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### **Reflections on Vulnerability: Aspects of Sustainability of Art in Post-War and Conflict Societies The Examples of Kosovo and Afghanistan**

**Abstract:** *In the article “Reflections on Vulnerability: Aspects of Sustainability of Art in Post-War and Conflict Societies. The Examples of Kosovo and Afghanistan”<sup>1</sup> I will discuss the hypothesis that the articulation of violation, as demanded by artists, can be describe as an opportunity that demands recognition, as their perspective can contribute to sustainable change in conflictual societies. Artists in post-war societies are coping with the experience of being marginalized, ridiculed and prosecuted. The artists’ creativity is one strategy they use to create a new way of coping with unbearable situations. I will conclude that the artistic disposition toward social changes and normalizations in post-war societies consists in remaining a wound. Sustainable cultural assistance in countries such as Kosovo and Afghanistan can yield lasting results only if actors from these societies are included in and recognized as equal partners in the process of reconstruction of their societies.*

## **1. Introduction**

In the following essay, I will draw on research undertaken in Kosovo and Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The two countries are comparable because the situation in both can be described as one of a precarious or non-existent state. The military interventions in these countries, which have so far led to only marginal improvements in the conditions of civilian life, also show that one can speak of problems in the consolidation of peace and of an insufficient sustainable reconstruction of the two countries. The problems, conflicts, and contradictions in the way these countries are represented in the discourses on international law represent to my mind a form of communicative disdain for the abilities civilian societies show in making a genuine contribution to the reconstruction of their country. The attempts undertaken by NGOs toward reconstruction in countries with precarious state institutions run counter to an adequate engagement of the conflicts in these countries. Based on interviews with artists in Afghanistan and Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, I thus present dimensions of the articulation of

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for discussions, comments and references to Julia Afifi, Anthony Amatrudo, Ingeborg Baldauf, Anita Chari, Maeve Cooke, Jutta Gehrig, Axel Honneth, Heikki Ikäheimo, Lena Inowlocki, Gerrit Jackson (for translating the revised version), Sacha Kagan, Volker Kirchberg, Philipp v. Leonhardi, Uriya Shavit, Fritz Schütze and Julia Zhang.

<sup>2</sup> My PhD project is entitled: ‘The Experimental Public Sphere: A qualitative-interpretative study of the appropriation and transformation of the public sphere by contemporary artists.’ For my research, I invite artists into radio shows and conduct life-history interviews with them. I use radio as an experimental space and employ participant observation and interaction to reconstruct, through interactions with artists, the production of symbolic forms in the framework of a concept of a deliberative public sphere.

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Afghan and Kosovar art scenes work toward recognition in ways similar to those described by Kagan and

violation, as demanded by artists because of this situation, in order to describe such articulation as an opportunity that demands recognition, as their perspective can contribute to sustainable change in conflictual societies<sup>4</sup>. This would equally result in an altered conception of peace consolidation in these countries, which I consequently describe as follows: establishing a sustainable and stable political situation in these countries means to do justice to the contemporary conditions of the political from the perspective of the violation of a civil society, and, given the experience of violation suffered by individuals there, to respect the state of mourning among the civilian population. My hypothesis is that in post-war societies, ways of life that are capable of experimentation must first be recognized by the media in order for the capacity to narrate one's own life to become a reality once again. Biography research has therefore to employ ethnographic practices<sup>5</sup> if it is to describe social reality adequately. In order to undertake biography research in a vulnerable society, we must rethink concepts of interpretation with respect to the unknown others. Biographical research can play an empowering role in these processes, by "providing a voice" in societies that are "under construction," such as in Kosovo or Afghanistan. How do we create a sustainable view through research on artist's artistic action in post-war societies? And could this be a substantial contribution to the creation of a pluralistic and sustainable pluralistic public sphere and public spaces for artistic production in Kosovo or Afghanistan?

I will begin with a discussion of public spheres in post-war societies and then with a discussion of philosophical approaches proposed by Judith Butler, Axel Honneth, and Chantal Mouffe; in a third step, I will contrast these with statements by artists from Kosovo and Afghanistan; these will enable me to describe a perspective of political action characterized by understanding and based on artistic forms of expression.<sup>6</sup>

I then associate the creativity of artists, and the way they work with language or situations, such as social situations that lead to renewed sense-making and a shift in belief structures, with crisis resolution. Artists can be therefore described as actors of transformation in post-war societies. In this context, I consider artists protagonists of a democratic culture because of the ability they have

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Abbing in their examination of the role "subunits" play in the definition of an "overall art world." "An art world is as vast as the order of legitimization (i.e. the Canon) that it holds together. It is an arena offering a common identity, understanding and recognition around the definition of an art-form." (Abbing / Kagan 2007: 3)

<sup>4</sup> There are some difficulties in bringing together field research in conflictual societies and discourses on sustainability. To understand the problems in societies under construction, it is necessary to discuss first the different perspectives in theories of public spheres, how democratization and the political is reflected in order to understand what is lacking and failing in these societies. That artists have a specific role in this discussion is the aim of this article to make this more objective.

<sup>5</sup> see Denzin *Interpretive Ethnography* (1997) and see also Maurice Punch, *Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research* (1998)

<sup>6</sup> Another perspective to describe artistic action in art worlds comes from Kagan and Abbing: "In the art world as an arena of conflicts, certain circumstances enable occasional change, others almost continuous change, while some circumstances make change especially difficult for long periods. One major dimension of such circumstances lies in the polity conventions of the art world."(2007:1)

to creatively shape the public sphere and to include the observer as a standard for measuring the success of a reflexive public sphere.

## 2. The political and cultural constitution of public spheres in post-war societies

All democracies engage in debates about their own practices and achievements. “For Dewey, democracy must be understood as a process in which more and more elements are included in new ways; this is why democracy, according to its own understanding of itself, can never claim to be fully accomplished.” (Niederberger 2006, 272; Dewey 1927, 143-184) It is in the framework of the debates that individuals themselves conduct about the public sphere and democracy that they come into existence. These forms of articulation can be understood as part of a “normative conception of the public sphere and discursive communication.” Peters argues that this conception can be seen in “the freedoms of communication guaranteed by constitutions and press laws, in political and juridical discourses about freedom of opinion and expression, in debates about media policy, in the norms of journalism as a profession and in public controversies about the standards of behaviour prevailing in the mass media, in public indignation about secrecy and the way the public is misled, in negative reactions to the use of manipulative techniques in political campaigns, and in minority groups’ claims to the right to express their views and have their voices heard” (1994, 49). Exerting influence on the development of public spaces can preserve the conditions of communication for the free expression of opinion with a sufficient degree of variation and pluralism. It is important to recognize the factors that can cause public spaces to shrink or collapse.

