

# THE NATIONAL PROJECT AND THE ROLE OF THE ENGAGED INTELLECTUAL OF THE SOUTH

**Keynote Speech in honour of Professor Norman Girvan at the IXth Annual Conference of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES), Kingston, Jamaica, 26 March, 2008**

Chairperson,

Professor Nigel Harris, Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies; Professor Gordon Shirley, Pro Vice Chancellor and Principal, Mona Campus; Ms Kerry Ann Lewis, UNICEF, Jamaica and SALISES Alumni; Professor Norman Girvan and Mrs. Girvan; and Friends.

I am singularly honoured to deliver this keynote address in honor of Professor Norman Girvan, to whom this Conference is dedicated. Professor Girvan has played a distinctive role in developing a particular type of scholarship and in nurturing the excellent Caribbean tradition of political economy, which the demand of the moment and this year's SALISES conference calls for "reinventing". Coming from Africa and from the South Centre, I hope I can make a modest contribution to the reawakening and reinvention of this tradition.

I have known Professor Girvan by reputation for over three decades whilst I was teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam, and many members of my Faculty were from the so-called "Dependencia School" to which Norman made a distinct contribution. I may add in parenthesis that I myself belonged, then, not to the Dependencia School but to the more mainstream Nationalist - Marxist tradition, drawing my inspiration from, among others, Lenin and Mao but mainly from Gandhi, Nehru, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nasser, Sukarno and many other inspiring "third world" thinkers and leaders. The writings of the Dependencia School were an added inspiration. More recently, I have known Professor Girvan at close personal level for the last three years. He is a member of the Board of the South Centre, whose Executive Director I became three years ago, with some prodding, I might add, from Professor Girvan and political friends in Africa.

In this lecture I focus on what may not be common knowledge among young intellectuals. However, those who come from an earlier tradition know it as the "***National Project***" – a project that began before countries in the South got their independence from colonial rule, a project that continued for several years after political independence, and then, in the era of globalization, it died a sudden death. It needs to be revived, just as the Caribbean tradition of political economy needs to be reinvented.

The aim of my lecture, then, is to return to the theme of the "National Project" (which, to give emphasis, I put in inverted commas for the purpose of this paper), and to try to get a sense of the role that the engaged intellectual of the South could play in restoring the

“National Project”. In a sense, then, mine is a larger and broader realm of the theme of this Conference, and I hope it blends into it.

I also want to take this opportunity to tell you a little more about the South Centre. Many of you may not know it. It was founded in 1995 at the inspiration largely of the late President Julius Nyerere. *Its mission is to forge unity among countries of the South on a path of collective self-reliance*, and as a basis for equitable negotiations with the North on matters related to such things as trade, development, investments, intellectual property, technology transfers, climate change and global governance – creating, hopefully, a fairer world for all.

### **Is there something called a “South Intellectual”?**

Before I come to the “National Project”, let me address first the issue of what I call the “South Intellectual”. The question is: Is there something called a “South Intellectual”? At the South Centre we have a project called the “South Intellectual Platform” or SIP for short. But is there a genre of scholarship that can be considered “South”, or, to use a terminology that has fallen out of fashion, “third world”? Is there something called a “third world intellectual”? Is it not too artificial a category to describe certain scholars and intellectuals by their geographical domain – some kind of “geographic indicators” they use to name brands of wine and cheese?

We talk about “an Indian scholar”, or “an African intellectual”, or, say, a “Caribbean scholar”. That somehow makes sense. But does it make sense to go beyond the nation and beyond the region? *Is there something distinctive about a “South scholar” or a “South intellectual”?* That is the question. (I should add that I use the word “scholar” and “intellectual” interchangeably for now, but I prefer the term “intellectual”).

Instead of answering this question directly, allow me to make a brief autobiographical sketch. Earlier I mentioned that, some thirty years ago, I came across the work of *Norman Girvan* whilst I was teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam. But Norman was not the only Caribbean scholar in our list of essential authors whose works we urged our students to read and with whom to lock horns.

I knew, in a manner of speaking, *Sir Arthur Lewis* before I knew Norman Girvan. No one who has done work in the area of the economies of the third world countries (I come from Uganda) could have escaped the impact of the works of the legendary Arthur Lewis. As an undergraduate at the London School of Economics from 1958 to 1961 Lewis was still not known to me, but as soon as I came to the Makerere University in Uganda in 1964 it was impossible to miss Lewis. We all owe it to him to think of our “labour surplus” economies in a distinct manner with a distinct methodology of research and questioning.

During the three years before Makerere, from 1962 to 1964, I was doing my Ph.D. The subject I chose as my thesis was the issue of the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Through it I wanted to understand the global system. As my thesis developed, I became conscious of my experience as a child growing up in Karamoja in Uganda. The

Karimojong lived a generally peaceful life as pastoralists, but sometimes there were eruptions of small-scale violence which usually would end quickly. As I was doing my research I had the feeling that in many ways the international society was organized like the Karimojong, i.e. one without a centralized authority, without a state system.

But I did not become fully aware of this, conceptually that is, until I came across the writings of another Caribbean scholar, **M. G. Smith**, especially his brilliant paper “*On Segmentary Lineage Systems*”. Then it dawned on me, conceptually, that the international society, too, like the Karimojong, was segmented, one without a centralized state system. Many writers of International Relations from Western scholarship describe the international society as “Hobbesian” or “Lockian” following the two English “social contract” philosophers. But my observation was that international society was not in a Hobbesian state of “war of all against all”, nor was it a rationally organised Lockian system. It was closer to M.G.Smith’s segmentary or acephalous society rather than Hobbesian or Lockian.

