

Report on the Legal Pluralism course and the Jubilee Conference on Legal Pluralism- 4th to 10th Sep 2011

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Laws were not new to me and neither was studying it , at least that is what I thought when I signed up for the Legal Pluralism course work preceding the Jubilee Conference on Legal Pluralism from the 4th to the 7th of September 2011 at University of Cape Town . Being a relatively new entrant into humanities, my tryst with legal pluralism was limited to natural resources especially fisheries and expected the course and the conference to be restricted to these and I was definitely in for a big surprise.

Cape Town was my first destination in Africa and so far been the only one. The iconic table top mountain was spell bounding and Kramer Law Building situated right below it provided the perfect setting for what was to be a very intensive and stimulating week. To begin with, the participants of the course work were as diverse and their research topics, representing themselves from almost all the continents in the world. The participants for the course work were a healthy mix of both young researchers and experienced practitioners of law in its various formats. The very round of introduction of the participants was an eye opener for me to the variety of legal systems across the world. The course work included both presentations and interactive sessions. It was indeed a blessing to interact with the likes of Franz and Keebet von Beckmann who's work have been pioneering in this field of research. As the days progressed, and we were exposed to various systems of laws, their interaction and the methods to study these, it became increasing clear that studying law was not as easy as it had sounded to be. It was in one of these sessions I realised how apt it was for the organisers to choose South Africa as the venue for this year's conference given its rich variety of legal systems. Conceptualising the pluralistic nature of laws with various examples from across the globe was the most interesting part to me .Incidentally the role play selected for looking at interaction of laws was my own topic of research in South Asia .The role play gave me new insights and different perspectives on how law is looked upon and interpreted by different actors. The course ended on the 7th of September with a field trip which was the icing on the cake.

The course set the tone for the big event, Jubilee Conference on Legal Pluralism the starting from the 8th to the 10th September. With five major themes namely -models and practices of legal pluralism, governance and the politics of order, property relations, human rights and development and law, custom and religion running in parallel sessions it was hard to choose at times. Nevertheless I was happy to attend some really good sessions. Apart from this the daily plenary brought in a variety of eminent speakers from different back grounds. To have visited South Africa and attend the course and conference was indeed a life changing experience.