friends exchanging gifts, but rather like business partners – a kind of relationship that is not predestined to ensure trust. However, maybe because the social fabric is already weakened, the *perfect equivalence* between the 'gifts' (i.e., amounts of money in a ROSCA or material assets in a consumer association) is needed as another guarantee of fairness.

From the perspective of women, SSE-activities contain opportunities for self-empowerment. Three female respondents of this study spoke about the opportunity of surviving with the help of an SSE-group and without depending on a husband. The majority of the above-described SSE-groups had a mixed membership, though some were women-only groups. Women groups showed a slight tendency towards savings and credit, though they could also be found in other spheres like cooperatives or consumer associations. Particularly striking about women groups is their tendency to emphasise the aspect of caring and sharing. Within – and sometimes even beyond – the group, members are sensitive to the needs and problems of

other women. SSE-activities can be a source of livelihood and sometimes even of empowerment for the most disadvantaged groups in a capitalist society. As women are a notably disadvantaged group in Uganda (Kasente 2002, 186), they especially can benefit from the SSE.

### *3.2.6 Evaluation of the groups encountered in terms of their SSE potential*

All the group types listed herein can be categorised as SSE activities, though some of them with reservations. **Cooperatives**, for instance, do not create *local* economic cycles, aiming instead to grant farmers access to *external* markets. Apart from that, they fulfil many SSE-criteria. As mentioned above, they are the oldest and most popular form of SSE-groups and enjoy the reputation of protecting their members from market forces.

**Savings and credit groups** are highly ambivalent in relation to SSE: On the one hand, they threaten social cohesion between family and community members and further the individual accumulation of capital. Especially VSLAs and SACCOs tend to treat their members violently in case they fail to pay back their loans (on time). On the other hand, the population needs alternatives to commercial loan providers. In comparison to the latter, community-based savings and credit groups still offer more space for mutual understanding, consideration, and support among members. Especially ROSCAs with their pure *savings* activities can even be taken as a radical alternative to conventional financial services. They fulfil all SSE criteria. Only with regard to collective ownership one might argue that the money remains the individual members' property. However, until the cycle is completed, it somehow remains common property, as members only have a legitimate claim to their payout as long as they deliver their regular contributions. VSLAs tend to be more dangerous and simultaneously more attractive for their users. They fulfil surprisingly many SSE criteria, namely cooperation, democratic decision making, bottom-up processes, local orientation, and – with reservations – collective ownership (throughout the year, the money belongs to the group) as well as caring and sharing (not always, but in some cases). Nevertheless, their goal is capital accumulation. The very elements that make them attractive (loans and interest) also make them problematic. Taking a small but regular contribution to ROSCA meetings is easier for low-income earners than paying back a loan with interest within a short period of time. As a result, VSLAs often encounter trouble with members failing to pay back (on time) and the rest of the group taking tough measures on them. Under these circumstances, all members are subject to financial and social trouble – a situation that is not intended by the SSE.

SACCOs present themselves as complete failures when defined as member-based organisations. They do not fulfil satisfactorily a single SSE criterion. Nevertheless, SACCOs may play an important role in other areas of an alternative economy. They can render



specialised financial services to cooperatives and smaller SSE groups for whom it is difficult to attain funds from banks. SACCOs can connect them to government agencies, NGOs, formal financial service providers, or local elites (as those institutions are not likely to disappear in the foreseeable future, just like the need for financial resources). In that constellation, SACCOs could grant access to finance to SSE groups and, at the same time, ensure that SSE criteria are considered throughout the transaction.

**Consumer associations (Mukenkede/ Gema Kumwino)** fulfil the majority of SSE criteria. Their shortcomings are in the areas of collective ownership (as the gifts become the member's individual property) and the creation of local economic cycles. The majority of goods members buy for each other are not produced in the region. In terms of the values they promote, those groups are ambivalent: While their focus on the purchase of goods appears very capitalism-friendly, significant social dimensions pertaining to the frequent meetings and the enjoyable time spent together during the gift showers build social cohesion and promote solidarity. Social structures that have been destroyed over time can be re-built or replaced with new ones. Moreover, the 'gifts' exchanged within the groups are usually not luxury goods, but daily necessities (e.g., clothes, household utensils). Consequently, the collaboration within those groups can grant access to such basic items to people, who usually lack such access.

