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Book Review of The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond

Rodríguez

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Book Reviews

The Rise of the Global Left: The World Social Forum and Beyond by Boaventura De Sousa Santos (London, UK: Zed Books, 2006, 222 pp., hard cover, \$85.00; soft cover, \$31.00).

Reviewer: Karina Rodríguez N. Universidad de Chile, Santiago, Chile

The Rise of the Global Left is a book that aims to achieve a better understanding of the World Social Forum (WSF) in the context of struggles for social emancipation and highlight its capacity for renewal and reinvention of left thinking and practice in the construction of global left politics. The book is divided into several chapters that allow you to gradually gain a deep understanding of the WSF as an agent of social change and as a critical utopia based on the manifestation of counter-hegemonic globalization and the recognition of the differences.

The author gives full information and details about what is and what should be the WSF, focusing on its organization, challenges, methodology, participation, and deliberation system toward to a more participatory and democratic struggle. Through the analysis of the WSF's organizational transformation, the author reaches the conclusion that the WSF has shown an enormous capacity to reinvent itself, identify problems, and seek for solutions for them.

Maybe one of the most interesting analyses in the book is the one presented in Chapter Six about the tensions or cleavages, the strategies, and political actions at the WSF. Reform or revolution, socialism or social emancipation, the state as an enemy or ally, national or global struggles, direct or institutional action, equality or respect for difference and the WSF conceived as a space or as a movement are the main manifest cleavages detected by Santos. Nevertheless, these cleavages are not specific of the WSF because they belong to the historical legacy of social forces that struggle against the status quo for a better society. In addition, he argues, cleavages have been of a low intensity, because for the movements and organizations what unites them has been more important than what divides

them. Nevertheless, the cleavages are important in different ways to the movements and organizations of the WSF.

The permanent question about the future of the WSF has generated the impulse for innovations and openness to new proposals of organization and work. There could be many solutions, including the one presented by Santos, which suggests creating the Popular University of Social Movements to reduce the gap between practice and knowledge and embody a struggle against hegemonic monocultural logic. But there should be a permanent question about the efficaciousness, representation, organization and the accurate combination between celebration of the difference and generation of consensus leading collective action.

After reading the book you may reach the conclusion that at the WSF is facing many challenges and has many others in the future. Of course, the WSF is not a perfect organization and is not the unique organization that can gather the struggles for social emancipation nowadays. However, it has shown a tremendous capacity to keep alive the utopia that another world is possible through the celebration of diversity by reciprocal understanding and surely the WSF is making the greatest effort to make it real.

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