In a society at war, such as Afghanistan, these public spaces and democratic standards are almost completely absent.<sup>7</sup> As efforts are made to reconstruct the country, the focus is on restoring “shrunk” and “collapsed” public spaces and on establishing democratic spaces of free discursive communication. One can speak of life-threatening exclusion when the conditions in a society are such that people cannot participate in public debates and are excluded from the discursive arenas of complex modern societies, when they are deprived of opportunities to appear in the public sphere

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<sup>7</sup> In 2008, Afghanistan will have seen 30 years in conflicts and at war. When King Mohammad Zahir, the Father of the Nation (baba-e-mellat), died on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, the majority of the Afghans and both houses of the Afghan Parliament considered his 40-year reign as the most peaceful time in the history of Afghanistan. Afghanistan before the beginning of the conflict in 1978 was known and is in retrospect still seen as a state on a progressive path towards democratization and with a vivid public life. “The conflict had its origins in the 1978 coup that overthrew Afghan president Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan, who had come to power by ousting the king in 1973. The president was assassinated and a pro-Soviet Communist government under Noor Mohammed Taraki was established. In 1979 another coup, which brought Hafizullah Amin to power, provoked an invasion (Dec., 1979) by Soviet forces and the installation of Babrak Karmal as president.” The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition, 2007. See E. Girardet, Afghanistan (1986); A. H. Cordesman and A. R. Wagner, Lessons of Modern War, Vol. III (1989); A. Saikal and W. Maley, ed., The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan (1989); A. Hyman, Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964-1991 (3d ed. 1992).

and hence of access to those locations where conversation takes place. Butler argues that this exclusion is connected with the human capacity for language and the capacity to speak. “The public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors.” (Butler 2004, XVII) Butler here develops a concept of the public sphere as equivalent to a space of experience and public appearance in which human life can unfold. Heike Kämpf describes Butler’s understanding of the public sphere as one “in which reality constitutes itself for the participants, within which communication is possible, and in which the actors can be made visible” (Kämpf 2006, 230). Artists need public spaces for their work, and they need the acceptance and recognition of the cultural forms in which they express themselves. These forms of expression articulate reactions to the conditions in a given society and to social change. In my view, artistic articulations are linked to political deliberations in societies that are in a stage of reconstruction and social change.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, aesthetic forms of communication employed by visual artists are related to the reflexivity of public spheres. The public sphere is therefore understood as a sphere of communication, and it extends into the internal structure of the individual consciousness. It rests on ideas that individuals can relate to themselves, and provides frames for the development of identity. Political actors constitute themselves as such when motives become ideas and a political dimension comes into existence. For political speech to take place in a democratic society, participation must be understood as being fundamentally related to this political process. The renewed and urgent importance of the question of participation is a consequence of a changed understanding of the political. Participation, representation, and constitution are interlocked; according to Volker Gerhardt<sup>9</sup>, they form a triangle within which the political moves. A “social whole,” Gerhardt writes, is “itself present only in its parts.” One recognizes it in symbols or in singular acts which, moreover, are adequately understood only by those who have a part in them. Conversely, the respective social whole itself functions as the representation of those who cooperate under its claims.” (Gerhardt 2007, 25) Besides the representational functions that address social action in the form of *mental representations*, *scenic presentation*, and *active representation of persons*, acting for others is the decisive political process. In the latter, Gerhardt recognizes the connection between participation and representation—“there is no participation without representation” (ibid.). Truth and knowledge, thus Gerhardt, will procure for themselves the public they need be-

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<sup>8</sup> There are several more questions: How does the state of a region in crisis, such as Kosovo and Afghanistan, influence the possibilities of narrativity and creativity? What is the empowering condition, and how does this influence the narration of life stories? How does the constitution of public spheres influence the opportunities for an expression and articulation of individual lives? How is it possible that active, recognitive attitudes of human beings are simply forgotten? And how does this situation affect a social and political theory of post-war societies and societies at war such as Afghanistan?

<sup>9</sup> Volker Gerhardt (2007), *Partizipation. Das Prinzip der Politik*.

cause “politics is dependent on the sphere of universal validity.” According to Gerhardt, politics and science are public activities that render that which is of political and scientific import negotiable, allowing an interplay between the individual and collective consciousnesses to emerge. “Only in the medium of the public can a large number of people be united in a conjoining political consciousness. How far the frame of this community may be seen to extend is documented by the telling, though empirically unprovable, concept of the ‘world public.’” (Ibid., 369)

### 3. Articulations of vulnerability in post-war societies

In “Excitable Speech” (1997), Judith Butler’s claim was that we can be injured by language. If we are injured by language, she asked, what can we do? “We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts, and acts against us, and the claim we make is a further instance of language, one which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance.” (Butler 1997, 1) She analysed how we do things with language and what effects we produce with language, because we *do* language. The new question I sketch here based Butler’s arguments after 9/11 in “Precarious Life” is: How are we now *doing* the political? <sup>10</sup> For how can the political violate, in contrast to the violations we suffer through the use of language?<sup>11</sup> For Butler, political communities are based on a relationality that is constituted and composed by others and the bonds they have with each other. Judith Butler’s claim in “Precarious life” is that if we were to argue against this relationality, we would ignore a fundamental social condition of our formation. And if we were to ignore this relationality, we would lose the ability to understand how a community is suffering. We have ties to others and “that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us.” (Butler 2004, 22) These ties make a community inscrutable and mysterious if there are too great losses. Butler insists in her essays on referring to a common human vulnerability, “one that emerges with life itself.” For Butler there are ways of distributing vulnerability, differential forms of allocation that make some populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others. “To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways.” (Butler 2004, XII) My claim in this essay is that vulnerability must therefore be understood as a concept that is primary and a fundamental condition of human life, because “there are others outside on whom my life depends.” Vulnerability is a primary form of the structure of human life and of the reconstitution of a political

<sup>10</sup> See also Mouffe, *on the political*, where she is mentioning that we are living in a “post-political period”, [...] with neo-liberal globalization being perceived as the unique horizon...”(Mouffe 2005: 109)

<sup>11</sup> „The failure of language to rid itself of its own instrumentality or, indeed, rhetoricity, is precisely the inability of language to annul itself in the telling of a tale, in the reference to what exists or in the volatile scenes of interlocution.” (Butler 1997: 8).