Whilst I was still at Makerere guess who came there and mesmerized us (most of us still very young then) with his eloquent quotes from Marx and Lenin and with his commentaries on cricket. It was, of course, another legendary figure from the Caribbean, **C.L.R. James**. Shortly afterwards, whilst I was still reading “*The House of Biswas*”, **V.S. Naipaul**, was appointed at Makerere as “Creative Writer in Residence”. He was later to write “*A Blend in the River*”, which in fact, for me, became a description of my own life. Like one of his principal characters, Salim, I was victim of what Naipaul brilliantly characterized as “the Big Man”, (in my case, Iddi Amin) whose erratic and whimsical rule (much as anticipated by Naipaul) led to my first exile in 1972.

I spent my first exile at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1973 to 1979. Two figures from the Caribbean dominated our thought on economics and politics. One was the late **Walter Rodney** with his charismatic, revolutionary presence amongst us. Walter was to leave us in 1974 never to return, a martyr to the cause in which he passionately believed. He made a huge impact on us. The other was **Clive Thomas**, who had left Dar just before my arrival, but whose “*Dependency and Transformation: the Economics of Transition to Socialism*” was a mandatory reading for all those who were still groping to seek an answer to the question: “How does a small country like Tanzania move towards socialism?” Tanzania, under its first President, Julius Nyerere, was experimenting with its own brand of socialism, called “Ujaama”. But Thomas’ insights broadened our view to looking at experiments of what we used to call “*Transition to Socialism*”. I believe we had a course, or part of a course, by that name.

I could go on and mention many other Caribbean scholars who contributed to our learning and discourses at the Universities of Makerere, Nairobi, and Dar es Salaam in East Africa. The point of this brief sketch is that there was something in the writings and engagements of these scholars and writers with whom we in East Africa could easily identify. And to my question: “*Is there something called a South or Third World intellectual?*” the answer is yes there is. How else could we in East Africa have resonated so ardently with intellectuals thousands of miles away in the Caribbean? Obviously, there was something in common that pulsed in our hearts.

Of course, the Caribbean scholars were not alone in this kind of engaged discourse with us. I could name many others from Asia, Africa and Latin America (too many to mention them here) whose writings contributed to the lively debates we used to have at the Universities in East Africa. *What was specific about these scholars was that they were trying to define the specificity of the peoples who had just gone through a hundred, in some cases hundreds of years of colonial experience, and they were groping to answer some critical questions of self identity and collective destiny: Who are we as a “nation”? What now? What do we do with the hard won independence, where do we go from here?*

Of course, intellectuals were only a part, a small part, of the “National Project”. There were political leaders of the Third World like Nehru, Nkrumah, Nasser, Sukarno, Manley, Nyerere and many others in the opening political landscape of the newly emerged independent countries of the South. These were the real inspiration behind what we as intellectuals tried to understand and to contribute in some modest ways. We were all excited about, for example, the “Bandung Project”, and the Non-Alignment Movement, and the New International Economic Order. The NIEO, by the way, too needs to be revived and reinvented together with the National Project and the tradition of Political Economy.

## **The National Project**

If there was common mission that linked these political leaders and the early South intelligentsia it would be their common pursuit for the “*national project*”. All those engaged political leaders and intellectuals were trying to answer the questions: How do we contribute to the building of our nations independent of the domination of external forces? How do we build our nations that would answer to the needs of our own peoples instead of, as in the colonial past, to the needs of the colonizing powers?

In his essay on “*Search for Policy Autonomy in the South: Universalism, Social Learning and Role of Regionalism*”, (published by UNRISD in October, 2005), Professor Girvan joins other scholars from the South (but also like-minded scholars from the North) in challenging the claims to universal validity of neoclassical economics and neoliberal policies. Girvan says, significantly, that the objective of “policy autonomy” in the South is “self-determination.” *This, in my view, is the crux of “the National Project” – self determination.*

## **Today’s Challenges for the “National Project”**

I want now to fast wind to the present day. I will not go into the very important question of how the “National Project” got lost during the last twenty or thirty years. This is a very important question for historians, one that still begs proper analysis and discussion. But here I want to move to the question: “*What does the “National Project” mean in terms*

*of the engagements of the South intellectual in our own time?”* What should be his or her passions that would steer or motivate his or her intellectual creativity? I will give only a partial answer to this.

In my view, there are three passions that should motivate engaged scholarship of the South intellectual in this regard. These are:

1. As a critique of the dominant imperialist *ideology*.
2. As a critique of the dominant structures of *power*, or speaking truth to power.
3. As a provider of ideas for a future *vision* of global society

I will first go through the larger question of the relationship between ideas and political practice, and then go on to outlining, briefly, what an alternative vision, or alternative strategy to the dominant neoliberal paradigm might look like. I will then take one aspect of it, which is close to my heart, and that is the question of integration in the regions of the South as a counter to Globalization.

### **Need for a Proper Critique of the Dominant Imperialist Ideology**

This is a very important task for those who are still committed to the “National Project”. I pose this as a challenge to our young scholars, but I am not going to do it myself at this time. No doubt several people who are presenting papers to this Conference, including Norman Girvan, Clive Thomas, Havelock Brewster, Kari Levitt and younger scholars will have much to say on the subject.

