



A Personal Memorial on Rodolfo Stavenhagen (29 August 1932 – 5 November 2016)

by his editor and friend, Hans Günter Brauch

Since my student days at Heidelberg University in the late 1960s and early 1970s I was familiar with the work of Rodolfo Stavenhagen published in the book by Dieter Senghaas on *Peripherer Kapitalismus: Analysen über Abhängigkeit und Unterentwicklung* (1974). I met him for the first time personally in late December 2006 during the 60th birthday party of Úrsula Oswald Spring in Yautepec, Morelos in Mexico and then usually several times during my annual visits to Cuernavaca.

It was a great honour to invite Rodolfo on the occasion of his 80th birthday in March 2012 to become an author in my book Series on *Pioneers in Science and Practice* <http://www.afes-press-books.de/html/SpringerBriefs_PSP02.htm> which started my close cooperation with him as an editor of three English anthologies with his major English writings during his long distinguished scientific career in sociology with a special focus on the rights of indigenous people and rural agriculture. Out of this close cooperation emerged three books:

- Rodolfo Stavenhagen: *Pioneer on Indigenous Rights* (Heidelberg – Dordrecht – London – New York: Springer-Verlag, 2013). <<http://www.springer.com/de/book/9783642341496>>

- Rodolfo Stavenhagen: *The Emergence of Indigenous Peoples* (Heidelberg – New York – Dordrecht – London: Springer-Verlag, 2013). <<http://www.springer.com/de/book/9783642341434>>
- Rodolfo Stavenhagen: *Peasants, Culture and Indigenous Peoples: Critical Issues* (Heidelberg – New York – Dordrecht – London: Springer-Verlag, 2013). <<http://www.springer.com/de/book/9783642341526>>

We met quite often in his home with his wife Elia for lunch or tea, in Ursula's home and during her birthday parties and my own 65th birthday party in Yautepec, often also with his close friend Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, a fellow sociologist and critical observer of the societies in Latin America and of world events.

It was a special honour for Ursula and myself when he presented our co-edited book *Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters and Security – Threats, Challenges, Vulnerabilities and Risks* on 27 September 2011 in the German Embassy in Mexico City <http://www.afes-press-books.de/html/PDFs/PhotoGallery_%20MexicoCity_110927.pdf>.

During one of our private conversations - as usual in German - in the garden of his home in the centre of Cuernavaca in spring of 2011 he told me his life history. Rodolfo was born in August 1932 in Frankfurt to a Jewish family. He could not see his birthday certificate until several decades later when he personally visited the Mayor's office in Frankfurt and asked whether he could obtain a copy.

His father had obtained a PhD in the social sciences from the University of Frankfurt but after he was unable find an academic job he joined the jeweler's store of his grandfather in Frankfurt's west end. Their villa was next door to the Senckenberg Museum on biodiversity where later the two ugly university towers of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University were built after World War II that were fortunately demolished in February 2014. He told me that his grandmother often took him to the garden of the museum next door where he could play in his huge personal playground.

When the Nazis took power in 1933, his parents left their home and store behind in 1936 and looked for refuge in several countries in Europe reaching at the end to the Netherlands and on the very day German forces started to invade this country his parents and he could get on the last ship that left for New York and from where they continued their journey to Mexico where they were granted permission to stay and thus to survive. His grandmother had decided to stay in Germany and she was later murdered in a German concentration camp.

He later told me that he was very moved when the German Ambassador to Mexico in a personal letter of congratulation for his 80th birthday apologized on behalf of Germany for all Rodolfo and his family had experienced in his country of birth whose culture had influenced him and whose language he spoke fluently without any accent until he passed away on 5 November 2016.

Rodolfo Stavenhagen received his education in Mexico where he lived most of his life and became one of the most distinguished social scientists and proponents of the rights of the indigenous people in Mexico and globally as their UN Rapporteur. In our last meeting in August 2016, Ursula and I met him in his huge library that was decorated by pieces of art of the indigenous people of Mexico, of the Benin culture in West Africa and of Asia. He told us of his last journey to New York in May where he received the distinguished *Kalman Silvert Award* <https://lasa.international.pitt.edu/eng/awards/silvert_history2.asp> of the *Latin American Studies Association* (LASA) <<http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/forum/files/vol47-issue2/KalmanSilvert.pdf>>.

Rodolfo was one of the most distinguished social scientists I was honoured to publish in my book series on *Pioneers in Science and Practice* who has also become a good friend for whom I had the very highest regard and respect for his lifelong scientific achievement. He was a very nice person I was always most delighted to meet and to discuss with him many scientific and political developments and debates globally. I have missed him during my most recent visit to Cuernavaca and I will miss him in the years to come. However, his ideas and his commitment for the indigenous in Mexico and globally will remain a task and a challenge for the years and decades to come.

Cuernavaca, Mexico, 16 March 2017

Hans Guenter Brauch