community and a community in general, because there is a human condition that everybody shares. New ties may emerge in a community through the reflection and experience on how human beings suffer. We can find an aspect comparable to Butler's conception of vulnerability in Axel Honneth's critique of *Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View*<sup>12</sup>, where he makes reference to human beings, who initially stand in a recognitive, empathetic, interested relation to the world. Honneth furthermore rethinks reification as "forgetfulness of recognition" ("Anerkennungsvergessenheit"), suggesting that human beings lose the conscious ability to care for and recognize the other as a person. When human interrelations are characterized by reification and forgetfulness of recognition, then, thus Honneth, social recognition must be described through an analysis of its failures, in humiliation, disrespect, experience of injustices, misrecognition in social relations, and through the lack of participatory engagement ("Teilnahmslosigkeit") in social interaction. True abnegation of *primary recognition*, Honneth writes, is possible only on societies that have arrived at a point zero of sociality. More than a passing imaginary reification of human beings, beneath whose surface an "ontological difference remains conscious that really obtains between a person and a thing," this ontological distinction "falls into oblivion" in "originary" forms of "reification." When that happens, thus Honneth, "the sense is indeed lost that [the other] is a being with human characteristics." (2007, 12) Replying to Judith Butler, Honneth explains that his Honneth "interest in the subject of 'reification'" is rooted in the difficulty of interpreting industrial mass murder. What becomes manifest in such mass murder is not merely the "disappearance" and "oblivion" of the "primary recognition" that had been performed before, but, I believe, also a forgetting of the vulnerability of the other as well as of the self. In Honneth's understanding of recognition, attitudes such as "sympathy," "worry," or "concern" are something we have in common, something that is of existential importance because we are "worried only by such events, concerned only by such occurrences as have direct and immediate relevance for the way in which we understand our lives. Therefore, we cannot not react to states of affairs that concern us in this way: whatever concerns us existentially compels us to relate to it in one way or another. Now, I have proposed that we regard such a form of existential significance as the result of a primary and very elementary form of recognition: we react to certain phenomena in our life-world with an existential responsiveness because we adopt an attitude toward them in which we accept them as the other of our selves; this *primary* recognition is expressed by the fact [...] that we cannot avoid taking a position." (Honneth 2007, 5) The knowledge of the vulnerability of the other enables an orientation of the perspective of understanding the other that precedes the "participant's perspective." This means that we recognize the vulnerable self of the other within ourselves. If we recognize within ourselves, by virtue of the other's intentionality, an *a priori* intentionality

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<sup>12</sup> Honneth, Axel: „Reification: A Recognition-Theoretical View“. Tanner Lectures on Human Values. March 14 -16, 2005. Lecture II: Reification as Loss of Recognitional Attitudes, Tuesday, March 15, 2005, With commentary by Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss and Jonathan Lear

that is akin to our own, we do soon the basis of an intentional orientation that acknowledges also the other's vulnerability. "Without the experience that other individuals are fellow men, we would be incapable of attributing to them moral values that control or curb our action; the elementary recognition, then, must have been performed at first, we must at first adopt a stance of existential sympathy with the other before we can learn to follow norms of recognition that compel us to comply with certain forms of consideration or benevolence." (Honneth 2007, 6) Drawing on Chantal Mouffe's *On the political*, I would like to bring the oblivion of the vulnerability of the other to the global political stage of international interventions. This might help to explain political and artistic action in Kosovo and Afghanistan. "[W]hat is at stake in the discussion about the nature of 'the political,'" thus Mouffe, "is the very future of our democracy<sup>13</sup>." (Mouffe 2005, 9) According to Mouffe, new antagonisms have arisen in the political order that "represent challenges that decades of neo-liberal hegemony have made us unable to confront." (Ibid. 119) The cosmopolitan discussion of the notion of a global representative democracy, thus Mouffe, fails to recognize the hegemonic dimensions of politics: "To believe in the possibility of a cosmopolitan democracy with cosmopolitan citizens with the same rights and obligations, a constituency that would coincide with 'humanity' is a dangerous illusion. If such a project was ever realized, it could only signify the world hegemony of a dominant power that would have been able to impose its conception of the world on the entire planet and which, identifying its interests with those of humanity, would treat any disagreement as an illegitimate challenge to its 'rational' leadership." (Mouffe 2005, 107) The political, thus Mouffe, is distinguished by the fact that is among the *existentials* (Heidegger) of any social life and equiprimordial with the visible acts of social institutionalization—hence the hegemonic character of the political. "Every order is political and based on some forms of exclusion." (2005, 18) At the same time, every hegemonic order can be put in question through "counter-hegemonic practices," leading to the possible establishment of other hegemonic orders. Both within and without hegemonic orders,<sup>14</sup> one can speak of antagonistic friend/enemy relations and of agonistic models of opposition in parliamentary democracies (Canetti). Based on the unipolar and hegemonic world order she diagnoses—"the unquestionable supremacy of the United States"—Mouffe demands a multipolar world order that would not be *beyond hegemony*; rather, "the only conceivable strategy for overcoming world dependence on a single power is to find ways to 'pluralize' hegemony." (2005, 118) The latter describes, thus Mouffe, how "in order to be political this we/they relationship had to take the antagonistic form of a friend/enemy relation." for Schmitt,<sup>15</sup> of course, in order to the political this we/they

<sup>13</sup> By contrast, what is central to parliamentary democracies, thus Mouffe, is not representation but deliberation; "the difficulties linked to the establishment of a global representative democracy can be ignored. Participation in a global civil society could replace representation by providing a place for deliberation about the range of issues affecting people in different aspects of their lives." (Mouffe 2005: 105-106)

<sup>14</sup> For an understanding of these complex interrelations, see also Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, and Mladen Dolar, *His Master's Voice*.

<sup>15</sup> In order to explain how, given the relational constellations of societies, new friend-enemy relations arise, how

relation had to take the antagonistic form of a friend / enemy relation. This is why he could not allow its presence within the political association.” (ibid.16) This antagonism is constitutive of the political and, thus Schmitt, ought not to be defined as restricted to one single hegemonic world order. Terrorism, Mouffe writes, is a reaction to a unipolar hegemonic world order. The moralistic and messianic public discourse of the Bush administration, the “War on Terror,”<sup>16</sup> obscures the monopolization of an *idea of civilization* and of *Western liberal hegemony* it serves to assert. An understanding of the political that is to be found in consensus on a single global political model, she writes, excludes a dimension of “legitimate dissensus.” In the formation of political identities, the “we/them distinction can always become the site of an antagonism” (ibid.), an antagonism that is part of the political and, according to Schmitt, of our *ontological constitution*. The political is constituted as antagonistic, thus Mouffe, an antagonism that is manifest in a sublimated form in the oppositions within parliamentary democracies, as an agonism. A pluralistic antagonism would permit conflict and dissensus in a multipolar world because there is an insistence on a we/them relation that, however, does not destroy the enemy, so that the hegemony of the neoliberal model might be put in question. “Conflict, in order to be accepted as legitimate, needs to take a form that does not destroy the political association. This means that some kind of common bond must exist between the parties in conflict, so that they will not treat their opponents as enemies to be eradicated, seeing their demands as illegitimate, which is precisely what happens with the antagonistic friend/enemy relation.” (Mouffe 2005, 20) The concept of the opponent is thus of constitutive importance for a democratic politics. “Antagonistic conflicts are less likely to emerge as long as agonistic legitimate political channels for dissenting voices exist. Otherwise dissent tends to take violent forms, and this is true in both domestic and international politics.”(Ibid., 21) Hence, Mouffe follows Cacciari<sup>17</sup> in understanding the recognition of a pluralistic global order as “working towards the establishment of an international system of law based on the idea of regional poles and cultural identities federated among themselves in the recognition of their full autonomy.” (ibid., 117) For instance, no functioning parliamentary institutions exist in countries such as Afghanistan or Kosovo. In such situations

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we/them relations within collectives can turn into antagonistic relations, she draws on Carl Schmitts *Concept of the Political* and, thinking “with Schmitt against Schmitt,” seeks to use “his critique of liberal individualism and rationalism to propose a new understanding of liberal democratic politics [...]” (Mouffe, ibid 14).