I do want to make one point, however. The language of discourse of the dominant imperialist ideology is economics. Economics has an aura of the “scientific”, although we know that its scientific pretensions are based on make-belief (much of it self-motivated) rather than the rigours of what can pass muster as “science”. Furthermore, when economics is bolstered with mathematics and graphics, it acquires an added aura of “authority”, which is often quite spurious.

Let me illustrate with an example. Some months ago I had an opportunity to attend a conference organised by economists from an UN-affiliated research institution in Helsinki. There were several parallel sessions, and I was able to sit in some of them. In one of them a researcher made a seemingly erudite presentation on Zimbabwe. There was much discussion afterwards, but most of it was on methodological issues rather than on substance. At the end of the session, I asked the author, a young man, why he had left out the land issue from his analysis. “How can you discuss Zimbabwe”, I asked him, “and not talk about land?” He could not think of a good reply except to say he was doing comparative analysis of some countries, and land was not in his “model”. So much for economic modeling! These economists can discuss Zimbabwe without talking about land, leave alone the political economy aspect of land. Sadly, many of our young students of economics studying in Western but also in our own universities in the South are

engaged in this what I frankly regard as a *banal pursuit of abstractions* that have very little to do with the realities that we face.

I say this to raise one important question. The language of discourse of the dominant ideology is economics. *The question is: does it then follow that the language of counter-ideology must also be economics?* It is a question I pose to you. For me, I find it most unsatisfactory that what we now have on offer by our own economists is what is called **“heterodox” economic theory** as an answer to what is called the **“orthodox” economic theory** of the mainstream economic and trade theorists. The heterodox economic theory is developed by a group of economists based in the institutions of the South, but also in North. Indeed, the best known among them are people like the Nobel laureate, Joseph Stiglitz and Dani Rodrick, who have given much substance, credence and “authority” to heterodox economics.

What do I find unsatisfactory about the heterodox economics? One is that, like its adversary, the orthodox theories, these are also, still, largely abstractions from the reality of power and politics. I am sure they will deny this. But, after a close study of many of their writings, the conclusion I have reached is that there is absence of substantial political analysis in their writings, or if there is, it is in passing, as an add-on to the basics of their analysis, which is essentially economics or, to use a slightly pejorative term, economicistic. Many of them, for example, talk of “national space” in policy-making for the countries of the South, but it is not the same as the “national project”, which is essentially a political-economy concept.

Some of our heterodox economists give a purely “on the one hand and on the other hand” kind of analysis typical of orthodox economists. All these economists are biologically sound; they all come with two hands. Globalisation, for example, has “bad” things about it, but on the other hand, it also has “good” things, they argue. None of the heterodox economists that I know deal with the issue of imperialism. It is not there in their vocabulary. Check the index of their books. But without an understanding of imperialism, how can you possibly understand the “national question”? I would say that the American intellectual Noam Chomsky has a better understanding, or awareness, of imperialism than our home-grown heterodox economists.

Furthermore, I am not sure what real impact heterodox economics has made on the ground. Heterodox economics has been around for the last at least three decades, indeed ever since neoliberalism became the dominant ideology. And yet, even in the realm of ideas it has not made as much impact as it might have. The reason why orthodox neoclassical economics and neoliberal policies are now in crisis has mainly to do with what is happening on the ground rather than the impact of our heterodox economists. The failure of the Washington Consensus based orthodox policies in alleviating poverty and bringing about development in much of the third world is the main reason for the crisis of orthodox economics and policies. The IMF and the World Bank have simply failed. That is the main reason of their denouement.

I don’t want to be misunderstood in my critique of heterodox economics. I think they have provided a valuable critique of orthodox economics, and this was indeed necessary. In fact, in my own writings, I find that among some audiences quoting Stiglitz or Rodrick gives me a better punch than all my own efforts to rally data and evidence on behalf of

my arguments. They provide “authority” of office or former office (in the case of Stiglitz as former senior economist in the World Bank and now Nobel Laureate) and their academic credibility (as in the case of Dani Rodrick).

My point, rather, is that heterodox economics is good up to a point but it is not good enough. It must move beyond the realm of economics to the realm of “political economy”. In other words, I endorse the theme of this conference, namely, “Reinventing the Political Economy Tradition of the Caribbean”. All I want to add is that this tradition should be globalised beyond the Caribbean.

Let me move to the second task of “National Project” South intellectuals, and that is:

### **Speaking Truth To Power ... and “Reality Check” to Theoreticians**

I shall start this discussion with a quote from none other than the late Michael Manley, whom we in Africa regarded with high esteem, as one of “our” leaders in the Third world. This is what he said in his concluding letter to Kari Levitt in the correspondence between him and her in the late 1990s:

Those who have to face the challenge of action may make mistakes. Meantime, those who reside permanently in the word of ideas, *alone and untested*, do not help anyone when they refuse that reality is more complex than theory. (Kari Levitt, *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and Caribbean Community*, 2005, p. 302)

Let me re-read this passage. There was a note of bitterness in Manley’s letter, which Kari in her next letter regretted that it might lead to a premature closure of their very interesting dialogue.

