

The Social Forums as the New International? Politics of the ESF & WSF from a Deconstructive Point of View

Fabian Schuppert***Abstract**

The European Social Forum (ESF) and the World Social Forum (WSF) are key-actors of the anti-capitalist protest movement. Their scope is international, and their unifying power immense. Thus, it seems valid to ask, whether the social forums are on their way to become a New International in the Derridean sense of the term. In this paper I argue that the social forums show indeed many similarities with Derrida's concept but also some significant differences in respect to their theoretical underpinnings which influence the forums' political efficiency. I will argue, that the social forums have to focus stronger on their concrete political effectiveness in order to maintain their role as key-actors in the movement.

Introduction

The World Social Forum (WSF) is one of the key-actors in the extra-parliamentary political struggle around the globe. With its transnational scope, the WSF succeeds in bringing together a huge amount of activists and groups from all over the world, united in the opposition to neo-liberalism and free market capitalism. Together with its European sister, the European Social Forum (ESF), the WSF promotes the idea that 'another world is possible', drawing not only a substantive crowd of activists and participants but also getting a fair

* Fabian Schuppert (gfschuppert@web.de) is a PhD student at the University of Helsinki.

amount of media attention. The social forums are the most important networking arena for all those, who criticize globalisation under the banner of neo-liberalism. The unifying power of the forums, through an open and horizontal structure, has turned the forums into mass events of an incredible size, a success story. There is, however, also a lot of criticism of both the organisation of the ESF/WSF and the political output of the forums. Due to their role as the anti-capitalist spearheads of massive social change expectations concerning the socio-political effectiveness of the forums are rising, making it more and more difficult for the organizers not to leave many activists disappointed. Both, the ESF and the WSF face the problem to decide which organizational structure they want to follow in the future, and how politically determined they want to be.

A possible role for the WSF and the ESF is to be some kind of new international, as they function as a unifying platform for various actors of the political left. Interestingly enough the organisation of the WSF and the ESF show some parallels to Jacques Derrida's concept of the New International, which he described in his book *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International* (1994). Needless to say Derrida alludes with his choice of terminology to the socialist/communist Internationals, drawing a sharp distinction by describing the New International as a loose alliance without coordination, party, country, or class. For Derrida the New International is firmly connected with the promise of democracy-to-come, and the messianic hope for a better society. Derrida stays with his examinations of the New International on a fairly abstract level, claiming nonetheless in his second book on Marxism, *Marx & Sons*, that the New International 'is already a reality' (Derrida 1999: 239).

The aim of this paper is to thoroughly examine Derrida's concept of the New International, and the logic of deconstructive politics, in order to define criteria, which will help to answer the question whether the social forums are a new international from a Derridean point of view. Moreover, the analysis will not only take Derrida's concept to the institutions of 'real' politics, but also try to describe the problems of political practice for both, the social forums as well as the Derridean New International. The WSF and the ESF have to face the crucial question, whether the social forums want to become more effective political actors instead

of being mere arenas for networking processes. Is there any chance for the social forums to unite anti-capitalist activists via a fixed account of what kind of better world they are fighting for, or will the social forums collapse if they try to become political actors?

The New International

While heavily criticizing Francis Fukuyama's hypothesis about the end of history and the global victory of liberal democracy based on market economy, Derrida presents in his book on the *Specters of Marx* a list of ten plagues of the world, followed by the concept of the New International. Derrida (1994: 79) pillories Western liberal democracies for their hypocritical political rhetoric, and the media for their manipulative practices. Then Derrida lists the ten plagues, starting with a critique of the new unemployment, which is a consequence of market oriented business practices such as downsizing and outsourcing. The list continues denouncing immigration politics, economic wars, the immanent contradictions of the free market system, the foreign debt, weapon trades, nuclear weapons in general, inter-ethnic wars, and the power of so-called phantom-states, before ending with the tenth plague, 'the present state of international law and of its institutions' (Derrida 1994: 83).

