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Vortrag im Oberseminar

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The Politics of Transnationalism in Afghanistan: Rural Reconstruction and Democracy Production

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Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the study of new forms of transnational power constituted by the action of United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations, philanthropic foundations, or think tanks, around which gravitate loose networks of activists promoting democracy, human rights, women's empowerment, or environmental conservation. It focuses more specifically on the impact of the massive reconstruction effort on Afghan society. The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), the main project of rural rehabilitation underway in Afghanistan, serves as the case study. Launched in mid-2003, the NSP is funded primarily by the World Bank, administered by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and implemented by several international and national NGOs. The objective is to bring the funds directly to the rural people to establish democratically elected local councils, whose function is to identify needs, plan, and manage the reconstruction. This approach of community building is at odds with the complex social fabric and the overlapping sources of solidarity and conflict that characterize rural Afghanistan. Although its political significance has vanished in the context of the Afghan presidential elections of summer 2009, characterized by quickly evolving alliances, the NSP illustrates how reconstruction funds are part of local and national politics of the country. It is one of the resources that various actors are seeking to tap in their struggle for power. The paper shows how such a program is one element of a much larger conceptual and bureaucratic apparatus promoting new forms of transnational governmentality, which coexist with and sometimes challenge the more familiar territorialized expressions of state power and sovereignty.