

The integration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill

*Interview to Dr. Norman Girvan
By Laneydi Martínez Alfonso*





In 2013, during one of his many visits to Havana, Norman Girvan enthusiastically agreed to participate in an interview on Latin America and Caribbean relations –in the living room of his friend Graciela Chailloux. The ideas expressed in this interview are a testimony, once again, to his academic excellence, his infinite intellectual curiosity and his immense humility. Meeting this brilliant professional and exceptional human being, it has been one of the most especial moments in my life. Through his work, I rediscovered a different Caribbean, full of challenges, potentialities and cultural richness. His firm commitment and trust in young people will always be a source of inspiration for me. Thanks Norman Girvan for the Caribbean.

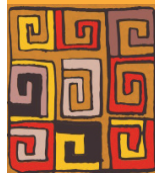
Part I: Changes in the Latin American regionalism

Laneydi Martínez Alfonso (LMA): The first decade of the XXI century has been marked by the emergence of several changes in the Latin American regionalism and the modalities of political coordination and cooperation in the region, in the form of new stakeholders (Petrocaribe, ALBA, UNASUR and CELAC) and leaderships (mainly Brazil and Venezuela). In this context, how would you characterize this “new” moment of the Latin American regionalism? And under your consideration, which are the implications for the region in general and, particularly, for the Caribbean?

Norman Girvan (NG): Certainly, we have witnessed profound changes with a transcendental importance in the history of Latin America and the Caribbean, especially its relations with the main center of hegemonic power. I even see this moment as a Second Declaration of Independence of Latin America. Two events mark the shifts:

- 1) The stopping of the project for the construction of the Free Trade of Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) in 2004, where the majority of Latin American countries rejected the American model, despite of all pressures and as a consequence of political changes in the region.
- 2) The Summit of the Americas and the General Assembly of the OAS in April and June respectively in 2009. The Summit of the Americas virtually collapsed. There was a general claim that Cuba should return to this organization. A final declaration was not signed. Three months later the OAS lifted the restrictions to Cuba. You can find an article about this subject in my webpage.

“The integration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill” Interview to Dr. Norman Girvan



There was a determination among Latin American and Caribbean States, with no exception, to assert their independence of Washington. The construction of new institutional forms gave substance and form to this determination: UNASUR, ALBA-PetroCaribe and CELAC. All of which represents a new project for an independent cooperation, coordination and integration, moving away from Washington Consensus of limited state intervention in the economy. One dimension that has to be recognized is the rise of social movements in Latin America and Caribbean from the 90s to the 2000s. These subterranean changes eventually broke through and brought progressive and popular government into power. Examples are Chavez's and Lula's movements and others that are well known. It is important not only to look at the changes at the level of political process and political dynamic since the mid-90s, for these developments are also products of deeper changes.

Laneydi Martínez Alfonso (LMA): Which factors would you identify as the main causes of these changes?

Norman Girvan (NG): It is important to contextualize these processes. The 1970s saw the rise of right wing military dictatorships and in the 1980s we had tremendous struggles for democratization. As a consequence there was the emergence of new organizations and political formations rooted in the population particularly in the 1990s; and democratic elections became the norm. Initially most of the governments in power were committed to the neo-liberal policies of the Washington Consensus; which they were made to believe would result in economic growth, development, and reduction of poverty. But what took place was greater foreign control in the economies, declining public services, rising debt, and increased poverty and inequality. So there was growing disillusionment with the neoliberal model. The seeds were planted for the emergence of social movements opposed to neo-liberalism; linked to the opposition to neo-liberalism and globalization in the North. The Latin American Forum of Sao Paulo, the network "Our World is Not for Sale, the Seattle meeting of the World Trade organization (WTO) in 1999 and the massive demonstrations that took place, the international mobilization against the multinational agreement of investment, the financial crisis in South Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia in 97)—all these resulted in popular people protests, associated the rise of neoliberal globalization. Thus, there was a jointing up of the forces in Latin America and the global north, the configuration of a new political climate and the mobilization of the indigenous people in Ecuador, Bolivia, in some extent also in Peru, also women and afro-descendants movements. This situation led to the setting up of new political forms that contributed to the changes. The latest elections

in Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil showed how permanent or sustained are these changes.

LMA: An unexplored perspective has to do with new theoretical developments that several authors have associated with the aforementioned changes in Latin America regionalism: do you consider that these changes respond or lead to new theoretical developments on regionalism, integration, cooperation and political coordination in the region? What are their main bases?