In general, at least judging by the correspondence reproduced in Kari’s book, I take the view, like Kari, that there were perhaps certain options that Manley might have considered between 1974 and 1977 which, for whatever reason, he did not. In my calendar, it was with the coming to power of Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US in 1979, when the imperialist counter-revolution against the liberation struggle and the “National Project” began. Even then, it was not until mid-1980s that the counter revolutionary economic theory, which later matured into neoliberal policies, really took hold of the IMF and the World Bank ideologists, who then spread it to the rest of the third world. Thatcher in her now infamous statement said that “There is No Alternative” (TINA) to neoliberal globalization. *After mid-1980’s, in other words, very few leaders in the South could really manage to sustain the “National Project”*. Most of even nominally “progressive” leaders in the South succumbed to the force of neoliberalism. But that was after about 1985. Therefore, it remains somewhat of a puzzle to me as to why Manley during his second administration should have abandoned the national project as early as in the 1970s.

This said, I must say that I do sympathise (even empathise) with Manley. Academics can speak truth to politicians, but when do politicians get an opportunity to challenge the academics with “reality check”?

To be autobiographical once more, I have been on both sides of the divide. For most of my life I have been engaged in the realm of ideas, but between 1973 and 1994 (for over twenty years) I was actively engaged in politics, first in the underground guerrilla (but mainly political) struggle against the regime of Iddi Amin in Uganda, and later, after 1979, and for a brief period as a Minister of state in government, and later still during my second and third exiles. (My first exile was in Tanzania, my second in Kenya, and the third in Zimbabwe). In other words, I know a little bit of the other side.

And the point I want to make is that the pressure to make decisions, and the circumstances in which you are forced to make those decisions, do compel you sometimes to throw overboard every principle that you cherish. Or else, and this is the point, you lose political power, as our Party (the Uganda National Liberation Front) did in Uganda. In other words, the difficult choice you have to make is to stay in power and compromise your principles, or get out of power and go back to either academia or underground resistance. Some of us tried both after losing political power in Uganda.

Therefore, I do have empathy with Manley. Ironically, Manley lost power even after he conceded defeat to the imperialist manipulations. I guess the imperialists simply wanted him out, just like they did Allende in 1973!

Let me return to the point Manley was making. It is an important point. We as engaged scholars cannot escape from it. We who research, write, and critique have an obligation, in my view, to speak truth to power, to say how things are and how they should be, from the vantage point of some distance from political power and authority. That vantage point is extremely important; it gives a larger perspective to the drama of daily politics. At the same time, however, a question that we cannot escape is: “what would we have done if we were in power at the time that difficult decisions had to be made in trying to run the state and the economy?” As theoreticians, we speak truth to power; politicians, in return, provide “reality check to theory”. This coin has two sides.

The challenge is how do the political leadership that have the power and the theoreticians that deal with ideas meet and work together *when it matters* – and not, so to speak, after the events? When there is a separation between, as it were, the philosopher and the king, how do we create a synthetic “Philosopher King”?

## **The Organic Intellectual and the Organic Third World Institution**

A partial answer to this question was given by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in his concept of the “*organic intellectual*”. For Gramsci an “organic intellectual” arises in the midst of society, as part of society, and in the midst of struggle for liberation from oppressive and exploiting conditions. An “organic intellectual” is different from say a teacher or a priest who depend on a body of teaching or preaching materials that are passed on. An organic intellectual, by contrast, is always in the midst of struggle; he/she

is always on the move, engaged with current struggles, drawing strength from history and from the society in which he/she is embedded, the society that nurtures him/her.

I will not discourse on this further. I do want, however, to illustrate the point with a contemporary example of how “organic intellectuals” are borne out of daily struggles, and how they might, or could, influence decisions of the moment. I have in mind those like Norman Girvan and Havelock Brewster who have come together to challenge the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the governments of the Caribbean nations have initialed (though not yet signed, and there is important difference between the two) with the European Union. They are speaking truth to power, as it were, *not tomorrow, but today*, not after the event but in the heat of battle. They are calling for public disclosure of all documents and the processes by which the EPAs were negotiated and initialed. The jury is still out, but may be Norman will have something to say on this.

Let me go a step beyond Gramsci. He was talking about the “organic intellectual”. There is, however, another dimension to this, and this is what I call the **“organic institution”** of the South. May be SALISES is, or may become, one such institution. The difference between an individual and an institution is that the latter is held together by a shared view and vision of society among a group of “organic intellectuals”. Also, in relation to the “national project” they, hopefully, share a long term strategy. In other words, ***an “organic institution” is a “collective” with a shared vision***. The similarity between the two – the individual intellectual and the collective institution—is that both are involved in daily struggles, not from the privilege of distance (as academics enjoy), but in the heat of battle.

I cannot speak of SALISES. But I can say something about my experience with the institution of which I am a part, namely, the South Centre. In my view, the South Centre is an “organic institution” of the South. In contrast to it, there are many research and academic institutions in the South that are mainly research oriented. The difference is that research institutions may put their toes in the water from time to time, but they mostly remain on the dry ground, on the sandy beach. By contrast, “organic institutions” have to swim in the middle of the ocean, and they sink or swim with the tide and the currents.

Edward W. Said, in his 1993 Reith lectures on *“Representations of the Intellectual”* speaks somewhat disparagingly about what he calls the “professional” intellectuals, who do their work ...

... for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behaviour – not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and “objective”. (p. 74)

I share Said’s general critique of the “professional intellectual”. Where I differ from him is in my recognition that there is a difference between the professional who works in an indifferent university or a research organization, and one who works in an “organic institution”. An “organic institution”, like Gramsci’s “organic intellectual”, swims or sinks in the sea of daily struggles fighting for a just cause, or for a mission (defined in this essay as “the national project”). In an ordinary research institution, a “professional intellectual”, on the other hand, does his or her piece of research and moves on to where

he/she gets a better professional recognition or promotion. The South Centre, at least from my hands-on experience with it in the last three years, is what I call an “organic institution” of the South. Its staff are not just “professional intellectuals” in the sense that Edward Said talks of them. Not for the South Centre the leisure of immersing its toes once in a while in the sea, keeping mostly dry otherwise. The South Centre swims or sinks with the rest of the South.