<sup>16</sup> “Defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government. Today, that task has changed dramatically. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger America. Now, shadowy networks of individuals can bring great chaos and suffering to our shores for less than it costs to purchase a single tank. Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us. To defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal—military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing. The war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration.” (Bush, G.W.: The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>

<sup>17</sup> see Massimo Cacciari, *Digressioni su Impero e tre Rome*, in: H. Friese, A. Negri and P. Wagner (ed.), *Europe Politica. Ragioni di una necessita*, Rom (2002); a critical view on the confiscation of democracy can you find in Andrew Arato, *Empire’s Democracy, Ours and theirs* (2006) and Jean Cohen, “*Whose Sovereignty? Empire versus International Law*” *Ethics and International Affairs* (2004) v. 18 # 3, see also Ulrich Beck: *On the cosmopolitan view. War is Peace. Beck, (2004): Der kosmopolitische Blick oder: Krieg ist Frieden.*

one can say that “the possibility of an agonistic confrontation disappears and it is replaced by an antagonistic we/they” (ibid., 23) because these states are currently being adapted by the international actors involved to a hegemonic global order that, due to the regional structures of Afghanistan, fails to gain recognition there, and provokes resistance. The military conflict in Afghanistan shows that a new antagonistic principle has emerged on the level of international politics that stands in contradiction to the idea of trans-national democracies or global governance in a multipolar world order. “Whatever its guise, the implementation of a cosmopolitan order would in fact result in the imposition of one single model, the liberal democratic one, on to the whole world. In fact it would mean bringing more people directly under control of the West, with the argument that its model is the better suited to the implementation of human rights and universal values. And, as I have argued, this is bound to arouse strong resistances and to create dangerous antagonisms.” (Mouffe 2005, 103) International processes of decision-making, Mouffe writes according to Dahl<sup>18</sup>, are not democratic because democracy serves to exercise control over those who govern—“if we accept that democracy is a system of popular control over governmental policies and decisions.” (Ibid., 105) To discuss all aspects of the debate over cosmopolitan democracy would be beyond the scope of this essay. I would like to connect the question to the articulations of cultural actors and artists in post-war societies.

#### 4. Asymmetrical relationships in rebuilding the Afghan state

In the following, I will point out contradictions and an asymmetry in relationships between the new Afghan community and the international community in Afghanistan, which I interpret as forms of an elementary failure to recognize the other in communicative acts. Two research trips to Kabul in 2005 and 2007<sup>19</sup> provided the author and her colleagues with opportunities to examine the public forms of expression that were coming into existence in Afghanistan and making political speech possible.<sup>20</sup> In order to do so and to get an idea of how a cultural public sphere was constituted by cultural actors, we conducted narrative interviews with cultural actors from the fields of film, theatre, the media, and the fine arts. New forms of negotiation of culture employed by cultural actors and the discursive arenas that artists were shaping for themselves provided strong evidence

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Dahl, *Can International Organizations be Democratic? A sceptical View*. In: *Democracy's Edges*, (2000) see also Rainer Forst, *Recht auf Rechtfertigung*, (2007) and David Held, *Democracy and the New International Order*. In: Daniel Archibugi and David Held, (ed.), *Cosmopolitan democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order*

<sup>19</sup> We structured our investigation by framing the following questions: To what extent is a reflexive and participatory public sphere developing in Afghanistan? How do Afghans understand their own society? Are there processes of translation between religious and non-religious citizens, and what reflections are taking place on new assumptions about the role of a citizen? How is the status of freedom of opinion determined in Afghanistan? On what basis is general participation in the cultural institutions permitted?

<sup>20</sup> These research trips were undertaken by the author together with Philipp v. Leonhardi and Zpugmai Zadran. Julia Afifi made it possible for us to establish contact with cultural circles in Kabul. The 2005 trip was financed by the Auswärtiges Amt, the German foreign ministry.

that processes of democratization were taking place in Afghan society. The ways in which our interviewees weighed and reflected on these questions provides the framework of our analysis. We wanted to understand what had changed in Afghan culture and what could be interpreted as new forms of negotiation, as part of a deliberative culture that was coming into existence in Afghanistan, and as a cultural identity. Since these forms of negotiation did exist in Afghanistan, we proceeded on the basis of the assumption that democratization processes were underway in Afghan society. We can therefore speak of a struggle for acceptance of, and participation in, experimental forms of cultural life, of a kind artists need for their creative processes, in Afghanistan. The decisive question here is what creative and experimental forms of culture have already developed in Afghanistan, and how they can gain recognition; artistic productivity opens up new perspectives on the world. Through the development of new artistic processes that describe cultural difference, reflection is given a new impetus characterized by tolerance of cultural difference. This tolerance can contribute to peaceful coexistence between different ways of life that recognize each other as equals. Before I enter into the exceptionally positive developments observable in Afghan artistic circles today, I would like to mention certain problems which became apparent during our first trip to Kabul in August 2005. These problems arose as we sought to be equally open and impartial towards all actors in a post-conflict state. It was very difficult to identify a cultural public sphere in Afghanistan that was entirely unrelated to the presence of an international public sphere; international NGOs were seeking to attract public attention to their own projects. We were and are interested in Afghan cultural actors who have constituted their own visible structures since 2001, and who have distinguished themselves by professionalism<sup>21</sup> in their activities and by independence in relation to the enormous number of international trainers and advisers.

## 5. Burdened public spheres

There are major burdens weighing down on processes of democratization in Afghanistan. The country's precarious statehood affects all spheres of the civilian population's everyday life. There are significant restrictions on the citizens' *status activus*,<sup>22</sup> as there is little prospect of their finding employment that corresponds to their qualifications or will enable them to improve those qualifications. The precarious condition of the state institutions can be seen in the administrative

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<sup>21</sup> I assume that professionalization is present in biographical processes if procedures of work and the production of knowledge pertaining to the artist's own work are reflected on and presented in an action-oriented manner in the interviews. Cf. Schütze / Mondada (2004), Riemann (2003), Lena Inowlocki (2000); Völter, Bettina/ Dausien, Bettina/ Lutz, Helma/ Rosenthal, Gabriele (2005). The commitment and interests of artists in rebuilding their own country was very obvious in the interviews.

<sup>22</sup> A citizen is considered to have a *status activus* if, as an active member of society, he or she wishes to make use of his or her rights as a citizen. This includes the ability to vote, the ability, at least in principle, to be elected, and the ability, at least in principle, to hold public office. (Excerpt from an interview with Stefan Oeter interviewed by the author, December 2005).

structures. A large number of employees were appointed to their jobs without the appropriate qualifications. There is no way they can understand how the structures of a properly functioning administrative system would work, or guarantee its functioning, because they receive no training that would give them such knowledge. This means that Afghan citizens are missing out on opportunities to participate in their new institutions because of a lack of training. There is hardly any discussion in the political structures or in public life about participation, or about how Afghans themselves could influence their institutions. We interviewed international experts, and found that in many cases the working alliance between Afghans and their international partners was asymmetrical. The two parties were not equal. This lack of a capacity to act and shortage of particular skills was made worse by the fact that so far, little attention had been paid to the need to train personnel in the fields in which they work in order for them to make a responsible contribution of their own, or to forming their own judgment. The concepts of “training” by American, Canadian, and German groups I experienced in Afghanistan were asymmetrical, with a few exceptions. Most of the communicative acts between foreigners and Afghans were structured in this way; in most cases, it is an adequate description of the situation in Afghanistan. NGOs that came to Afghanistan after 2001 moved on the well-trodden paths of the international-aid caravan, securing their own financing with short-term aid projects without developing, in cooperation with the government, a sustainable structure or a sustainable concept of reconstruction.<sup>23</sup> If the beginning of international assistance in 2001 had been accompanied by an effort to train Afghans in and toward professional standards, one would have expected to see a rise in these standards.