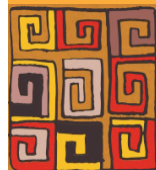
NG: Yes, to some extent, but not as much as I wanted. I am aware of the theory of the project of construction of XXI socialism and also of the Bolivian philosophy of "living well". Movements have produced new concepts and this is linked with the renewal of concepts of socialism and of what constitute progress. You can find a paper on a critical evaluation of ALBA as alternative model integration on my website.

The UNASUR is an integration model, still in an embryonic form, that contains elements of liberalization, of IIRSA and of social inclusion as dimensions, as well as an active role of the State. It is not a socialist model like ALBA. The idea of post-neoliberalism is probably associated with the Brazilian model of social democracy with the private sector playing a role, but the State also provides guarantees and social services to the poor.

LMA: As you know, in the last 10 years, new players have emerged in the regional scenario of Latin America and the Caribbean: UNASUR, ALBA and CELAC are some of the examples. How would you characterize, in terms of achievements and challenges, the emergence of these new stakeholders in the regional context?

NG: From ALBA, I would highlight its flexibility, the treatment of asymmetries, the active role for the State, the human dimension and the technical and financial cooperation, but there are also preoccupations. One of them is the situation of the debt which is being accumulated to Venezuela, the limited exports to Venezuela from the smaller ALBA countries and the reliance on financial cooperation. This is an unhealthy and unsustainable situation. The Caribbean countries don't have anything to export to Venezuela or Cuba, except for tourism. Flows of tourism coming from Venezuela, Cuba or Ecuador to the Caribbean could be an interesting possibility but very little has been done to boost merchandise exports from these countries.

"The integration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill" Interview to Dr. Norman Girvan



The integration process of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill, because of lack of internal dynamic provided by market forces. The potential benefits for CARICOM based on market integration and the Single Market and Economy (CSME) appear to be limited. There are limits on the supply capability of these countries to export to Latin American markets. Trinidad Tobago is the main exporter to Latin America; Guyana has some exports to Brazil a bit, but the rest of CARICOM exports very little to Latin America.

There is an absent of political will to complete the integration project in CARICOM and the social forces do not perceive benefits from the amount of effort that would be required. Neither businesses nor government sees benefits from it.

At the same time, you have new integration schemes being offered to these countries. The Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and the CARIFORUM countries sets up a virtual single market among them in trade, services and investments. There were also institutional arrangements in which interaction with the EU will be as strong as or stronger than interaction within CARICOM on trade matters. Two countries -Guyana and Surinam- are participating in UNASUR; and three others -Antigua, Saint Vincent and Grenadines, and Dominica— are in ALBA, with a fourth, St Lucia, set to join. These schemes bring interaction with larger and financially more powerful countries. The effect of these schemes in the Caribbean Community is that the economic integration aspect is being put to one side.

Part II: Integration and Foreign Policy in the CARICOM countries: challenges and opportunities

LMA: Recently, we have witnessed an increasing involvement of CARICOM members in new regular spaces (UNASUR, ALBA and CELAC). In a context in which CARICOM has traditionally privileged an Anglo-centric vision of its external relations: Which factors would you think would explain this new approach? Do they respond to changes in Latin America and/or changes in the countries of CARICOM?

NG: The Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas required the governments to coordinate their foreign policy through COFCOR and their foreign trade policy through COTED. It is mandatory but it doesn't always take place. There is no machinery with a consistent and coherent foreign policy. The voting pattern in United Nations with respect to Palestine as

Observer State, the recognition of the new government in Libya and the Falkland Islands shows this incoherence. Some abstain, some absent, some vote “for” and others “against”. In general, what you can find is an incoherence and lack of coordination on key issues. In respect to China, the majority of CARICOM members recognize the People’s Republic, but some recognize Taiwan. In the case of ALBA and PetroCaribe there is also no common policy. Again, this situation reflected a lack of coordination and coherence. Underlying this are the differences in economic structures and class interests. Trinidad Tobago’s highly developed industrial sector and highly influential financial sector are pressuring for trade agreements with third countries; while other countries of CARICOM are not as enthusiastic because of the customs revenues that they stand to lose with this agreements.

Generally in CARICOM, we continue reacting to external shocks and events or opportunistic alliances by individual countries; with no coherent or long-term strategy or proactive approach.