The main point of criticism about the present state of international law is its subjugation by powerful nation-states, which act as representatives of capital. Derrida is by no means opposed to the idea of international law, and the creation of international institutions monitoring the law. Other than Walter Benjamin, who wanted to abolish law, Derrida aims at reforming it through criticism (Miller 2001: 8). For Derrida, the problem is the hypocrisy underlying the discourse on human rights, the foreign debt, and economic equality. There is no reason to hail liberal democracy considering the fact that never in the history of the earth were as many humans affected by violence, inequality, economic oppression and famine as today (Derrida 1994: 85). It is quite remarkable that Derrida's criticism (written in 1993, published in 1994) about the inequality of states before the law, and the insufficient enforcement of UN resolutions, is today even more applicable and better fitting than 12 years ago. Undoubtedly the United Nations are facing their most severe crisis since their foundation, and the international court in The

Hague suffers from the fact that only war criminals from non-Western countries can be prosecuted.

Following his analysis of the state of international law Derrida introduces the concept of the New International. It reads as follows:

It is an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, "out of joint," without coordination, without party, without country, without national community ...

without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class. (Derrida 1994: 85)

According to this rough outline, the New International must be understood as a supplement to the existing structures of nation-States and countries, something really existing, not some kind of utopian model; a loose alliance of solidarity, not an International of the working class, not a Marxist party fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat, but a 'counter-conjuration' renewing the critique of concepts such as the nation-State, and free market economy (Derrida 1994: 86). In academic circles the immediate response to this Derridean concept was mainly criticism. Terry Eagleton, for instance, ends his frank reply to *Specters of Marx*, entitled *Marxism without Marxism*, by ridiculing Derrida's accumulation of without-attributes, dismissing the concept as an 'ultimate poststructuralist fantasy' (Eagleton 1999: 87). Joining the group of critics is Tom Lewis who argues that Derrida's reformative, evolutionary account neglects the revolutionary potential of the working class (1999: 149). Instead of marginalising class and class consciousness Derrida should recognize the value of a transnational workers identity for the revolutionary cause.

In *Marx and Sons* Derrida clarifies his concept of the New International, and tries to weaken the stated criticism. The New International does not need the single class-consciousness of the Marxist social classes, as the Marxist classes focus too much on their supposed unity and inner homogeneity, while the New International rather works with the notions of dominance, hegemony and force (Derrida 1999: 237). This does by no means imply that the existence of the New International presupposes the disappearance of class antagonisms and class differences. While orthodox Marxism works with a true-or-false ontology, the New International leaves room for uncertainty and openness (Townshend 2004: 132-133).

Thus, with the concept of the New International Derrida does not deny class antagonisms but rather pleads for the reconsideration of certain analytical categories. The New International shall be understood as 'another dimension of analysis and political commitment' (Derrida 1999: 239). Its aim is to critically examine every singular socio-political situation anew, without relying on pre-existing criteria or definitions. The idea of the New International is to create free networks based on solidarity and alliance beyond class affiliation.

But what exactly does Derrida mean, when he states that the New International works with terms like hegemony, dominance and power? The notion of hegemony, a key-term of Gramsci's political theory, refers to a paradoxical state in which the dominant groups in society, despite exploitation and injustice, (seem to) get the consent and support of the subordinate groups (Gramsci 1971). Through a constant process of accommodating oppositional values and practices the ruling classes achieve a hegemonic state of power. In the poststructuralist, deconstructive theory of hegemony, put forth by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), the main focus is laid on the analysis of political discourses and the fixation of meaning as ideology. 'A hegemonic account of politics and ideology focuses attention on the logic of articulation' (Norval 2004: 140; Butler, Laclau, Žižek 2000), as the fixation of meaning via hegemonic articulation is the instituting moment for every society. However, 'no instituting act is fully achievable and, as a result, no ideology is ever completely totalizing' (Norval 2004: 143), thus, leaving room for resistance and alternative articulation.

Derridean deconstructive politics acknowledges and supports the constitutive incompleteness of democracy. In the circumstances of undecidability, which Derrida proposes, the messianic hope for a better society exists. Derrida presents the concept of democracy-to-come, which supposes 'an alterity that cannot be anticipated' (Derrida 1994: 111). In *The Politics of Friendship* (1997) Derrida describes democracy-to-come to be futural, marked by 'originary heterogeneity' (1997: 105), and incompleteness. Deconstructive politics is aimed at disagreement and critique, not consensus, it tries to change via criticism, not with the help of bombs and guns (Norval 2004; Miller 2001).

