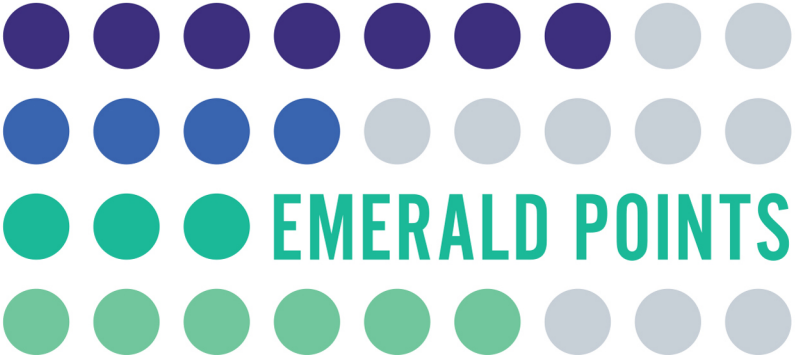


THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKING

Elizabeth Friesen



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BY

ELIZABETH FRIESEN

Carleton University, Canada



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
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FOREWORD

I first became aware of the impact of the World Economic Forum (WEF) while tracing the progress of the transnational civil society campaign for the cancellation of third world debt, a campaign which culminated in the adoption of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative at the G8 in 2005. I chose the case of the campaign for the cancellation of third world debt because I was interested in theories of power. The power of the liberalised international financial system to shape not only international economic relations but also economic, political, and social realities within states seemed to me to be unprecedented in its scope and scale. Following Polanyi, I wanted to explore the kinds of power societies might bring to bear in response.

This eventually led me to the transnational civil society campaign for the cancellation of third world debt (Friesen, 2009, 2012). As I traced the origins and activities of the national and transnational civil society actors, organisations, and networks involved in this campaign, I became aware of the somewhat surprising role the WEF had played in this process. There is very little analysis of the WEF as a transnational political actor and I believe this is a serious oversight. The WEF is an increasingly engaged and well-connected transnational actor in the global political economy. The innovative transnational politics practiced by the WEF are not formally legitimised by states but they are underpinned

by unconventional sources of power and influence. At present, the norms and formal institutional structures of the international order appear to be eroding and research into transnational politics and non-state sources of resilience in the international political economy is particularly relevant. The WEF is an unusual transnational organisation with unique capabilities. It is energetic, ambitious, innovative and now more determined than ever to take a part in addressing the most challenging issues in world politics.