Allow me to go a little deeper on the subject of “speaking truth to power”. The question is “Whose truth?”

### **Speaking truth to Power ... whose “truth”?**

Truth, of course, is complex and has many dimensions. I have no intention of getting into a philosophical discussion on “truth”. The kind of “truth” that we at the South Centre deal with on a daily basis is what I call “*diplomatic truth*”, or truth as negotiated between asymmetrically positioned power relationships, in our case, between the “North” and the “South”.

A caveat is necessary before I proceed further. The “North” and the “South” are neither homogeneous nor monolithic units. The South is as divided as the North. Furthermore, there are those in the North, especially segments of civil society, who share the concerns and values of the South on a solidarity basis. And yet, there is a certain reality about this divide. The purpose behind recognising this reality is not to perpetuate it but to do away with it, to dissolve it. It can be dissolved, however, only when the historical reality of the “colonizer” and the “colonized” finally ends. Unfortunately, that still is not the case.

Let me give some examples of the “diplomatic truth” as negotiated between asymmetrical power holders. Take the debate about Globalisation, for example. In the diplomatic discourse it is not what you or I might think of it, or define it, that matters. It is defined in the course of negotiations between contending political forces in a particular context. The “South” might argue, for example, that they have not seen much benefits of Globalisation, and Africans might say that all they have seen of it are its negative consequences. And they would present it as a “*challenge*”. The “North” might argue, on the other hand, that much of the benefits of Globalisation has not permeated Africa because of internal governance problems in Africa, corruption of its leaders, and failure to create conditions for investments to flow. Globalisation, they would argue, has not really been “given a chance”; hence while recognising that it might be a “challenge”, it is also an “*opportunity*”. The negotiated or diplomatic “truth” about Globalisation is thus a compromise between the views of the North and the South that presents it as “*both an opportunity and a challenge*”. This compromise camouflages huge differences on ideological and policy issues that obscure the “reality” on the ground. It is an “*interim truth*” until the reality on the ground, or power balances, change. In the meantime, as an intergovernmental organization the UN and also the South Centre have to work with this “diplomatic truth” about Globalisation.

Let us take one more example, that of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UN framework provided a multilateral setting, which is good. On the other hand, multilateralism comes with the price that any text within UN framework has to be negotiated. Here power, resources, and access to knowledge are significant factors that influence the outcome of negotiations. The MDGs were a negotiated compromise text; not exactly what the G77 wanted. However, it has now become part of the “diplomatic reality”, and no government in the world can officially critique it. They have signed on the dotted line. It is the promise of hope over despair, and nobody in the diplomatic world dare be cynical about it.

And yet contrary to the rosy reports of the department in the UN that monitors MDGs, the reality on the ground as reported by more objective observers is that these targets are not being met. For example, according to the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) published by *Social Watch* on 7th June 2007 ([www.socialwatch.org](http://www.socialwatch.org)), at the current rate of progress universal access to a minimum set of social services will only be achieved in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2108. This means a delay of almost a century. Furthermore, according to a recent report by the UNICEF, of the 62 countries making no progress or insufficient progress towards the MDG on child survival, nearly 75% are in Africa. In Southern Africa, infant and under-five mortality have increased, as AIDS reduces life expectancy and increases mortality from infections, tuberculosis, malaria and under-nutrition.

### **Speaking “Existential Truth” to “Diplomatic Truth” and the Role of the South Centre**

So as it turns out, it is not simply a question of “speaking truth to power” as we earlier discussed, for the question is “whose truth?”

As organic intellectuals and as organic institutions (like the South Centre) we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to speak truth, as we know and experience it to the “diplomatic truth” that is negotiated by our governments in the forced circumstances in which they find themselves. In the South Centre, for example, we have often taken positions against those that some of our governments in the South have been compelled to take because of the pressures put on them by powerful forces in the North.

The trade negotiations going on in the World Trade Organization (WTO) are a case in point. Ever since the WTO was formed, the countries of the South, especially, the smaller and vulnerable countries, have been subjected to enormous pressures (in the form of both incentives and sanctions or threat of sanctions) to conform to agreements entered into, previously and largely in a conspiratorial manner, by the bigger trading powers and trading blocks such as the USA and the European Union. These powerful blocks divide and rule the South. To the poorer countries of the South they offer “technical assistance” and incentives such as “quota free and duty free” access to their markets. Once these smaller countries, some of them known as the LDCs or the Least Developed Countries, are taken out of the loop of negotiations with promises of technical and financial assistance and privileged access to their markets, the Northern power blocks then face the bigger countries of the South in “hard bargaining” with the technical details of trade

negotiations, when they talk in terms of numbers and coefficients. Once the big powers, including the larger trading nations of the South, have agreed to a compromise deal in which they have taken care of one another's interests, the jointly agreed formula is then imposed on the rest of the smaller countries of the world. These smaller countries who were temporarily taken out of the loop of the negotiations process, are then brought back to face the hard reality of the mercantilist ethos of the WTO. They are then forced to surrender their illusory and temporary "concessions" that they were earlier given on the basis of "preferential" treatment, and forced to accept "full reciprocity" as, so to speak, "equal" partners in the negotiations. This is the "existential truth" of the global trade negotiations.