Following from Derrida's remarks on the structure of the New International and deconstructive politics in general, certain criteria can be identified, which the social forums have to fulfil in order to be considered a new interna-

tional in the Derridean sense. The identifying features of the New International are its structure as loose alliance of solidarity, its non class-bound membership, its articulation of criticism in times of hegemonic discourses, its 'no' to violence, its transgression of black-and-white categories, and, last but not least, its being directed at democracy-to-come. Moreover, the Derridean concept of the New International is deeply connected with the notions of undecidability, responsibility, and justice, which heavily influence its attitude towards political practice, a point, which will be discussed later. Now it is time to take a closer look at the social forums.

The History of the WSF and the ESF

The World Social Forum,ⁱ which was held for the first time in 2001, has its roots in the anti-Davos protests. In 2000, simultaneously to the World Economic Forum held in Davos, several groups, including *Le Monde Diplomatique* and ATTAC, protested in Switzerland against capitalist exploitation and the dominance of western European economic elites. In the same year plans were developed by Oded Grajew and Bernard Cassen (among others) to hold a more thoroughly organized World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, with the support of various Brazilian groups as well as ATTAC and *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Teivainen 2002: 623). In the course of setting up the first WSF the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) turned out to be extremely helpful by providing financial support from the municipality and the state government. The official Organizing Committee for the first Forum consisted of eight Brazilian organisations, including the Central Trade Union Confederation and the Movement of Landless Rural Workers.

While already the first WSF was a great success with thousands of participants from more than 100 countries, the second and third WSF (held in 2002 and 2003) were even more impressive, attracting more activists from outside Brazil and Latin America than the first forum and getting significantly more media attention. In 2004 the WSF was held in India, in 2005 it returned to Brazil, and in January 2006 there was for the first time a polycentric World Social Forum, held on two different continents for the ever growing number of participants and activists, with two more events to follow later during the year. By now many smaller forums, held throughout the year, exist to continue the networking proc-

ess started by the WSF. In Europe the European Social Forum has taken over the role as the biggest arena for anti-globalisation, anti-capitalism and anti-discrimination activists to meet, network and demonstrate.

So far the ESF was held four times: in Florence 2002, in Paris 2003, in London 2004, and in Athens in May 2006. The ESF can be best described as a process, as there is no permanent office and no institutionalised executive committee. In-between two events the ESF exists only in form of websites, informal networks, mutual support, exchange of ideas and the European Preparatory Assembly (EPA). The EPA is responsible for preparing the event, mainly booking a venue, planning an opening ceremony, and finding a suitable date. The contribution of the independent groups to the ESF is normally embedded in these basic structures. The EPA is like the ESF an open space, encouraging input from all the groups and movements interested in the ESF process. The task of the EPA is a rather difficult one, as it tries to merge a huge set of various group activities into an open and free event without executing central force or imposing a rigid structure. Obviously, though, there are some groups with more influence upon the organisation of an upcoming Forum than others. Nonetheless the organisational structure of the ESF is horizontal, aiming at including as many opinions as possible.ⁱⁱ It is due to this broad approach that the ESF, as well as the WSF, have managed to unite a vast number of groups and activists from very different backgrounds.

The Charter of Principles

The only basic requirement for groups and movements which are interested in joining the WSF/ESF process is to agree with the basic principles laid down in the 'Charter of Principles' after the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001.ⁱⁱⁱ The rather concise charter defines both, the aims of the social forums and the role the social forum is supposed to play in the process of making another world possible. According to the charter the forum is an open meeting place for groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth.(Charter, on-line)The new planetary soci-

ety which the groups participating in the WSF/ESF process are trying to build is based on 'globalisation in solidarity' (Charter, on-line), which will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens - men and women - of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples. (Charter, on-line) The forum itself wants to provide the space and possibility for independent groups to meet and interlink, it does not, however, function as a body representing world civil society. Thus, '[n]o one ... will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants' (Charter, on-line). The organizational structure is horizontal and decentralized, providing a 'non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context' (Charter, on-line) for all participating groups and activists. Moreover, 'neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the Forum'(Charter, on-line).