SSE activities can either serve as *slightly alternative strategies of* capitalist development (Utting 2015, 5, 9-10) or as *alternatives to* capitalist development (Santos/ Rodríguez-Garavito 2007, xx-xxiii). The majority of groups encountered in Busoga tend to be the former rather than the latter. Cooperatives dealing in production and marketing, consumer associations, burial societies, ROSCAs, and VSLAs (though with reservations) are helpful for the population of Busoga, and particularly for disadvantaged groups in their daily struggle with globalisation's impacts on their everyday lives. In addition to that, they all advance values like distributive justice, cooperation, and solidarity rather than capitalist competition and exploitation. Nevertheless, some of them contain traces of capitalistic principles, e.g., market access or profit-orientation (though equal and not monopolised distribution of those profits is pursued). In the scope of this study, I encountered only two kinds of SSE groups that deserve to be called *radical alternatives to* capitalist development: ROSCAs and Muno Mukabi groups. However, even the remaining kinds of groups fulfil important functions as means of survival for their members within a hostile environment and as promoters of values based on solidarity. Only when people see such (slightly) alternative endeavours succeed will they believe in alternatives to capitalist development.

### **3.3 Why should we think about alternative economic practices?**

According to Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, rather than forcing Africa into the Western-dominated world-system, Africans should evolve their own, diverse politico-economic ideas (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 293). Arturo Escobar suggests that the most promising alternatives to capitalist development can be found in micro-level practices, in the global South (Escobar 2012, 223). Immanuel Wallerstein believed that Africa's marginal position in the capitalist world-system would become its strength when it comes to creating alternatives for the future (Wallerstein 2017, 64-65). Post-Development thinkers like Wolfgang Sachs and Majid Rahnema have pointed to the Western development model being harmful for humanity and the natural environment, as it already exceeds the natural limits of planet Earth's capacities. Consequently, rather than animating others to copy its system, the global North should think about sustainable alternatives for the future, while granting others the freedom to find their own – hopefully sustainable – ways (Rahnema 1998, 379, 384, 391-393; Sachs 1998, 291-299). Recent research has demonstrated that global economic crises – like the one of 2008 – and the current global ecological crisis are logical consequences of the structure of the capitalist world-system (cf. e.g. Schmalz 2014, 145-148). Neoliberalism, the current ideological basis of global capitalism, has turned out to be a poor strategy for dealing with economic and ecological crises alike. Countries that do not follow neoliberalism's major principles like economic deregulation and reliance on the financial sector strictly, for instance the BRIC countries and among them especially China, have overcome the 2008 economic crisis better than others (ibid., 145). At the same time, neoliberalism's call for unlimited economic growth has led to a massive use of natural resources in the so-called 'developed countries' that already reaches the limits of planet Earth's capacities and cannot be copied by the rest of the world (ibid., 147-148). As a result, there is a need to "make growth in developing countries [sic!] sustainable and post-growth in industrialised countries stable" (ibid., 148, translation by E.K.).

Through its major principle of capital accumulation, capitalism tends to distribute wealth from the majority of the world population to a minority (Altvater 2011, 139). The global justice movement (or alter-globalisation movement) has been criticising neoliberal globalisation for prioritising global corporations and ignoring negative social impacts of its programme, since the 1980s (Ziai 2021, 15-16). Recently, it rose to new levels, due to new technical means of communication and networking, but also due to the already diverse movement embracing many new actors (ibid., 16-18). For instance, it has been joined by several social movements that build their argumentations on the above-described 'limited natural resources'-approach, e.g., the de-growth movement (cf. e.g. Muraca 2014; Paech 2015). According to Aram Ziai, a special feature of this 'new' global justice movement is its objective of "social change from below" – a peaceful, democratic change, which's outcomes can and should look differently in

different local contexts – rather than a forcible revolution with a pre-decided result (Ziai 2021, 20, translation by E.K.). The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is one among many socio-economic alternatives that are promoted by the global justice movement as well as by other critics of the social impacts of unregulated capitalism. However, I have identified SSE as particularly interesting for my study because of its historical and current link to practice. Numerous alternative approaches have been tried out in its scope on different levels, e.g., cooperatives, non-profit-making societies or self-help groups, etc. (Altwater 2011, 203). They have helped people, who had been disadvantaged by the system, not only to find their niche for survival, but also to act on their own non-capitalist terms of solidarity and equity (ibid.). In summary, the ‘search for alternatives’ to the current socio-economic system – or at least to essential but harmful features of it – is neither a monolithic global movement, nor an exclusive sphere of some particular actors. It can take place on different levels, even on the smallest.

As has been pointed out above, the search for ‘living alternatives’ in Busoga has delivered ambiguous results. Some groups encountered were good examples of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), others were not; some were illustrations of SSE’s strengths, others results of its weaknesses. It is one of the strengths of SSE that it can work on every level, even that of a single group of people, who decide to do things differently, e.g., to prioritise equal distribution and democratic decision making over capital accumulation. In that context, I would like to borrow Abdou Salam Fall’s image of the “social and solidarity economy as a laboratory to question the dominant paradigm in development processes” (Fall 2013, 96). In the ‘laboratory’ of SSE, various ingredients are being blended, e.g., Western and non-Western approaches, capitalistic and non-capitalistic ideas, old and new forms of mutual support, autochthonous forms of solidarity and those initiated by influences from outside. Whether the outcome is a success or a failure, the experiment itself has produced helpful new experiences. In summary, my study results from Busoga demonstrate that alternatives are being tried out in practice. The above-discussed details concerning those alternatives can serve to gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The implementation of orthodox liberalisation policies and the exposure of the national economy to the global market – prior to any chance of evolving social safety nets, a diversified labour market, strong industries, and stable capital markets – has been diagnosed as highly problematic even by some mainstream economists like Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2002, 15-17). Nevertheless, such policies have been guiding the political direction in Uganda since 1987