This doctrine of "equal" partners in the negotiations has come home to roost in the so-called bilateral and regional "Free Trade Agreements" (FTAs) of the countries of the North and the South. Here there are no more defenses provided by "the collective South" that gives some degree of protection to the weaker member countries of the South in the WTO. Here, in the bilaterals and the regionals, the strong exact from the weak what the weak must surrender out of their weakness. Here, the North is able to get out of the South what is called "WTO Plus" concessions, including the so-called four "Singapore issues", namely, Investment, Competition Policy, Government Procurement, and Trade Facilitation, the first three of which have been rejected by the South within the WTO context. The current negotiations between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries are a part of this pattern of emerging mercantilist trade negotiations.

If I had the time I would have given you other examples of the struggles of the countries of the South in the present globalizing world, and the role that the South Centre is playing.

- I would have talked, for example, about the importance of the struggle for access to knowledge and innovation; the importance for the South to work on its own "indicators" of innovation; the protection of indigenous knowledge; the need for sufficient flexibilities in the TRIPS agreement to enable countries in the South to engage in parallel imports and compulsory licensing in order to provide affordable drugs to poor people; a proper Work Plan on minimum and mandatory "limitations and exceptions" to copyright laws that would permit diffusion of knowledge as a global public good; and many other developmental issues that, after a long and hard struggle in the WIPO, the South has been able to finally to win in September 2007 as part of WIPO's agenda.
- I would have wanted to tell you about the importance of resurrecting the original mandate and vitality of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) that is going to be severely tested at the XI<sup>th</sup> session of UNCTAD in Accra, Ghana, in April 2008, a struggle in which the South Centre has made some important contributions.
- I would have wanted to tell you about the struggle the South is currently waging on what is known as "the aid effectiveness" project of the OECD that is going to be the subject of negotiations in September 2008, also in Accra. The OECD has

succeeded in getting several countries of the South to sign on to what is called the “Paris Declaration”. However, I believe that this is one of those “diplomatic truths” which we in the South must challenge on the basis of our existential reality on the ground. And what is this reality? It is that many of our countries have become so dependent on “aid” that it is impossible to talk about “self-reliance” or the “national project” unless effective “exit strategies” from aid are offered to our countries. I would have liked to talk to you about the work that the South Centre is doing in this regard.

- I would have wanted to tell you about the current debate on the issue of “Finance for Development” and the so-called Monterrey Consensus, that is going to be the subject of further negotiations in Doha towards the end of this year. This issue has acquired an entirely new dimension since the collapse of the financial system of the North following the subprime mortgage crisis; the virtual collapse of the IMF and the world Bank both in their credibility and in their operational functionality; and the massive bail out in billions of dollars of the banking system of the North out of the so-called “sovereign wealth” from the countries of the South.

I would have wanted to tell you about the role that the South Centre is playing in all these matters, but perhaps you can log on to our website [www.southcentre.org](http://www.southcentre.org) to get more information.

If I have given you the impression that the South Centre is the only organization that is involved in this struggle that would be wrong. It is the only *intergovernmental* organization of the South with a reasonable staff and resources that is in the front line of this struggle. But there are others, especially within the civil society and in the NGO community from both the North as well as the South with which the South Centre works in collaboration and solidarity.

For example, in the case of the EPAs negotiations between the EU and the ACP countries the “diplomatic truth” put out by the European Commission and some of the governments in Africa and the Caribbean confounds all logic and all evidence on the ground. I am sure Norman will talk about it. Allow me, however, to make one point in this regard.

The European Commission argues that the EPAs are “good” for the ACP countries. Louis Michel, the EC Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, has argued in a recent publication released by the Commission, that the EPAs are a good “development model” based on “shared values” of the European nations and the ACP countries.

However, this is not what most objective observers say about the EPAs. Our analysis in the South Centre shows that the agreements in their present form will further deindustrialize African countries, and may even threaten their food security, and in general their policy options for indigenous development. We have documented how the European Commission has systematically practiced a policy of divide and rule in Africa. This is especially the case in Eastern and Southern Africa, where the older indigenous efforts at regional integration within the context of SADC, COMESA and the East African Community are now in shreds.

Fortunately, there is now growing resistance from some African governments to this old type divide and rule colonial policy of Europe. The President of Senegal, for example, came out publicly during the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon early this year to denounce the EPA negotiations as a forced diktat of Europe. This is close to what President Bharat Jagdeo of Guyana also said in relation to the Cariforum-EC EPA. He also said that it was a forced agreement. “I resent that characterization that we won from these negotiations, we didn’t win anything,” he is reported to have said. The two Presidents, one from Africa and one from the Caribbean, spoke what I call the “existential truth” about EPAs that is camouflaged by the “diplomatic truth” presented by the European Commission and some of our leaders.

The civil society social movements in Africa are very active in this area. On 23 March, 2008, for example, 50 of them called for a stop to the EPAs saying that these will destroy the economies of the African countries; that the EPAs will lead to a substantial loss in the government revenues accrued through tariffs, as well as a loss of jobs and policy space. They demanded that the “interim” agreements that have been entered into must be nullified.

In the Caribbean context, Norman Girvan has argued that the Cariforum-EC EPA negotiations have been subject to lesser disclosure, debate and parliamentary oversight than legal and constitutional changes of lesser importance, and that the agreements must be subject to full public disclosure and debate, and possible review.