Judging from the quotes above, the social forums fulfil quite a few of the criteria defined earlier: the social forums are a loose alliance of solidarity, their membership is not bound to a certain class, and the social forums articulate criticism. But even though, the principles laid down in the charter seem to include some of the criteria of the Derridean New International, it is too early to conclude. First of all the political practice of the social forums needs to be critically examined, especially as there are more criteria to be checked, and notions like human rights, social justice, and equality – which are used throughout the Charter of Principles - are common components of political rhetoric but very hard to grasp, leaving enormous space for interpretation and conflict.

The Politics of the Social Forums

The Charter of Principles aims at including as many activists as possible by using common categories such as freedom and equality, which are 'floating signifiers' (Laclau, Mouffe 1985), i.e. their content is difficult to define. It is through the political practice of the social forums that the concrete meanings of these terms become clear. The political practice of the social forums, though, is multidimensional and diverse, just like their activists.

During the third ESF, which was held in London in October 2004, the inner tensions of the ESF process, and the difficulties of bringing so many different political movements together under one roof became clearly visible. Anarchists stormed the stage of a debate session entitled 'Unite against Racism', at which London's mayor Ken Livingstone was supposed to be one of the key-note speakers. The anarchists accused the organizers of the debate session of breaking with the Charter of Principles (Tempest 2004), which states that 'neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the Forum'. The rigorous exclusion of government and party officials is definitely one of the most controversial principles of the ESF/WSF. The incident in London, led to a huge debate about the future of the ESF, and the question of tolerance among the diverse group of participants in the ESF.

The cardinal problem for the WSF, as well as the ESF is the question of its organisational structure and its genuine openness towards all sorts of anti-capitalist groups and movements. While some of the participating groups focus on gradual changes in the existing nation states for a certain social group (e.g. women, or immigrants), others favour radical change, including the possibility of using violence. Therefore the attitude towards politicians, who might be interested in participating in the social forums (not as party representatives but as free human beings) varies significantly, as many of the former groups see the forums as a space in which dialogue with these politicians might flourish, while the latter, like the anarchists in London, are afraid that even initiatives like the ESF become a sell-out to the odious system.

At the WSF held in Porto Alegre in 2005 one of the main acts was a speech given by Hugo Chavez, president of Venezuela, and friend of Lula da Silva, president of Brazil, whose party (the Brazilian Workers Party, PT) has been supporting the WSF since its early days. Thus, the relationship between the social forums and political parties as well as politicians is more complex than a reading of the charter might suggest.

Obviously an event as sizable as the World Social Forum needs its sponsors to cover its expenses. Being an initiative with Brazilian roots it is hardly surprising that most sponsors come from Brazil, including local governments, the ministry of tourism, the oil company Petrobras as well as the association of Brazilian airports Infraero. A totally different thing, though, is the overt affinity of

the organizers of the WSF 2005 to the socialist governments in South America. The participants and organizers of each social forum are an extremely diverse crowd, bringing together university professors, environmentalists, and radical activists. As it is hardly surprising for events as colourful and diverse as the social forums, tensions arise, and questionable allegiances exist. While especially some of the Latin American groups still hail Fidel Castro, and romantically glorify Che Guevara, others call Israel a terrorist state and demand a free Palestinian state. The problem is not necessarily that quite numerous activists literally buy into the myth of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro at one of the ubiquitous t-shirt vendors. It might be naïve, revolutionary romanticism, and simultaneously the expression of a certain demand for identity creating symbolism. The speech of Chavez was little more than a gigantic advertisement for the socialist parties of Central and Latin America, outlining the need for anti-imperialist politics inspired by Jesus, Che Guevara and many others (Chavez 2005). The celebrated appearance of Chavez at the WSF poses two problems: firstly it is doubtful that he did not act as a party representative, secondly – and more important for the future of the social forums - the topic of his speech and the following appraisal by the organizers of the forum show a lack of political originality, while rather indicating a shocking backwardness in admitting the shortcomings of many anti-capitalist and pro-socialist projects.

The social forums are in danger of being perceived as mere platforms for gathering all and everybody who is politically 'left', including those who still hail Che, and those who criticise Israel with anti-Semitic propaganda. Many statements issued by groups in and around the social forums follow a clear-cut black and white dichotomy, i.e. the logic of us against them, which serves as a unifying device for the diverse range of activists participating in the WSF process but simultaneously prevents the forum from formulating an inspiring alternative to the existing isms and beliefs. As the polycentric World Social Forums held this year show, there is an enormous interest in the process and the idea of networking globally. The problem is that if the social forums continue to only unite different groups in protest, the social forums are truly endangered of becoming a mere mainstream cliché of anti-capitalist protest culture.

