

Thomas Stern: Report about the **World Congress for Knowledge Democracy in Cartagena 17th of June 2017**

On the day following the ARNA-conference 2017 Lonnie Rowell opened the congress with about 450 international participants. Rajesh Tandon was the first speaker. He wore a t-shirt in blazing yellow with the letters PRIA printed on them, which as he explained stood for his organization Participatory Research in Asia and at the same time are the word meaning loved one in his language Hindi. He pointed out that this day was the international day of housework, and that in some parts of the world those who carry it out are beginning to organize and fight for better work conditions and social security. Their specific knowledge, which is mostly transferred within families, is a perfect starting point for deliberations about Knowledge Democracy. Tandon's own grandmother for instance had been an expert on plants and herbs and their medical use, e.g. as antiseptic. But not only this kind of knowledge has to be respected, but also the way how it is generated, namely by trial-and-error, or by acting-testing-experiencing. Not only alternative knowledge but also the alternative ways how it is generated ought to be acknowledged, whether they are rooted in myths and rituals, in music and dance, or in yoga and t'ai chi. That's why we should rather talk about Epistemic Justice instead of Cognitive Justice.

Budd Hall presented a video recording of a remarkable meeting just one month before in May 2017 which had taken place at the confluence of the Blue and the White Nile River in Africa. A delegation of Canadian Native Americans had held a meeting with a group of chiefs and shamans from several local tribes for a joint ritual celebrating harmony and balance of mankind with the planet earth and all living creatures. What for Western observers might have looked like a superstitious mumbo-jumbo had led to a deep mutual understanding between the participants and confirmed their conviction that all human beings are indissolubly connected with each other and with their environment.¹

In his keynote lecture the Portuguese social philosopher Boaventura de Sousa Santos pondered about the contrast between the claim of this global assembly and the task of actually dealing with all the current contradictions in our world. He said we must take into account that academic research is no longer shaped by social reform concepts or revolutionary ideas like in the 1970s, but by neoliberalism, i.e. by an image of a free market society composed of individuals in pursuit of personal benefits and in competition with each other. In the northern hemisphere the visions of solidarity and socialism have faded and have been replaced by ecological ideologies ("mother earth", "ubuntu", ...) which are nothing new for the people in the southern hemisphere. Maybe the future of social research lies outside the universities and is driven by grassroots movements and social activists? Our role as academics could be to validate the knowledge which is created in resistance and to make it available for the ordinary people. Part of that assignment would be to rewrite history. About Native Americans and Africans without traditional literal culture there exists only the history as it has been narrated by their colonial conquerors. Who is going to write the history from the perspective of the subjugated? Colonialism is not only the conquest and repression by foreign powers. It deeply affects the consciousness of the colonized, it destroys their self-image, their social cohesion, their convictions, their groundedness in this world. It is still palpable for their descendants in the USA through their daily discrimination within the educational, health and prison system and in the labour and housing market. It is no longer urgent to expand our knowledge about

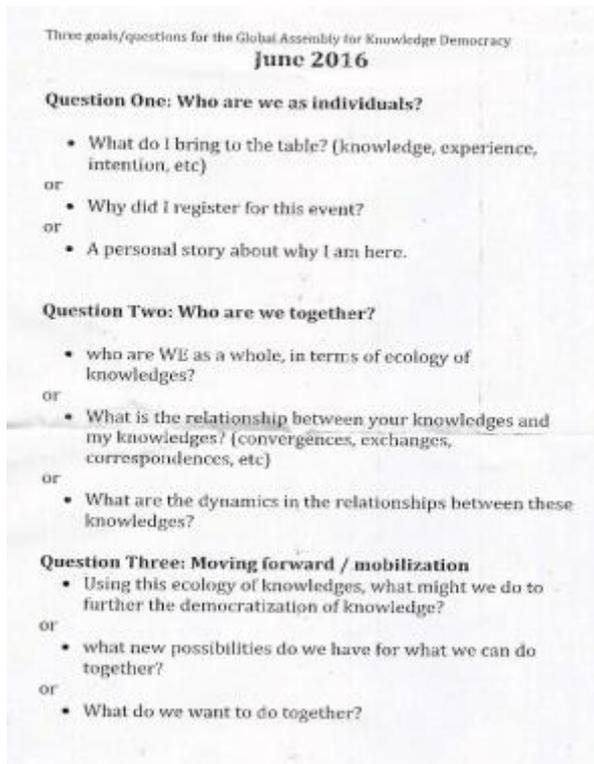
¹ One of the Norwegian Congress participants criticized the affirmative attitude towards traditional forms of knowledge and mindset of African chiefs and shamans. His Ugandan students, he said, regard their culture as deeply rooted in patriarchal and authoritarian tribal structures, which are oppressive for women and young men, and which are the reason for them to take refuge in Europe.



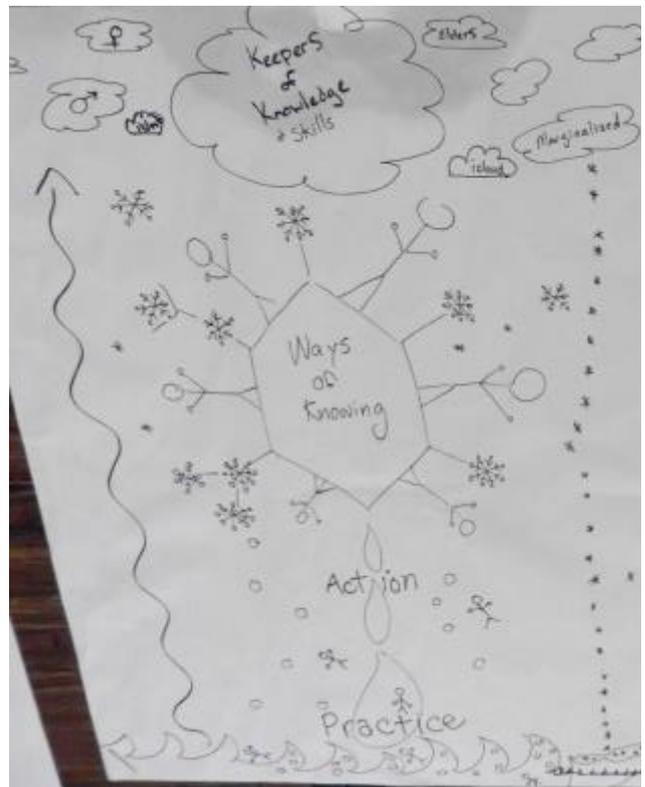
Lonnie Rowell opens the World Congress



Some students prepare their contribution.



Three questions for group discussions.



One of the posters as a result of the group discussion.



One of the working groups and their poster.



Participants knock upon their heart while walking in line.



A minute of silence, reflection and smiling.



Dr. Pencil at work.