Many of our international interviewees insisted, however, that Afghans were incapable of reconstructing their country in a professional way because they refused to accept the need for professionalization. On the international side, resources were initially allocated only to masters’ and business plans for projects with Afghans, but it was never explained that there was no prospect of these projects becoming reality. This could be interpreted as placing unnecessary burdens on the international helpers in a severely damaged country, and as expecting them to do too much. But this attitude continues to place obstacles in the way of the construction of functioning state structures, and it might also suggest a conscious policy of restricting the influence Afghans can exert on the reconstruction of their own country. Permitting such influence would entail the establishment of egalitarian and reciprocal relations of communication, and accepting contributions “on the basis of their objective power to convince, that is to say, without regard to the individual” (Peters 1994, 53). Inequality and asymmetry in relations of communication are present when “the acceptability of statements is based on perceptions of the status of the speaker, rather than because the arguments put forward have the power to convince” (ibid. 53). In Afghanistan, reciprocity in opportunities to

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<sup>23</sup> See Geertz (2005): “*What was the third world revolution*”. See also Polman, (2005) “*Der Hilfe-Supermarkt. Humanitäre Organisationen - Geschäfte, Medien und Kriegsparteien*”

communicate has not developed because there is a structural asymmetry in the distribution of knowledge being put to use in the country's reconstruction by the international actors.

In order to describe the stagnation that exists in some fields in Afghanistan, it is necessary to identify certain obstacles to the consolidation of peace. For example, nothing was done to stop former warlords making appearances in the media that helped to make conflicts worse during what was supposed to be a period of peace consolidation. The international community attempted to establish democratic principles such as freedom of the press as part of the peace process, but then found that it was no longer able to stabilize peace in the way that was needed. This culminated in 2007 in demands for an amnesty for war criminals who also sit in parliament as MPs. Up until now, no functioning judicial apparatus has been created that would be capable, for example, of guaranteeing physical protection for journalists or MPs who express critical views. Tom Koenigs, the UN Special Envoy in Afghanistan, told us: "One thing that makes the peace process more difficult is the fact that in Afghanistan, almost all the competing groups were guilty of committing massacres against the others." Mariam Tutakhel (Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin)<sup>24</sup> argues that the worst problem is the fact that what the international community drew up was a military-political concept rather than a concept for reconstruction, and that there was no reaction to problems as they arose on the ground. The NGOs are not entirely to blame for this situation, since these were mostly non-state actors, having worked before in post-communist countries that have been struggling against an overly powerful state. In Afghanistan, by contrast, the creation of state structures existed only on paper and was not turned into reality.<sup>25</sup>

"In Afghanistan, 70% of the funds flowed into the non-state sector. The nongovernmental organizations were sent into the country without any political guidance; their task was to identify projects, put them in place, carry them out, and evaluate them. There was no requirement that the projects should be effective, as a result of which there was no objective evaluation either. Local needs were not identified on the basis of what the population and the government wanted, but according to the number of project proposals submitted. In this way, I make myself irreplaceable." (Tutakhel, interviewed by the author, 2007) Non-state actors in a country like Afghanistan would undermine any basis for their own activity if they were to come to the conclusion, "We are superfluous here". But the budgetary requirements of the donor countries demand that this irreplaceability be maintained and demonstrated by means of project results.

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<sup>24</sup> Mariam Tutakhel is consultant of the Heinrich Böll Foundation Board. Between January and July 2004, she worked at the German Embassy in Herat.

<sup>25</sup> See radio interviews with Conrad Schetter (April 18, 2007), Mariam Tutakhel (January 17, 2007) and Rahraw Omarzad (April 18, 2007) at [www.fehe.org](http://www.fehe.org) (radio projects conducted by the author). See also: Schetter, C. 2007: *Die Taliban und die Neuordnung Afghanistans*. In: Chiari, B. (eds.): *Wegweiser zur Geschichte: Afghanistan*. Paderborn: Schöningh, 77-93; Schetter, C. 2006. *Geopolitics and the Afghan Territory*. *Geographische Rundschau International Edition*, 2 (4): 20-26; Schetter, C. (2005): *Ethnoscapes, National Territorialisation, and the Afghan War*.

However, one can also identify projects that open up global perspectives by giving Afghanistan its own view of the wider world. One example of this is the creation of a department for international news at Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA).<sup>26</sup> This could offer a way of breaking out of the feeling of isolation that developed during the decade in which the Taliban Regime was in power in Afghanistan, by giving the society its own channels of access to the international world. Overarching questions, such as the problem of how Afghanistan can integrate itself into a world community and which new fields of experience need to be created for this to happen, are always implicitly posed by these activities, and lead to new impulses of reflection in society; in the long term, however, they can only be developed if and when a consciousness of civil society has emerged that will make it possible for Afghan citizens to participate in and influence all spheres of life, because they are struggling for democratization<sup>27</sup>.

## 6. Artistic and political deliberations in post-war societies

There are a number of cultural actors in Afghanistan who are open to cultural exchange, and who see themselves (in a way similar to European conceptions) as “civil” forces within their society. In recent years, they have been able to establish initial structures functioning on these lines. The *Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan* (CCAA) is developing concepts that affect Afghan society as multipliers. For example, there are plans to set up a mobile movie theater in order to reach the population outside Kabul as well as in the capital. In a meeting at the beginning of March 2007, we developed the workshop program „Discovering Democracy—Young Kabul Art 2007“<sup>28</sup> and collaborated with several artists on the question of how Afghanistan’s young democracy can be represented in art.<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the workshop, cameras were distributed to the participating female art students from the Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan, enabling them to take

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<sup>26</sup> RTA’s director, Najib Roshan, was so worn down by the demands of his job that he left Afghanistan in February, 2007. This project is now seriously endangered, and the journalists who have been trained have not yet received contracts that would make it possible for them to continue their work. However, Radio is a particularly significant medium in the development of a new cultural public sphere; first, because radio broadcasts can be heard in parts of the country that are outside the reach of other media, and second, because the spoken language is part of oral culture and provides access to information to the 80% of the population who are illiterate. Some of the interviews have therefore been published in the form of radio programs

<sup>27</sup> „I think the media was trying to find its place in the new Afghanistan. We have a lot of independent publications, newspapers, and radio stations and television stations, they had a difficult time, but right now they try to find their place, it has nothing to do with the government or the parliament, it is their own effort.“ (Abdul Samad, KAS, Kabul 2007, interviewed by the author)