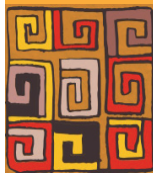
LMA: How would you characterize the participation of CARICOM countries in each of these new spaces (UNASUR, ALBA and CELAC)? And what have influenced this new direction of foreign policy?

NG: I would characterize it as reactive and opportunistic, meaning they are vulnerable and heavily dependent, so they jump opportunities that are provided. That is the main reason for PetroCaribe, ALBA, and the financial cooperation. Some countries in the Caribbean prefer Taiwan, because it offers more credits than China and some have changed because of China offers. This is a consequence of the vulnerability and the absence of any coherent integration.

LMA: How would you assess the interactions of CARICOM with Venezuela and Brazil in this context?

NG: There is a big appreciation for and solidarity with Chávez in the Caribbean. All the leaders know him and sincerely appreciate and recognize that PetroCaribe and ALBA have been tremendous sources of assistance. ALBA for Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia is the construction of a new socialism, but for the Caribbean countries, which are members, they don’t perceive themselves as part of projects of socialist construction. It is not an ideological convergence but a financial and social opportunity. There is a turn to the South in the CARICOM relations to Latin America. We are seeing an emergence of Brazil as a major player in the Caribbean. In the Brazil-CARICOM Summit in 2010, a number of bilateral agreements were signed. The Caribbean regards Brazil as a source of cooperation, trade and investment, particularly in Jamaica, Trinidad Tobago and Barbados.

“The integration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill” Interview to Dr. Norman Girvan



There are thousands of Brazilians working in Suriname and Guyana. Brazil has influence in the constructions related to IIRSA; it is also providing scholarships to the Caribbean countries. The US interest in CARICOM is focused in security. CARICOM is being 'pulled to the South' with growing non-traditional ties.

LMA: In this scenario, the question of whether there are essential and progressive changes in the determination of the foreign policy of CARICOM countries arises. It also re-launches the debate of the need of the so call "*concentric diplomacy*", more adjusted to the Caribbean realities. In this framework, which changes do you identify in the determining of foreign policy of CARICOM countries to Latin America, in the period 2001-2012? Can we talk about new priorities or the emergence of a new diplomacy?

NG: The changes in the foreign policy of CARICOM countries have not been in response to internal political changes or ideological shifts. If you look at Jamaica, governments of both political Parties have maintained the participation in Petrocaribe and CELAC, neither have jointed Venezuela in ALBA, perhaps because of fear of displeasing the US. There is consistency in relation to opposition to the Cuban Embargo, but not an ideological shift. All political Parties, more or less or with nuances, have subscribed forms of neo-liberal model. The differences are really modest and they are consequence of vulnerability and marginalization of the governments in the World Trade Organization, in relation to the exports of sugar, the banana trade, the fall in textiles exports, the NAFTA, the growing Chinese exports and the changes in the US.

There is no new diplomacy. There are meetings between CARICOM and China and Japan and India. My impression is that the meetings are to get a little bit of scholarships, funding, but there is no coherence.

LMA: In the case of CELAC: How would you assess the participation and perspectives of CARICOM countries in this scheme, particularly, given the controversial political positions of CARICOM countries in the case of the Falkland Island and the Assange case?

NG: Again this is the reflection of that incoherence I mentioned. It was very embarrassing. It seems that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines went to an ALBA meeting and supported the case of Argentina in relation to the Falkland Island; and then in a ministerial meeting with the British, Saint Vincent took another position. There are incoherencies at the regional but also at national levels. In a longer term CARICOM will play a very active role in CELAC. There are potentialities for a new set of alliances in the long term.

LMA: In relation to the role of Cuba for CARICOM countries in CELAC: paternalism or genuine bridge?

NG: Cuba was instrumental in having CARICOM as part of the troika in CELAC. It will be a bridge and not paternalistic. Cuba tends to follow an extremely careful position, never trying to impose its views on others; and , always very respectful. The bridge to CARICOM means support, based on the weakness of the institutional structures, the absence of strong coherence and policy coordination. Nevertheless, the role of Cuba as a bridge will be undermined if CARICOM don't act as a single voice. Cuba can support CARICOM for Special Treatment as Small States, but for that to be effective, CARICOM should be acting collective or speaking one voice. If not, Cuba will find difficult to build a bridge between CARICOM and Latin America. There are no illusions of how effective can be, as long as CARICOM institutions don't speak one voice.

“The integration of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is incomplete and has come to a virtual standstill” Interview to Dr. Norman Girvan