This, in my view, is the most challenging issue of our time that those engaged in the “National Project” must address, one in which all the social and political forces from Jamaica to Cape Town and Vanuatu must join forces. They must invite bigger countries in the South like China, India and Brazil in solidarity to fight against this European aggressive effort to recolonise a significant and vulnerable part of the Third World.

Let me now come to the third task of the “National Project” South intellectual – that of offering alternative visions of a future society. It is not enough to make a critique of the present system without offering an alternative vision of where one would want to go.

## **What are the Alternatives to Neoliberal Globalization?**

I give below elements of an alternative vision that I have taken from an initiative of some activist trade union leaders in Southern Africa. I was involved in the conceptual stages of a process that is fast turning into some kind of a movement among workers and intellectuals in the Southern African context. It is called the ANSA project – or Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Southern Africa. I can do no better than summarizing the main elements of this alternative vision of ANSA in the hope that some of the people attending this Conference might take an interest in pursuing the subject further with the leaders of the movement in Southern Africa. ([www.ansa.org](http://www.ansa.org))

So here are the ten elements of the ANSA strategy.

1. At political and social level, a *people-led* (as opposed to the IMF-WB-WTO-donor-led) strategy.
2. *Grassroots-led regional integration* (as opposed to the current fragmentation of the region by the Empire).
3. At the economic level, an *alternative production system*, one that is based on domestic demand and human needs, and the use of local resources and domestic savings (as opposed to the present export-oriented strategy, based on foreign investments). This should lead to the *horizontal* integration of agriculture and industry (as opposed to the inherited vertical integration of each sector separately with the economies of the Empire), and an *increasing* (rather than as at present diminishing) returns to *social* labour.
4. A *phased withdrawal from globalisation* (as opposed to further deepening of integration within the existing iniquitous global system), and preparing for *leveraged negotiated relinking* in a *restructured* and *transformed* global production and distribution system.
5. An *alternative policy on Science and Technology* based on harnessing the collective knowledge and wisdom of the people (as opposed to the present blind emulation of techno-science of the Empire that is rooted in commodification of nature, human labour and social structures for profit).
6. A strategy of *alliance and networking with national, regional and global progressive forces* (as opposed to the present system of co-optation of social forces in the capital-led globalisation process).
7. A strategy with a *politically governed redistribution of the wealth and opportunities* from the so-called formal sector in society to the informal sectors (as opposed to the present system of misallocation of resources, and the integration of the informal sectors through their providing cheap inputs and a reservoir of semi-employed labour).
8. A strategy where *women's rights are in focus as the basis for a healthy and productive society* (as opposed to the present system based on the exploitation of women's labour, only followed by minor reparation activities to hide the hideous effects of capital led globalization on the women).
9. A Strategy where *education is linked with production*, and with improving the technical and managerial as well as research and development skills of workers and those directly in control of matters of production and governance (as opposed to education for a bureaucratic and technocratic elite).
10. A strategy where *peoples' mobilisation and visible demonstrations*, and open hearings, in support of the evolving ethical and developmental state, are seen as embodying the democratic strength of the society – creating a dynamic, participatory and radical democracy (as opposed to the present system, where mobilisation is seen as a threat to the existing system, and where the representative democracy can sign away the future rights of people).

It is part of the objective, and process, of ANSA-Strategy to broaden the ownership of the project, and turn it into nothing short of a mass movement, a renewed liberation struggle, over a period of sustained education, consultation, debate and action. It is fully compatible and an extension of the “National Project”.

I want to move now to one of the major challenges that the “National Project” and the ANSA Project face in our own times, and that is the question of how we in the South must seek to integrate our own countries in the face of continuous fragmentation and Balkanization by the forces of Globalization.

### **The Case for Integrative Regionalism in the South**

Different meanings are attached to the word regionalism, so it is important to understand in what sense we use the term here.

I have, as a result of my work in mainly Africa, identified four main types of regional integration. I set this out in the following table.

	Symmetrical Relations	Power	Asymmetrical Relations	Power
Ad hoc	Distributive		Enforced	
Teleological	Integrative		Structured	

The first type of regionalism is what I call *distributive regionalism* between countries that are roughly equal in economic and political strength. Here the gains and losses are closely tabulated and calculated, and no state surrenders anything unless it gets something in return of equal value. The states continue to pursue their individual interests. There is no overriding common interest except those that are negotiated on the basis of the relative strength and interests of the negotiating partners. Most so-called Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) both in the South and between the countries of the South and the North are this kind of “regionalism”. A plethora of these have proliferated in recent years in what is often described as “spaghetti bowl” regionalism that is indeed disruptive of the multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO). In many instances, these FTAs between the North and the South are worse than anything that obtains in the WTO.

When this kind of distributive regionalism takes place between roughly equal partners that share borders (geographically contiguous countries), and when these relations stabilise over a long period of time, this type of “distributive” integration can lead to the second type, namely, *integrative regionalism*. Integrative regionalism is where the integrating partners (states in the region) are perceived to have compatible interests. No conflict is perceived, or if there are conflicts then these are “sublimated” by the higher consideration of the “common good” that comes out of integrating into a single economic or political unit. The European Union is today the best example of “integrative regionalism”.

A third type of regionalism is what I call *enforced regionalism* where one country is subjected to the dictate of another largely because of asymmetrical power relationship. Theoretically, there is the possibility of the weaker partner to walk out of the arrangement. Practically, this may be impossible because of a “locked-in” situation

where walking out may be even more costly than a bad bargain. Enforced regionalism is power-based.