<sup>28</sup> The artists who participated in this workshop were: Nabila Ahmade, Ebrahim Bamiyani, M.Sulaiman-Dawlatzay, Mariam Formaly, Momin Formil, Shamsia Hassani, M. Reza Hosseini, Shabnam Ibrahimi, Wakil Kohsar, M. Nasir Mansurz, Asiya Moheby, Batol Moradi, Jahan Ara Rafiq, Mariam Rasool, M.Tamin-Sahebzada, and Ramzia Qazy Zada. „Discovering democracy—Young Kabul Art 2007“ was assisted by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

<sup>29</sup> In order to create a shared basis for all participants, we began with central questions of modern art history: how art has functioned since Marcel Duchamp; the significance of an artist such as Joseph Beuys, and how he worked; what kind of influence art can exert on society. We discussed with them f.e. the work “Coyote; I like America and America likes me“ from Beuys, performance, New York, May 1974.

spontaneous photographs. The main questions addressed here were those of the students' artistic identities, their artistic perspectives on new developments in Kabul, and the ways in which democratic structures were becoming visible. The subjects they chose for their photographs included new buildings as well as the ruins of the royal palace, the new parliament building (which we visited together), the Kabul museum, workers, landscapes, rubbish, building sites, petrol stations, snow-covered mountains, the photographer's brother eating spring onions and bread, people sitting at computers, an English class. Some reflected cooperation between the students, such as feet arranged to produce an image of joint work, or shadows the students themselves threw on the wall like the shadows in Plato's Cave Allegory. There was an impressive variety in the photographs taken, showing the conditions under which the students worked. Most of the photos were taken from inside cars, through closed windows. Why did they not get out? Why had they taken the photos with the windows closed? One of the answers given was, "We didn't dare get out of the car." This means that these young, veiled women artists still cannot move freely in their society in order, for example, to take photographs. This demonstrates a condition of "lawlessness" that prevails in many spheres of this society: Afghan society has lost its protective function,<sup>30</sup> and life has become unpredictable even though there are freedoms that one might exercise.

Shamsia, a 19-year old artist from the CCAA, drew a train with an Afghan flag travelling at high speed into a green landscape. Living in new conditions in a state like Afghanistan is associated with progress and freedom. In another drawing, a fist breaks through a pane of glass and seizes hold of freedom before it can disappear again. This is an attempt to take hold of the moment of democracy as it arrives; it has not yet become reality in Afghanistan, but the artists do not want to let it get away. If one experiences directly the new worlds of the imagination being explored by artists in Afghanistan, one understands the scale of the politics of destruction they have experienced—not just in the Taliban period, but also throughout decades of war. [...] "In 1976, the Department of Fine Arts was formed at the University of Kabul. A decade later in 1986 came the Faculty of Fine Arts in Herat. [...] History shows that although in the past eighty years there were breakthroughs in Afghan political history, no positive change in the art situation has occurred. Only two out of 34 Afghanistan provinces enjoy formal art education. Lack of necessary attention by the governments and lack of better planning in this regard have been the major constraints for the improvement of

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<sup>30</sup> It is not simply lawless state, because there are a number of former "laws" that restrict the freedom of Afghan women—and several new laws are not always being fully enacted, especially not when women are concerned. See also: Yassari, Nadjma: "The development of Shari'a and National Law in Afghanistan," in: *Sharia en nationaal recht in twaalf moslimlanden*. WRR Webpublicatie nr. 13, Otto, J.M. (Hrsg.), The Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2006 (mit Mohammad Hamid Saboory); *The Shari'a in the Constitutions of Afghanistan, Iran and Egypt: Implications for Private Law*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005, Reihe Materialien zum ausländischen und internationalen Privatrecht 45, 359 S. + \*212 S. „Die Tradition der „Loya Dschirga“: Herrschaftsstrukturen und Staatlichkeit (Christine Nölle-Karimi), in: Bernhard Chiari (Hrsg.), *Wegweiser zur Geschichte Afghanistan*, 2. Aufl., Paderborn u.a. 2007, S. 135-140 ; „Stammesstrukturen und ethnische Gruppen“ (Conrad Schetter), in: Bernhard Chiari (Hrsg.), *Wegweiser zur Geschichte Afghanistan*, 2. Aufl., Paderborn u.a. 2007, S. 125-134.

the arts in Afghanistan. *Not only this was not improved, but also the art subject was removed from schools curriculum as a regular subject and was left in the worst situation.* And the worst was when arts such as paintings, statuary, music and photography were declared ‘unlawful’ during the Taliban.” (Rahraw Omarzad in the preface of *Gahnama e Hunar*, 2007, emphasis F.H.)

These experiences have left their mark on the first video works created by artists from the CCAA, in which the reconstruction of the *Faculty of Fine Arts* in Kabul is one of the subjects addressed. The video „Closed Door“ shows that if doors are closed, Afghans find another way of reaching their goal. “First of all, the artists should believe that the street is a very good status for them to reflect things. When I started [taking] photos of my city, there [was] material on the streets. There are different possibilities for our artists today. They should know about photography, paintings, installation, etc. When they have this open mind, when they are walking on the street, they could explain it in another way, to see what is going on today. We do paintings of the subject: what is going on in our life. I think now it is good for our artists that they are living in a contemporary situation; for example, now the artists will pay more attention [to] culture and politics. They will be able to be very good artists and good on the streets, only by knowledge or experience of the technical world, we should have ... general knowledge about ... science, art, by these things, we can think about going on the streets. If the artist is waiting for the society, it will be too late. The artist should be brave, very strong and he or she should think about some problems of the society. A great artist [does] not always say ‘yes’ [but] sometimes ‘no’” (Rahraw Omarzad, interviewed by the author, March 2007). Changes in public spheres become visible when one observes narrations of artists’ own lives (“yes”) and the adoption of a distanced attitude toward one’s own life (“no”).<sup>31</sup> Cultural identity in Afghanistan involves a tension between individual and collective claims and considerations. Rahraw Omarzad describes his observations, which point to the way in which artistic processes function so as to generate knowledge in Afghanistan, as they do elsewhere. He recognizes individuals in their loneliness; individuals are for him isolated beings.<sup>32</sup> This image shows that in a society like Afghanistan, a world of the imagination is developing that recognizes individuals when an artist can describe isolation in terms of an image. As an artist, he or she establishes a new framework of identity that can be understood as a resistive subject. What happens here is that artists take over the function of interpreting the world. These frameworks for artists are

<sup>31</sup> Rahraw Omarzad, editor of the art magazine *Gahnama-e Hunar* and director of the Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (CCAA), says that artists in Afghanistan have always said “no.” “For me, life means the distance between ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ If I remember my life a long time ago, it was under the influence of this distance between ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ For example, in our country, when the government says ‘yes’ the people say ‘no.’ People face a lot of dangerous and bad things because of this ‘no,’ and unfortunately during the last thirty years the people have had the problem of the distance between these two. And my personal life was under the effect of these two questions. I was living in a situation where I had most of the time to say: ‘no.’ It is very important, especially for an artist, to say ‘no.’ Especially in my country most of the time I was proud to say ‘no,’ the situation was not good. Always they asked the artists to follow them, that’s why we had to say: ‘no.’”

