

One Thing Led to Another- My Tribute to Professor Norman Girvan

I was introduced to the work of Professor Norman Girvan in the fall 2005 when I began studies for a Master's degree in Political Science at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York in New York. Before then, I had never taken any classes which specifically dealt with Caribbean political thought or even development for that matter. So, as the lecturer, Dr. Judith Duncker, spoke about Caribbean dependency theory, I felt as if that theory was meant to find me and vice versa. It is strange to speak of a development theory this way, but as I sought to find or better yet, position myself in political theory, I knew that this was my worldview. One's worldview can change, but the work of Professor Girvan struck a deeper cord within me- there was deep conviction for me- and I wrote every word that came out of my lecturer's mouth and read up as much as I could access on Professor Girvan's work. My Master's thesis looked at *Mercado Común del Sur* (MERCOSUR) at a time when Venezuela had become a member of the bloc; and this is how one thing led to another.

After my Master's degree at Brooklyn College and a year of teaching an introductory Political Science class there, I found myself back in Trinidad- not intentionally (but that is another story). I was to start a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. Looking back now, I remember the proposal I wrote as part of the programme's application. I wanted to look at women and development in the Caribbean and of course my theoretical frame was all dependency theory. In 2009, about a year and half into the programme, as time came to truly decide on a thesis research topic, I looked at the political situation in Argentina first. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner had been elected President, but as I looked deeper at the region, Venezuela not just peaked, but stole my interest. A revolution of which the impact to poor women was unquestionable, in addition to a leader in President Hugo Chávez- yes I was meant to look at Venezuela one more time. As we sat in class discussing our topics one day, Professor Jane Parpart, the former Graduate Coordinator of IGDS wondered aloud about Professor Girvan. I remember interrupting her and the class with a loud "What?! Where is he?" "He is right next door," she stated, "in IR" - IR being the Institute for International Relations which is located literally next door to the IGDS. Professor Parpart then stated, "maybe we can see if he can be your supervisor." I smiled broadly but nervously because I was convinced that he was too renowned a man to want to work with me, but I remained hopeful. When Professor Parpart reported to me a few days later that Professor Girvan was considering being my Ph.D. supervisor but wanted to meet me first, I panicked. No way would this work out I said to myself. But this is how one thing led another.

He would always say to me that he was not a "gender scholar." I would always laugh because even though I studied gender, because of his natural ability to create connections based on a solid epistemological foundation, he would often help me to complicate and then further unravel the theoretical gendered underpinnings of my work. This was late 2009/early 2010 and I remember that the institutional support in Venezuela for my first trip there, scheduled for April 2010 fell through. I was working at an IGDS conference and Professor Girvan called me on my mobile to discuss my next steps. The conversation was a very hard one as I declared that I would visit Venezuela anyway with or without institutional support. While he did not agree, he stood by me and when I returned from Venezuela after a preliminary three-week trip, I could tell that our relationship had changed. He knew that I was committed to my research, to my Ph.D. and to working with him; and at this point I knew that I had a strong supporter in my corner.

My respect for him could only grow as I began to see him as a mentor and a father figure. When I fell short in my work, he was never afraid to let me know. When I did well, he did the same. He would tell me how good I did, and I think that in a way he saw me greater than I even see myself. He saw in me

potential and brilliance even as I would sit in his office with a half written chapter and questioning my own ability to do a Ph.D. and furthermore one on President Hugo Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Even though I did not speak Spanish and had to enroll in classes at the Venezuelan Embassy in Trinidad, he still supported me. He was excited about my work. He was excited of the potential, and we would often discuss this and Venezuelan politics during our scheduled meetings, and when we would have lunch at 'Wings,' a casual Indo-Trinidadian restaurant close to the University. We would talk about other things too- life, family, cricket, his many trips and the articles that he had recently completed.

I had dinner with him, his family and three other guests last November. He easily included me in conversation with his family and his guests - all renowned scholars; and after a marvelous dinner prepared by his wife and son, I chatted with his wife, and I truly began to appreciate Professor Girvan in a different way. He was kind and genuine and loved his family. Professor Norman Girvan, whose works I had only read about in 2005, was all the more real to me eight years later. I admired him and I felt appreciative that he would take the time from his 'retirement' to mentor and share his wealth of knowledge with me.

When President Hugo Chávez passed away on March 5, 2013, Professor Girvan called me for a quick chat. He was at the residence of the Venezuelan Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, Her Excellency Ambassador Coromoto Godoy. Earlier, we had all been at an IGDS event in which the Ambassador, introduced by Professor Girvan, gave the key note speech. The event ended close to 5pm and by the time I arrived at the Venezuelan Embassy around 6pm for my bi-weekly Spanish class, word spread that Chávez had passed away. Classes were suspended and I quickly drove home. I was surprised that Professor Girvan would call me. I figured that he would be busy speaking to the media, but as a great teacher he understood that I had dedicated three years to studying Chávez. I think he was one of the few persons who understood how this had and would affect me, and how deep a loss I felt.

Throughout December 2013, Professor Girvan and I went through my thesis page by page. When we could not meet face to face, we would have Skype meetings. Often I would get tired going through my work, my words that I had written and often re-written, but Professor Girvan would never tire and this would push me to get the work done. I could not let him down. I would not let him down. We spoke on December 30th 2013. At the end of the conversation, I realized that I would not speak to him again until the new year, so I took the opportunity to not only wish him a Happy New Year, but to thank him for all his support. I told him that I was very appreciative and while I hoped to finish and submit my thesis early in 2014, I hoped to continue to work with him. I reminded him that I would not have been at the stage where I was, with regard to my Ph.D and my thesis without him. We promised to speak soon in the New Year after his family vacation. The New Year came...

It is hard to put into words the impact that Professor Girvan has had on my life, and not just from an academic or strictly theoretical stand point. He was my teacher. He was my supporter. He was my defender (especially when my research seminars did not go as planned). He was that person who made me feel that my work would make a difference. He was that person that made me realize my own potential. He was that person who has brought me to a 300 page thesis; and now I am ready to submit and I want him to be here- not just for me, but for his wife and children, for the world. I believe Professor Girvan to be one of the greatest intellectual minds of the Caribbean and Latin American regions and I know many will mourn him. I mourn him, but I also feel honoured that he chose me. He chose to work with me when I did not have a clear plan but only a conviction or an unwavering belief in revolution, in Hugo Chávez, in Caribbean political economy, in knowledge and power in the Global South, Caribbean integration and of course in dependency theory (which I argued with him about with regard to me wanting to include it in my thesis). Speaking of himself in his 2007 essay 'One Thing Led to Another,' of which this tribute is based, he stated, "I do not see how thinking and informed people of today can fail to address these issues; or at least can fail to take account of them in the work that they do." Maybe he saw this in

me - that I was attempting to address these issues and would continue to do so. I do not know, but I sure hope so, because this is my plan.

One thing did lead to another and I worked with a man whose works I read, whose theories I critically analysed and who, after all was said and done, became my teacher. He will always be my teacher. There is so much he has written that I am yet to get my hands on. But as long as I write, the work of Professor Girvan will also continue. I will never forget him and while my heart breaks, I hope he knew of the tremendous respect, admiration and love I have for him. So again, one thing led to another and I am proud to say that I AM a student of Professor Norman Girvan.

I will miss you Sir!

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