A Theory of Justice

As pointed out above, the social forums aim at bringing together a huge variety of activists and groups from various backgrounds transgressing boundaries of class or party-affiliation. The way to achieve this is fairly broad criticism of capitalism and the foreign policy of the Western world, combined with the demand for justice and equality. The forums act as an open space to network and exchange ideas without taking concrete political action, or issuing statements. The fundamental principles laid out in the Charter of Principles are intended to provide a mission statement, not a philosophically thorough theoretical underpinning for a better world.

Therefore going back to the highly theoretical concept of Derrida's New International proves helpful in defining the forum's theory of justice and equality. The politics of the social forums are mainly emancipatory, believing in justice as equality. One of the main concerns of most groups involved in the WSF/ESF process is the help for the socially under-privileged, claiming their rights, and calling for laws treating all people equally. Good examples for this practice can be found in various groups, those fighting for women rights (who shall be treated equally to men in respect to social and legal issues), trade unions fighting for workers' rights (who shall get their equal share of the companies' profits), and those movements fighting for the rights of small peasants in the developing world (who shall get the same, equal chances as peasants in the Western world). All these groups participate in the WSF/ESF process, engaging in emancipatory politics, trying to achieve justice through laws treating all people equally and giving people the rights they deserve (Menke 1994: 285). Only a minority of activists beliefs in the need for a violent revolutionary struggle which will turn the world upside down. The majority seems to follow a reform-based, evolutionary approach, which accords to a general trend in left-wing politics. The understanding of the notions of law, rights, and justice in emancipatory politics, however, is quite different from the understanding of these notions in deconstructive politics.

The key to understanding the difference between the forum's emancipatory politics and the Derridean deconstructive politics is the notion of justice. Derrida clearly distinguishes between justice and law/the right. Law always implies force; each and every law needs to be enforced. One of the most important tasks of deconstructive politics is to deconstruct the legal structures that cover up

the economic and political interests of the socially dominating powers (Derrida 1991: 27). Deconstruction questions the authority of the law, pointing to the moment of its constitution, when the law was neither lawful nor unlawful. While it is therefore possible to deconstruct law, according to Derrida (1991: 30) justice cannot be deconstructed. The law uses general rules, norms and imperatives, which it tries to enforce through force based on its deconstructable authority, while justice is different.

Justice is not about establishing general rules which will apply equally to all people, but justice from a deconstructive point of view is about being just in each individual case to each individual subject, recognizing the otherness of the other. Thus otherness plays a decisive role. Justice cannot be explained with pre-defined categories and judgements, but deconstructive politics must always re-ask and re-examine the current situation, the methods and categories used to decide. In other words, justice can never be politically enforced. Justice is the experience of the impossible, of the aporia, the moment of undecidability, in which a decision cannot be based on any existing law or rule, determining what is just and unjust (Keenan 1997: 28-31). Justice is not tangible, but by nature spectral. Thus, justice like so much else in Derrida is horizon rather than essence. The spectral nature of justice, and the experience of justice as an experience of aporia lead to the notion of responsibility. Deconstructive politics is aware of the responsibility to question the socio-economico-philosophico-political circumstances in which they take place. This responsibility is both a responsibility to act justified in a deconstructive spirit, and also a responsibility to the other, to try to understand the other and his/her unique position and language.

Another key-aspect of deconstructive politics is its openness. Deconstruction criticizes existing metaphysical discourses, but its criticism does not come to an end. Deconstructive politics works towards the messianic promise of democracy-to-come.

Obviously the Derridean concept of justice does not qualify as an easy-to-read guidebook for making the world a better place. Neither, though, does the Charter of Principles by itself. Both, the Derridean conception of deconstructive politics in the New International, and the Charter of Principles depend chiefly on the socio-political practice, in which they are embedded.

A New International?

After the examination of the politics of the social forums, and the analysis of the notion of justice, it is time to finally answer the question whether the social forums can be considered to be a Derridean New International. The social forums clearly fit Claus Offe's concept of new social movements, due to their decentralized organizational structure, their interpersonal solidarity, and their focus on autonomous spaces rather than tangible material advantages (1985). The social forums also fit some of the criteria of the Derridean New International.

