

## **Democratic Articulations of Cultural Identity: The Arts in Afghanistan**

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### **Summary**

The article "Democratic Articulations of Cultural Identity: The Arts in Afghanistan" discusses the hypothesis that artists can become protagonists of a new democratic culture through the possibility they have of creatively shaping the public sphere. Artists in post-war societies find themselves confronted with the experience of being marginalized, ridiculed and prosecuted. The artists' creativity is one strategy they use in finding new ways of coping with unbearable situations. The paper concludes with an interpretation on how artists experience democracy as an area of conflict.

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### **1 Biographical Research in Post-war Societies**

Two research trips to Kabul in 2005 and 2007 provided the opportunity for an investigation into the world of Afghan artists: how do they work and interact with and in which way do they play a role in shaping the struggling and fragile Afghan democracy? These research trips were conducted as part of my Phd-Project "Experimental Public Sphere: A qualitative-interpretative study of the appropriation and transformation of the public sphere by contemporary artists," in which I use interviews to be later aired on radio programs which I will host as an experimental place in which artists can articulate their ideas and reflect on their works and societies.

In post-war societies and newly-born democracies such as Afghanistan, the media and the artistic scene are rarely regulated. Precisely because the society is still in a precarious state, it is often easier for artists to find and create public forums, e.g. radio programmes and exhibition spaces. Upon creating these public spaces, they often encourage the public to explore democracy. However, some of them pay a

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<sup>1</sup> Felicia Herrschaft studied philosophy, cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis and sociology. For her dissertation research, she is currently conducting interviews with female artists and curators in order to understand how and under what conditions these people create public spheres. Her ample fieldwork experience includes two stays in Afghanistan (2005, 2007). In 2005 she established the webproject [www.fehe.org](http://www.fehe.org) with artists.