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Conjuring the Spirits of the Present Forum: *Planetize the Movement!*

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On one level, I share Valentine Moghadam's [depiction](#) of several current problems and her passionate call to planetize the movement. Moghadam's concerns about inequalities, antagonistic interstate relations, war, climate change, and the "rightward march of populist politics" are widely shared across the planet. She also makes a strong appeal to unify global civil society ("the movement of movements," the World Social Forum) and a working-class-based Marxian Left (the Fifth International, the United Front, the Progressive International, or the World Party), the former "horizontally" and the latter more "vertically."

At another level, her analysis brings to mind an insightful point from Marx's famous essay "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." Marx discussed the French coup of 1851, in which Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte turned himself into the autocrat of France. In the beginning of Marx's essay, there are a few remarkable sentences that have been quoted time and again in the social scientific literature. This sentence is among them, but perhaps not as well-known as some of the others:

At the very time when men appear engaged in revolutionizing things and themselves, in bringing about what never was before, at such very epochs of revolutionary crisis do they anxiously conjure up into their service the spirits of the past, assume their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honoured disguise and with such borrowed language.

When trying to make sense of the great transformations of the twenty-first century, it seems difficult to avoid evoking "the spirits of the past." Moghadam's analysis is reasonable but also strangely anachronistic. She argues that the decline of the US hegemony is generating chaos. This is similar to the process of the British losing their empire, which engendered World War I, the

Russian revolution, fascism and Nazism, and World War II. So we seem to be back to the theory of hegemonic stability. From such comments as well as her claim that “the collapse of world communism generated new crises and chaos,” one could even infer a nostalgia for the Cold War, the era when the US was securely hegemonic and world communism still alive and (presumably) well, although I am sure it is not Moghadam’s intention to evoke nostalgia for the 1947–1989 period.

The term “international” originated in the late eighteenth century (from Jeremy Bentham), while the political idea of “inter-nationalism” comes from the nineteenth century (The International Workingmen’s Association in 1864). Its later editions were developed during the first half of the twentieth century. The term “inter-nationalism” reflects the rise of nationalism: it implies that ultimately the world consists of nations, while also suggesting a cosmopolitan perspective on the modern world. The Marxian versions of internationalism remain anchored in Lenin and Trotsky, whereas social democrats, liberals, and greens have had, and still have, their own editions of Internationals. The question is, do we need to assume such borrowed language in the 2020s?

The concept of global civil society is more recent and apt. Nonetheless, many pundits agree that the World Social Forum as “a movement of movements” has run its course. Perhaps it is possible to revive the World Social Forum in some sense, although its global attractiveness has all but vanished, at least for the time being, and although at the moment it is difficult to see what could replace its Brazilian organizational basis. There are also intrinsic reasons why the WSF failed to sustain hope for a better future. Although it is true that democracy requires pluralist civil society involving multiple movements and civic associations, the idea that there can be “a movement of movements” without agency is self-contradictory. A self-contradictory idea is prone to undermine its own basis, even become counterproductive. Something more consistent and more transformative is needed.

Political agency requires transformative capacity, which a mere open space or a forum of discussions lacks. Originally, the First International (1864–1876) was not that different from the WSF, although it could make some decisions and take positions. The First International was a loose organization of organizations and some individuals, primarily pursuing connections between the workers’ movements and unions in separate countries in order to create the conditions for some joint action such as backing of local and national strikes. Both its supporters and opponents had an interest in overstating its influence. The Second International (1889–1914) also had procedures for

adopting positions and making resolutions, but it fell apart along national lines in the summer of 1914 (only in Russia and Serbia did the socialists vote against the war). The “verticality” of these two Internationals stemmed mostly from exclusionary, authoritarian, and centralizing tendencies that characterized some of the struggles, and from the strongly sovereign-state-reliant programmatic visions that became prevalent within them. Neither of the two socialist Internationals ever developed any notion of common collective institutions on a European or global scale.

Something new is thus needed. This is the basis of the call for the creation of a world political party (WPP): an open ethico-political association in pursuit of a broad program of societal reorganization on a global scale. A WPP should be both more efficacious in achieving transformations than the socialist Internationals were and less “vertical,” i.e., more consistently committed to democratic ethos, principles, and practices. A political party is of course not a new idea as such, and there is a widespread skepticism about the current mainstream national parties. A viable WPP must be able to respond to this moral and political criticism. A WPP is nonetheless needed because collective learning and institutional change require politically capable transformative actors.

Many critically important problems can be overcome by building better common institutions. We can distinguish between three moments of transformative global-democratic action: (1) activities within the confines of established institutions; (2) advocacy to transform global institutions and create new ones such as global taxes and regulations, public investment programs, and a world parliament; and (3) participation in the newly formed global institutions. These three moments also form a logical order: (1) activities within existing institutions can include (2) advocacy of, and legislation for, global democratic institutions, while successful attempts at creating institutions of planetary democracy (3) make participation in them possible. Over time, new institutions will become established, and the cycle can continue from (1) to (2) to (3). There is no end to history, and not all new institutions will have to be planetary in scope. Global institutions can, and characteristically should, increase the contextually overlapping, multi-layered autonomy of local actors. This is a vision that can inspire optimism and ambition about our future possibilities.

About the Author



Heikki Patomäki is a social scientist, activist, and professor of world politics at the University of Helsinki. He has published over 20 books, 200 research papers, and hundreds of popular articles and blogs on such topics as the philosophy and methodology of social sciences, peace and futures studies, and global political economy, justice, and democracy. His books include *Disintegrative Tendencies in Global Political Economy: Exits and Conflicts* and *A Possible World: Democratic Transformation of Global Institutions* (with Teivo Teivainen). Patomäki is a full member of the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Letters (2018–) and Life Member of Clare Hall at the University of Cambridge (2020–). He is a longtime activist of the international Attac movement and a member of the Steering Committee of EuroMemo and DiEM25.

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