<sup>32</sup> Afghans, it is said, do not know individuality; yet the fact that an artist like Rahraw Omarzad articulates it indicates changes in the perception of the collective.

very fragile, as can be seen in the way they present their own paintings. One can hardly imagine hanging a painting without a frame, without a certain format, because the cultural experiences needed for an artist to establish a framework of his or her own are absent. Because they have no institutional structures, artists in Afghanistan have to occupy several positions simultaneously; people like Omarzad are artists, curators, gallery owners, and responsible for marketing, all at the same time.

## 7. Cultural death or regeneration?

Artists create sounding boards for themselves by developing joint projects. But what will happen if there is no societal resonance for artists' ideas and their incorruptible attitude? If women artists like Batol Moradi try to give the victims a voice? The media of the Taliban are being replaced through the use of new media and the discovery of public spaces, but the Taliban can still agitate against democracy from within the mosques. Reza Hosseini's photograph of the new symbolic world in the form of a faded rose encrusted with clay soil illustrates the difficulty of the situation. In a democracy, there are spaces of cultural experience that protect artists and their activities. Artists attempt to establish their right to be protected in this way by developing strategies that will enable them to demand public spaces for their works.

During our Kabul workshop, we discussed the significance of the colour red in Barnett Newman's work. The intensity of the colour creates a space of experience for the observer into which an awareness of the destruction of Native American culture flows. In response to the question of which meaning the colour red might have in Afghanistan, one artist suggested a room painted entirely in red. This red would contain the violence and destruction of Afghan culture. "Somewhere, a completely red room." This first image was then replaced by that of a blue room. "In Afghanistan, blue is the colour of peace. We must find peace, find a way of being calm." These thoughts can be described as a form of cultural identity in Afghanistan. A red room would keep alive the idea of cultural death, and is incompatible with the new cultural identity in Afghanistan. This society is regenerating itself in works of art that show that artists in Afghanistan can shape spaces of cultural experience, but these spaces are soaked in blood because life is still endangered.

## 8. Kosovo: coping with new social realities?

In the following, I will demonstrate a contrast with the Afghanistan case found in my research about artists in Kosovo. That investigation was carried out in the framework of an artists' exchange

organized by the Städelschule, Frankfurt, and the Exit Office, Prishtina. In Frankfurt, I was able to meet some of the participants from Prishtina, establish relations with the women artists through participant observation, and conducted radio interviews with some of them and some did radio shows. I had already produced interviews and radio broadcasts with the participating art students from Frankfurt, and they invited me to take part in the meetings. In order to understand what is involved in this kind of art project, it was necessary for me to spend some time in Prishtina. I wanted to find out which projects the artists would be able to put into practice, and whether these would correspond to the ideas they had expressed in Frankfurt. During my stay in Prishtina, I framed my first hypothesis: the absence of statehood and the lasting precariousness of this society are affecting forms of cultural expression, democratization processes, and such new arenas of discourse of civil society in Kosovo as are being formed. In these “injured societies,” however, efforts are constantly being made to test the formation of new kinds of public freedom in order to develop the acceptance of diverse ways of life.

## 9. Democratisation and indeterminacy in Kosovo

The situation in Kosovo seven years after the war is now reported to be stable but fragile. The level of reported crime and inter-ethnic crime is low. Organized crime and corruption have been identified as the biggest threats to the stability and sustainability of its institutions. A future status process has been launched, and Kosovar authorities have been forced to accept that they cannot depend on the international community to solve their problems in establishing an independent state. A multi-ethnic state will be the result of the status talks so that Kosovo can become an independent state with EU protection. During the occupation period, Kosovar Albanians had parallel institutions, e.g. schools. Children were educated in private houses. Now they are governed by three administrations: Serbian, Kosovar-Albanian, and UNMIK. But the result for them is that no one rules. Unemployment runs high, at currently 70 percent. Poverty is widespread. 70 percent of the population is below the age of thirty. The experiential space is different in which the young create and compose their selves through society, but without the experience of a regulated space with norms and rules. For example—what about new rules? They constantly ask themselves questions such as, „Is it permissible to make a U-turn with your car on the street?“ When they consider new rules, you can hear fear in their voices. They still don't trust the police or a society that threatened them throughout their childhood. This could be defined as a permanent process of consideration of independence. They appropriate the rising state by creating their own social realities.

## 10. Experience of a pixelated society: former Yugoslavia

These new social realities in the former Yugoslavia render it the first territory in Europe that can be described as having been pixelated after a breakdown of the state. The resulting small states can be called city-states. Artists identify this process of restructuring into city-states as happening from the *bottom up, not top-down*<sup>33</sup>. The Ljubljana-based artist Marjetica Potrč describes the architecture in Prishtina as *archetypal architecture*. “You can see different houses, totally different from one to another. They don’t need architects. When they want to build a house, they choose a style of modernism and oriental roots become more and more important, but there is no request for an authentic orientalism. It is a hybrid structure, because it is a personal expression: they express their own individuality. It is like a second skin.” (interviewed by the author 2006) For Marjetica Potrč, the house has become the new territory, “because you are taking care of the infrastructure for your own house if that is not provided by the city. It becomes a statement: I take care of my house and we are building a new citizenship, which is expressed in my house. The question asked by individuals is: what will our democracy look like?” (ibid.) How is the idea of a new democracy expressed in the narratives provided by artists? Edi Rama is an artist and the mayor of Tirana. He aestheticized façades in Tirana and painted the façades of public buildings. The effect of this is *a new colouring invasion of façades*. The patterns don’t follow the architecture: it looks like a new mapping of the city. When Anri Sala, an Albanian artist, conducted an interview with Edi Rama for a video work in a car, Rama said about the houses: „They are not lipstick, they are not dresses, they are organs.”<sup>34</sup> This expression shows how hybrid structures are emerging with personal expressions, because everything is improvised and informal, there is no state control regulating the public space.

## 11. Abilities of artists in crisis regions such as Kosovo to express what is new or indeterminate

Indefinite rituals are visible and recognized by artists in Kosovo in some areas of social life: a Neo-Oriental and Neo-Ottomanism style. Next to the library in Prishtina stands opposite an Orthodox church built by Milosevic during the occupation and never completed. Albanian artists such as Florian Agalli are addressing these issues in their work. In his video work “Rituals” Agalli<sup>35</sup> depicts

<sup>33</sup> Statement by Dubravka Sekulic, an architect from Belgrade, interviewed by the author October 2007

<sup>34</sup> Edi Rama, stated by Potrč, used in an installation called “Prishtina House”. The exhibition was called “*Personal states / Infinite actives*”, with Tomas Saraceno at the Portikus, Frankfurt Mai 2006

<sup>35</sup> „I decided not to keep provoking them ... that would just served their purposes, since that's what they want, confrontation and public disorder... so... I am working on another direction now... I am building what I call counterweights...Practically, while they go on with their prayer I will invite people to tell me their stories of use and

a neo-Ottoman reaction (ritual): men gathering to pray at the library in Prishtina, opposite the Orthodox church. Inbetween is the Faculty of Fine Arts located, a concrete monument which not only destroys the unity of the city but also makes it impossible to build on the rest of this otherwise undeveloped area of the city centre.