(Kiiza 2008). The effects of those measures are evident in the everyday lives of the population of Busoga: The population is fully integrated into the liberalised market economy of Uganda, the East African region and – at least as consumers – the global economy. On the one hand, this facilitates access to cheap imported goods as well as new communication technologies for most, and some even enjoy new markets for their products. On the other hand, the cost of living is steadily rising faster than incomes and growing social inequality continues between the few who are privileged (e.g., sugar cane farmers, large-scale traders) and the majority who are disadvantaged by economic liberalisation. In many households, the ever-increasing need for money (for educational and health expenditures, food, clothes, and other daily necessities) leads to food insecurity, as small-to medium-scale farmers sell off (almost) the entire harvest as soon as it is ready. Farmers in general face many challenges, most saliently shortage of land, pests, climate change, and a weak position in terms of price negotiations with intermediaries. The only viable option for raising their bargaining power requires coming together in cooperatives.

The position of Uganda and, as a result, of Busoga as a periphery of the capitalist world-system has been stable since their integration into that system around 1900. That position has proven resistant to any change, even after the actors profiting from the region have changed. Though nowadays little surplus value is transferred to the global North, that surplus value continues to move upwards within the system, from Busoga to aspiring semiperipheries. Farmers sell their harvest to local or regional intermediaries in order to buy goods produced in those semiperipheries. Admittedly, Ugandan elites likewise profit (e.g., as intermediaries, traders, government actors). Even so, taking into account the high number of disadvantaged people and their poor prospects of significantly improving their situation in the near future, this cannot be taken as a sign of the region's (or the country's) upward movement within the system. It must rather be interpreted as a sign of the increasing social inequality *within* the region (or the country). For such an analysis, postcolonial and Post-Development theory are more sensitive than the world-systems perspective. However, for understanding the impression that the involvement of Busoga's population as consumers in the global market mounts while their involvement as producers reduces, world-systems analysis was more helpful than the other approaches. This experience confirms Ferguson's hypothesis that fitting manifestations of globalisation in Africa into a single theoretical framework is neither easy nor desirable (Ferguson 2006, 26). Globalisation is far too complex to be captured by a single 'grand theory' – not exclusively, yet notably in Africa, as the continent's experiences with colonialism, post-independence state formation, the development industry, and current forms of economic exploitation and domination by actors from abroad are very specific.

Processes of commodification are also pervasive in Busoga. Subsistence crops and formerly useless items (that can now be used as inputs for commercial farming) have been turned into merchandise. Commons (e.g., land, fruit) have been turned into private property. These trends lead to processes of commodification in social relationships. The long-term reciprocal relationship that used to be established among neighbours or friends by exchanging favours over time has been replaced by the immediate exchange of goods for money. Things that used to be given for free are now essential means for generating income. A new preoccupation with prestige keeps people from borrowing and sharing as they have done before – even though doing so would be helpful in their precarious situation. The social safety net of the extended family (clan) has suffered not only from conflicts and diseases that forced people to leave their ancestral places in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also from individualistic values and work migration promoted by globalisation.

There is no escape from the liberalised Ugandan economy for the people living in Busoga. Hence, many of them seek agency through cooperation in the face of social inequality and poverty fuelled by economic liberalisation and globalisation. They “help each other survive the market forces” by joining economic efforts in cooperatives (Nannyonjo 2015, 271) and build new social cohesion within smaller SSE groups. The most important solidarity structure for the respondents of this study is burial support. It responds extremely flexibly to any major change of everyday life in Busoga. Along with two autochthonous forms of burial support that split due to migration movements, a modern SSE-activity exists for that purpose. Other kinds of SSE-groups encountered in the scope of this study are savings and credit groups, consumers’ associations, and the above-mentioned cooperatives, all of which fulfil SSE-criteria (with the exception of Savings and Credit Cooperatives), though to differing extents. Most radically alternative to capitalist development are burial societies, followed by Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs). Others do not deserve that label, despite promoting values of solidarity. As such, they may not already *be*, nevertheless *pave the way for* alternatives to capitalist development. Such practices also help their members survive (better) within the system. While consumers’ associations grant their members access to the above-mentioned convenience goods, under ideal circumstances savings and credit groups can be helpful for financing school fees, purchases such as building materials, or investments in small income-generating activities. From that improvement in their lives, members can draw resources (material resources as well as self-esteem and social capital) for exercising their agency.

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