Especially the structure of the forums as a loose alliance, which makes use of the 'spectral world of cyberspace' (Miller 2001: 10), perfectly accords with Derrida's concept. Moreover, at least in respect to their membership, the social forums transgress the narrow categories of the Marxist social classes, and the forums reject violence. Also, the WSF/ESF process is about articulating protest, instead of the usual hegemonic articulation, and particularly the WSF is a counter-product to the white, rich monopoly of world politics.

Besides all the similarities between the social forums and the New International, there are, however, also some significant differences. Even though the activists participating in the WSF/ESF process come from various backgrounds, the socio-political policy of the social forums does still work with the concept of Marxist social classes, an orthodox true-or-false ontology, and ideologically fixed meanings. The political project of the social forums is anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, but not anti-hegemonic from a deconstructive point of view. The social forums are committed to an emancipatory struggle, based on the firm belief in the values of freedom, equality, and justice, whereas deconstructive politics works beyond fixed meaning, challenging the universal, going 'in-between' and experiencing the aporia of undecidability. There is no 'I', which can decide, the liberal individual does not take responsibility (Norval 2004: 149).

The social forums are open and heterogeneous, too, they represent 'diversity and plurality', and 'disagreement amid many agreements' (Grzybowski 2006: 9). Their understanding of politics and the political, however, is different. Deconstruction seeks the promise of democracy-to-come, a democracy that will always be incomplete, and 'out of joint'. A democracy which is only possible with deconstruction, as Derrida (1997: 105) claims, that 'no deconstruction without democ-

racy, no democracy without deconstruction'. Deconstructive politics will not follow established rules, but value and consider each unique situation.

While it becomes clear that the social forums do not qualify as a New International from a Derridean point of view, the question arises what the politics of the forums can achieve. As shown above, the groups participating in the WSF/ESF process focus on certain categories without speaking with one voice. The polyphonic nature of the social forums is a double-edged sword, as it facilitates inclusion of interested groups, but weakens the political output of the process.

The Future of the Social Forums

At the ESF in Paris in 2003 Cassen, one of the founding fathers of the WSF, delivered a plea for a more hierarchical structure of the social forums in order to increase their political output. While Cassen's proposal was not very popular with the audience and many organizers of the event, especially due to the proposed loss of the horizontal structure of the entire process, the voices calling for a politically more active role of the social forums increase (Tormey 2004). Right now the social forums are no real threat for the capitalist system. As Teivo Teivainen points out, 'being anti-something can be politically useful, but only up to a point' (2002: 626). The social forums allow for extensive open discussions between different views of how the world should look after capitalism, or the end of Western dominance, but unfortunately, also due to its policy of inclusion rather than exclusion, consent on tangible concepts is rare, not to say non-existent. Just like many other protest movements, the WSF and ESF are not able to show alternative futures, or give a precise account of what they are fighting for (Teivainen 2002: 627). The crisis of the WSF/ESF, however, is in this respect a phenomenon typical for many parts of the political left the world over.

The social forums are trapped between being too satisfied with criticizing the state of the world, blaming the United States, and declaring their solidarity with emancipatory struggles on all continents on the one side (the unifying side), and the need for open-minded discussions and a profound theory of political practice on the other side (the active side). The immense popularity of the social forums offers a unique chance for all participants to engage in the collective

search for an alternative to the capitalist world of today. The fact that politicians, academics, entrepreneurs, and activists support the forums as serious and useful meetings, shows how much potential the WSF/ESF process has. The search for a viable alternative to capitalism does not presuppose total agreement between all participating groups (which would be simply impossible) but it should aim at transgressing the logic of total inclusion and mere networking of the current WSF/ESF process. The social forums are serious actors and political players, not a carnival of old-school socialists and frustrated youngsters, but for becoming politically more effective they will need a plan for political action, not only a nice slogan ('another world is possible') and a common arch-enemy (Western-style capitalism). But cannot the WSF and the ESF stay the way they are? They sure can (at least for a while, as conflict and tensions might sooner or later lead to a split or change in policy, no matter in which direction), but the enormous potential of this extra-parliamentary protest movement would be wasted.