“Iliros” is the name of a producer, and can be seen at the same time as an attempt to construct a new, proud national identity. Going back beyond the thousand-year period of occupation, an appeal is being made to the Illyrian period when Kosovo was not yet occupied. Thirty years ago, the revival of a myth imposed by the Albanian dictator, Enver Hoxha, who organized conferences in the seventies about Illyrian history in Albania, led to many children being given Illyrian names: Ilir, Agron, Alban, Dardan, Dita. They lack the experience of a democratic history, because their names are based on an Illyrian fantasy of Albania’s dictator Hoxha. Tiny Kosovo is still being ground between these two poles of conflict, Tito and Hoxha. The indeterminacy of this toponym—Kosovo, ‘belonging to the blackbird’ (and was it not the defeated Serbs who left the notorious battlefield as blackbirds?)—determines the ability of the Kosovar-Albanian art and culture scene to express itself. Kosovo/Kosova will then, perhaps after its independence, be a multi-ethnic state. The population cannot yet know what will happen, and this is also placing obstacles in the path of the development of political party programs. Until independence becomes a reality, people remain in a state of hero-worship and subjection, without any feeling that they are genuinely associated with the international transitional administration; but they no longer want to be an enclave subject to Belgrade either. The artistic production in a post-war country like Kosovo is related to the political situation. Young artists from the region are dealing with current events and political developments as examples of the uncertainty they experience. The artist group Lemonade offer one example: The band U2 won’t come this summer. Using flyers and posters distributed all over Prishtina, Lemonade’s artists drew attention to the fact that U2 won’t come, nor will the independence that has been promised for years: „the story that U2 will come in Prishtina still continues to be an issue for many individuals who have created this in their imagination, a fact that also resulted from propaganda. One thing is for sure, those people are still living with this dream since 1999 and together with all other Albanians they hope that one day their wish will be fulfilled. There are two dilemmas that have become a big concern, Kosova's independence and U2's arrival in Prishtina. Since we never had the chance to integrate in our politics because all decisions were made by others and we obeyed them, we did as much as we could by providing people with the poster that shows them that even this summer U2

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abuse of the library... you have to know that starting in 1990 all albanian schools were closed, all albanian personnel was dismissed, all albanian structures of education were deleted... so...I will interview from the outside old workers of the library who will tell me about how they used to just look at the library from the outside, and in the background you (the viewer) will see these islamic extremists praying on public educational ground... the last stop for the background is the golden cross on the concrete dome of the church... these guys do their prayer on the corner of the library closest to the church, so there is no fucking way to miss it... such a mess.“ (Florian Agalli, statement 2006)

will not come.“ (Lemonade, Prishtina 2007)<sup>36</sup> Using their own voices, they are coping with the unbearable situation of being marginalized as persons in the political deliberation process during the status discussion of Kosovo. However, they are opening up a world of action in which they build their own artspaces<sup>37</sup> for the visitor, who is no longer someone experiencing a work of art but part of an action, as in Lemonade’s intervention. They are showing us a world distinguished by participation. They are going into the street, they are telling stories, they are building houses, they are making radio programs<sup>38</sup>. The fact that they are doing these things as artists is the significant and noteworthy aspect of their actions, and this makes it possible for them to select the place where they will work. Although some art projects in Prishtina, like the “Contemporary Arts Library”, failed, and although many projects could not be put into practice in 2005, the exchange enabled young art students to establish contacts with the international “art world” and with artists who have appropriated their own space and cooperated with them, people who had enjoyed a free and uninterrupted arts education. The shared interactions were the decisive factor here; artists can use these on the spot until such time as the fog surrounding them, caused by the unsettled status of Kosovo, lifts. Artists in post-war societies like Kosovo are coping with the experience of suffering, *they keep on suffering*,<sup>39</sup> and they articulate this as an artistic expression in their works.

## 12. Conclusion: Sustainable transformations in culture through artistic awareness

My case in this article was to show that in post-war societies, human beings have lost their ability for social recognition, because of the losses they have experienced and because of the state of mourning they are in. Artists in post-war societies recover sources of vulnerability for new expressions in their society. This is what I would call sustainable transformation through artistic awareness. These articulations stand in contrast to the efforts of the international community in rebuilding an Afghan state or in stabilizing the political situation in Kosovo. Artists in Kosovo and Afghanistan are erecting signposts indicating a break, the new perspectives of a society, through the fragility of their objects and of what they say. Language is as fragile and vulnerable as an object. On the other hand, artists use their creativity as a strategy to establish new ways of coping with unbearable situations, as I have attempted to show in this essay. Through a sociology of art, we can

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<sup>36</sup> Something Midal, a female artist, said can be seen as pointing in the same direction; she said: “We are in a fog, but this fog will soon lift when independence comes.” (anonymized, artist interviewed 2006 in Prishtina)

<sup>37</sup> In 2007 several new artspaces opened in Prishtina, f.e. Station Center for Contemporary Art, Rhizome, Agnes Room, Lemonade.

<sup>38</sup> Urban fm a radiostation in Kosovo invited a lot of artists and young djs to produce their own Radioshows.

<sup>39</sup> Statement from Rron Qena, Prishtina May 2007

see how new political forms of expression arise with the emergence of new fields of art in the dynamic of cultural change. With the ability of artists to enact social worlds, we can say that social science might be able to establish a link to transformations in societies.<sup>40</sup> Yet the artistic disposition toward these social changes and normalizations in post-war societies consists in remaining a wound.<sup>41</sup> Sustainable cultural assistance in countries such as Kosovo and Afghanistan can yield lasting results only if actors from these societies are included in and recognized as equal partners in the process of reconstruction of their societies.

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<sup>40</sup> What is the role we play as researchers? To humanize injured societies? “For some time now, biographic work in social science has sought new ways of attaining greater ‘sensibility’ to humanistic concerns.” (Jones, 2006)

<sup>41</sup> Wagner, Thomas, “Die Wunde Beuys,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 23, 2006, 31: “In his ‘biography—workography,’ Beuys noted under the year of his birth, 1921: ‘Kleve, exhibition of a wound closed up with a band-aid.’ One of his installations, which led to a vehement debate when the Munich Lenbachhaus acquired it in 1979 because it unites two gurneys from the pathology, boxes with fat, lamps, tools, and glass jars sealed with gauze in a depressing ensemble addressing death as a hardening of the energy of life, bears the title, ‘Zeige deine Wunde’ [‘Display Your Wound’]. Another room, panelled with slabs of metal throughout, was entitled ‘hinter den Knochen wird gezählt/ Schmerzraum’ [‘behind the bones a count is taken/ pain room’]. Beuys, a Schmerzensmann? One who laid a finger in society’s wounds?” See also: Krstic, Igor. (2002) *Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture*.

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