The African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) is an example of this – in this case, enforced by the US. It is a unilateral, fast-track, offer by the United States to open its market to African products provided the qualifying countries undertake to meet certain U.S. economic, political and military conditions (among them the following: market access to US is open only to those countries that secure a “certificate of eligibility” from the US; conform to the WTO and Structural Adjustment Programmes; bring domestic legislation to conform to the WTO; eliminate barriers to all US trade and investments; and ensure strict private property legislation and enforcement. Furthermore, they must not engage in any act that undermines US national security and foreign policy interests). The offer is in obvious competition with the EU, and has yielded immediate economic results for a few African countries. However, the US can unilaterally withdraw the offer any time, and there is nothing an African country can do about it.

Finally, the fourth type of regionalism is *structured regionalism* where the outcome is determined not by negotiations but by historically created conditions or institutions in which asymmetry is built into, embedded in, the very nature of that relationship. It is a structured relationship. Thus, for example, in the decades when the Europeans colonised Africa it was an enforced “partnership” that was yet to be structured. Once the institutions of industry, trade and governance were put in place, the relationship became *institutionally structured*. The structured relationship may include not only institutions but also social groups (that emerge in the process of production and trade), ideological modes of thought, and even a certain kind of psychology (a subservient mindset), that the imperial power creates within the colonized society.

The ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, signed in Cotonou in June 2000, is an example of structured regionalism. It is essentially the continuation of the historical relationship between the ACP countries and Europe. Nothing has fundamentally changed about this relationship.

In the EPAs the ACP countries continue by and large to perform the historical role as the producers of raw materials for European industries, as well as provide markets for European goods and investments. Indeed, with the inclusion of “comprehensive and integrated approach for a strengthened partnership based on political dialogue, development co-operation and economic and trade relations” in the Cotonou Agreement, the structured relationship has, if anything, deepened and intensified even further. These are backed by sanctions that only Europe can impose on the ACP countries (the reverse case of ACP imposing sanctions on Europe is out of the question).

Ironically, whilst the European Union is itself moving towards integrative regionalism, it is disrupting regional integration in the ACP countries.

What I wish to argue is that the first two types of integration (distributive and integrative) are quite compatible with the “National Project”. It is integration among countries of the South, and aimed at either working out some kind of distribution of gains made out of regional integration, or, more ambitiously aimed at the long term full economic and political integration.

It is hardly necessary to make the case for *integrative regionalism*. It has been made over and over by politicians, economists, activists, cross border traders, and indeed the general population of the countries in every region in the South. There is hardly anybody who would not recognise the case for integrative regionalism. However, the one argument above all else that must be reiterated here is the political one. The economic case based on market size and the benefits of large scale production is obvious enough. The political argument is that only through integrative regionalism can the populations of the region acquire a negotiating clout in the global production and trading system.

The biggest hurdle to integrative regionalism in the South that is compatible with the “National Project” is the forced or structured regionalism that is imposed on the countries of the South pushed from above by the dominant economic and power blocs, namely, the United States and the European Union. The reality is that their kind of imperially designed “regionalism” results in the disintegration and disruption of all efforts that southern countries have been making to move towards genuine integrative regionalism.

### **By Way of Conclusion**

A man or woman who has no passion has no heart; one who has no power of reasoning has no mind. It is the combination of the heart and the mind that produces the balanced person who uses his or her mind to pursue his/her passion. In commemorating this 9<sup>th</sup> Conference in the political tradition of the Caribbean, SALISES looked for a living somebody who has put his mind where his passions are, and his passions where the struggles are for the peoples of not only the Caribbean but also those of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the rest of the progressive world in the North for their liberation and independence from forces of exploitation and oppression. In this search, SALISES has nominated a person that fits this description well.

As the present and transitional (and transient) Executive Director of the South Centre, I want to leave a parting word for Norman. I speak the following with some trepidation, since Norman is one of my bosses. But Norman is also a close friend. So I say the following as a friend.

Norman, as an organic intellectual, and as member of an organic institution, you must continue with your struggle against the EPAs and against the divide and rule strategies of the imperial powers against our countries and peoples. You must swim the ocean along with the rest of us. You will no doubt be thrown out of the ocean by the powerful counter currents, but go back into it. Do not retreat into the dry beach; do not retreat into the academic world of “heterodox economics” in order to write “peer reviewed” erudite papers for reputed conferences and journals of the North. Go back into the sea, if necessary, as it would be, again and again and again. Fight against the currents. Only dead fish float back to the beaches. Live ones struggle against the currents and get back into the ocean. Norman, pardon the expression, but you are a live fish!

Let us hope that SALISES will reinvent the Political Economy tradition of the Caribbean that you, with other colleagues, have nurtured for so long. I hope and request that in the

process you will also revitalize the “National Project”. Let us speak truth to power, but let us also speak the truth of the existential world of our people to the “negotiated truth” of the diplomatic world to which many of our governments in the South have surrendered the mandate and trust of their peoples.

Let us hope that our collective efforts will lead to a new vision of a better world, one that is fair, just, peaceful and bountiful to all peoples of the world. It is going to be a long and difficult swim.

I wish you well.

Thank you, Chairman, and thank you all for your indulgence.

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I have not listed publications of the South Centre that I have consulted in writing this paper. These may be accessed from [www.southcentre.org](http://www.southcentre.org)

Yash Tandon  
Executive Director, South Centre  
26 March 2008