

Report on my Participation in the World Social Science Forum 2015

By Herbert Docena

Thanks to the International Social Science Council and the WZB, I was able to participate in the World Social Science Forum held in Durban, Africa in September 2015. It provided me a much-needed opportunity for me to present, and get feedback on, the emerging argument of my dissertation project as a PhD candidate at the University of California, Berkeley and as a guest researcher at the WZB. Entitled, "The Enclosure of Heaven: The Global Struggle for Climate Justice and the Rise of Green Capitalism" and presented at a session focused on "social movements," the presentation sought to advance an explanation for how early radical environmentalist movements were contained but not entirely defeated or suppressed.

Drawing from insights in political sociology and the sociology of culture, it argued that said movements were rolled back as consequence of what Gramsci called a "passive revolution" on the world stage: that is, a particular group of intellectuals drawn from the dominant classes actually attempted to *reform* global capitalism by subjecting the market to global environmental regulation so as to selectively absorb the grievances of subordinate classes in order to forestall. But, the paper goes on to argue, this counter-hegemonic movement would not be defeated entirely because, in the course of pushing for these reforms, these reformist intellectuals would compel other dominant elites to also organize against their reforms, but instead of supporting more antagonistic popular mobilizations against these conservatives, these reformists would choose to accommodate them by making a series of compromises that weakened their attempts at global environmental regulation, thereby undermining their ability to absorb subordinate groups' grievances and, with it, their ability to secure global hegemony.

Following my presentation, I received several useful pieces of feedback on my argument, including the need to clarify some of the terms and concepts I used, especially when addressing a broader, more general audience not necessarily steeped in some of the specialized terms of my discipline. I also came to think of ways by which to make my narrative more engaging or more captivating. Finally, I received useful suggestions on other literatures to address or refer to so as to connect different fields and audiences. All these should be helpful as I finish my dissertation and hopefully get to publish one or several articles, as well as hopefully a manuscript, out of it.

The only thing that was unfortunate was that my panel was scheduled at the same time as another panel focused on nearly the same topic as mine (i.e. on environmental/climate justice movements). This prevented a few people whose feedback I wanted from attending as they chose to go to the other session. It would also have been useful for me to attend the other session so as to network with the other researchers there.

Apart from the opportunity to share and get feedback on my current research work, I also benefited from the opportunity to attend several deeply engaging sessions and talks—ones which in direct and indirect ways were quite closely connected to my own research interests. I especially enjoyed the panels on inequalities, though I wished that there would have been more anthropologists and sociologists, in addition to economists, in them. As always, I also wished there was more time for more spontaneous debates and discussions in addition to set presentations or speeches.

In addition, I had the privilege of meeting a number of scholars, particularly ISSC fellows, who share similar research interests and frameworks and who might be prospective research partners or collaborators in the future.

Though nothing "concrete" came out directly from my participation in the WSSF, I have no doubt that the feedback I got, the sessions I attended, the new contacts I made, and the numerous formal and informal discussions I had with other participants have widened my horizons and will hopefully enrich my future scholarship.