Crucial, though, is that the social forum process does not entirely give up its identity. This means that the horizontal organizational structure of the forums definitely must be maintained as to institutionalize the movement would lead to its decay. The massive use made of the internet shows how global networking can spread, and clarifies the subversive potential of the new media. The WSF does not need a party-like structure and strict hierarchies, but it needs an open discussion across different participating groups and beyond firmly established belief patterns with more tangible results to become a serious and powerful political actor.

The basic problem is, that the social forums today try to bring everybody with an alternative lifestyle under one roof and celebrating one's own existence. By now, though, the social forum movement is so large that it should go beyond the carnival celebration and take the next step towards changing the world. If the social forums manage to think the capitalist after without falling apart or losing their horizontal organizational structure, the chances that the WSF develops into a real New International and that the forums will pose a threat to the dominance of Western-style capitalism are higher than ever.

References

- Butler, Judith, Laclau, Ernesto, and Žižek, Slavoj 2000: *Contingency, Hegemony Universality*, London.
- Charter of Principles, on-line. Available HTTP:
http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_langu age=2 (1 February 2006).
- Chavez, Hugo 2005: *Our Peoples' South and North*, on-line. Available HTTP:
http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/download/chavez_speech_EN.p df (1 February 2006).
- Derrida, Jacques 1991: *Gesetzeskraft. Der „mystische Grund der Autorität“*, Frankfurt/Main.
- Derrida, Jacques 1994: *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, New York.
- Derrida, Jacques 1997: *The Politics of Friendship*, London.
- Derrida, Jacques 1999: 'Marx & Sons', in M. Sprinker (ed.): *Ghostly Demarcations. A Symposium on Jacques Derrida`s Specters of Marx*, London, 213-269.
- Eagleton, Terry 1999: 'Marxism without Marxism', in M. Sprinker (ed.): *Ghostly Demarcations. A Symposium on Jacques Derrida`s Specters of Marx*, London, 83-87.
- Gramsci, Antonio 1971: *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith), London.
- Grzybowski, Candido 2006: 'The World Social Forum: Reinventing Global Politics', *Global Governance* 12, 7-13.
- Keenan, Thomas 1997: *Fables of Responsibility. Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, Stanford / California.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal 1985: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London.
- Lewis, Tom 1999: 'The Politics of "Hauntology" in Derrida's Specters of Marx', in Michael Sprinker (ed.): *Ghostly Demarcations. A Symposium on Jacques Derrida`s Specters of Marx*, London, 134-167.
- Menke, Christoph 1994: 'Für eine Politik der Dekonstruktion. Jacques Derrida über Recht und Gerechtigkeit', in Anselm Haverkamp (ed.): *Gewalt und Gerechtigkeit. Derrida – Benjamin*, Frankfurt/Main, 279-287.

- Miller, J. Hillis 2001: 'Derrida, Benjamin, the Internet, and the New International', *Parallax* 7/3, 6-11.
- Norval, Aletta 2004: 'Hegemony after Deconstruction: the Consequences of Undecidability', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9/2, 139-157.
- Offe, Claus 1985: 'New Social Movements: Changing Boundaries of the Political', *Social Research* 52, 817-868.
- Sprinker, Michael 1999: *Ghostly Demarcations. A Symposium on Jacques Derrida`s Specters of Marx*, London.
- Teivainen, Teivo 2002: 'The World Social Forum and Global Democratisation: Learning from Porto Alegre', *Third World Quarterly* 23/4, 621-632.
- Tempest, Matthew 2004: 'Anarchists Storm European Social Forum', *The Observer*, 17 October 2004.
- Tormey, S. 2004: *The 2003 European Social Forum: Where Next for the Anti-Capitalist Movement?*, on-line. Available HTTP: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/simon.tormey/articles/ESFweb.pdf> (1 February 2006).
- Townshend, Jules 2004: 'Derrida's Deconstruction of Marx(ism)', *Contemporary Politics* 10/2, 127-143.

ⁱ The official website of the WSF with various links can be found at:

http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/index.php?cd_language=2&id_menu=

ⁱⁱ For more detailed information about the ESF process and the different groups involved go to: <http://www.fse-esf.org/>

ⁱⁱⁱ The full text of the Charter of Principles can be found at:

http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2 (1 February 2006)