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The CISAN, a Ray of Hope In Today's World

To speak of the Center for Research on North America (CISAN) is to speak of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). And this inevitably guides my look at the past and the present, and, of course, also makes me imagine the future.

A few yesterdays ago, or, to be more precise, in the mid-1980s, the sound of a motorcycle made me run repeatedly up the stairs to that little box, magnanimous in its ability to receive, hold, and release stories from different parts of the world. That call, usually in the morning, that gave me goosebumps, stopped worrying me one day (probably in summer) because fortunately, the little envelope that the mailman left notified me of my admission to high school at the UNAM.

The Sciences and Humanities High School, southern campus (CCH Sur), where I was assigned, was in many ways a very good option. Among other things, it allowed me to exchange knowledge and perspectives with fellow stu-

dents and teachers—horizontally, and sometimes, in a more orthodox way—and use the sports facilities, which would benefit my physical, psychological, and emotional health. It also let me visit the University Cultural Center more often, where what I experienced and dreamed of in its different venues has influenced not only what I produce through light or letters, but also my day-to-day actions, and also strengthened my desires to deconstruct the patterns that do not help to create other possible ways of living, patterns that repress the imagination in order to reproduce conventions bursting with special interests.

This profound quest to construct friendlier, more inclusive, and just spaces for everyone, women and men, who live on this planet has intensified over time. And my alma mater has been there to lead me in solidarity to places that have allowed me to interact with those who persevere in the fight for the abolition of all forms of violence, building and imagining just societies. So, I had the good fortune to be admitted to the School of Political

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and Social Sciences, and, years later, to the National School of Social Work, where I received my master's. I then continued with my doctorate from the Institute of Anthropological Research and a post-doctoral stay at the International Migration Research Centre at the Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada.

In that last year, after having moved around constantly, with everything that that implies, from rural to urban communities both in Mexico and Canada, I was looking for a place to continue my endeavor. Once again, I had the good fortune to focus on a space designated almost 15 years ago as a World Heritage Treasure, traditionally known by young and old, Mexicans and foreigners, as University City. There, at its center, standing out because of its monumental functionalist architecture, stands the Humanities Tower II, previously the Sciences Tower, currently home to the CISAN.

History of and in the CISAN

On November 10, 1988, the University Program for Research on the United States of America was founded, although months later, the University Council transformed it into the Center for Research on the United States of America (CISEUA). On May 19, 1993, given the need to analyze and explain the geopolitical, social, and cultural transformations occurring in North America, it was decided that Canada should be included as an object of study, thus giving rise to its new and current name.

It seems like the force and intent of José Chávez Morado and Rosendo Soto's murals in the Alfonso Caso Auditorium, just a few feet away from the center, inspire in those of us working here to share the fire that passes through the glass mosaics of one of them and illuminates us to stride ahead to gain knowledge about North America, including our country. That fire helps us understand what goes on in the areas of the CISAN's areas of inquiry: Migration and Borders; Identity and Cultural Processes; Social Actors, Structures, and Processes; Economic Processes, Integration, and Development; Ideas and Political Institutions; and Security and Governability.

And only a few months after having joined the CISAN, my expectations are very high. I should mention here that I have collaborated and participated in the CISAN as a volunteer for several years now. I remember as though it were

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yesterday the outstanding organization of the 2015 Metropolis International Conference, where I had the opportunity to coordinate a working group, The International Division of Labor and Precariousness of "Temporary" Workers: The Case of Mexico-Canada. One of the guests, Javier Vargas, the former principal dancer of the National Dance Company and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, performed an exciting choreography about the life of migrant agricultural laborers. The fact that the center was open to this initiative and lent it support so it could happen showed me that it was a space open to multidisciplinary, unconventional proposals; this motivated my imagination to continue participating.

Years later, continuing my work on Mexico-Canada migration, my colleague Andrea Meza and I proposed a book, *¡Tú, migrante! La construcción de las representaciones de la migración en el contexto de América del Norte y Centroamérica* (You, Migrant! The Construction of Representations of Migration in North and Central America). Researchers from different Mexican and Canadian universities, as well as a curator of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, contributed to it.

In this communion of ideals, convinced that circumstances must change for groups that have been made vulnerable for generations, both in Mexico and elsewhere, I decided to support the director, Graciela Martínez-Zalce, in preparing *Cruzando la frontera. Narrativas de la migración: el cine* (Crossing the Border. Migration Narratives: Cinema). This book came out in 2019. On the back cover, CISAN academic María Cristina Hernández underlines that it is a "polyphonic work in which the voices with different formative origins offer critical thoughts about an ancient human fact, migration, and, based on that transcendental decision, everything that comes with it and defines it."

Continuing this passionate work, I accepted being a collaborator in a pertinent, inspiring project: gathering information linked to the prevention, health, rights, and security of migrants, to be disseminated in three popular fanzines: *Return*, *Destination*, and *Transit*. This task was very enriching, among other reasons, because of the collaboration of the migrants from Casa Tochan, who contributed their critical empirical perspective.

The year 2020 will see the debut of my third documentary, *Migranta con M de Mamá* (Female Migrant with an “M” for “Mom”); the theater-dance project *La herencia. Cosecha de migrantes y maleta de sueños* (Inheritance. Harvest of Migrants and Suitcase of Dreams); and the conclusion and, I hope, swift publication of some articles about the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), viewed from the standpoint of the anthropology of the state. This material deals with the sexual rights of men and women Mexican migrants in the context of the program’s labor dynamics, maternity at a distance among migrants, the narratives of fiction and reality, deportation of Mexican migrants and its emotional impact, the challenges of the migrant’s joining the workforce in Mexico, and alternative proposals for the agenda of people of sexual and affective diversity in Mexico City. With all of that, I will bring to a close 15 years of work with and for the community of migrants who go to Canada to sustain that country’s agricultural industry and seeking better life options. Very often, however, they cannot achieve this, since the structures of exclusion, violence, inequality, and inequity do not yield despite the enormous efforts of the women and men involved.

I will conclude this stage in academic terms, but the human connections will remain, I hope, until my last breath, since they are part of my selfness and my relationship to and understanding of the world.

The year 2020 adds something different to this impassioned creative work that needs to be shared in order to spark reactions that benefit the “others” and, therefore, “us,” by having become a full-time researcher at CISAN.

This beginning involves the challenge of exploring apparently unknown terrain. Let me explain: at first, I thought that I would be moving into surroundings that were alien to me, but I have gradually discovered that that is not the case. Companies can be studied not only from the economic perspective or according to the logic of businessmen. They can also—and must also—be studied from the perspective of the human and social dimension, con-

sidering the vision of each of their members, that is, that of each interest group.

For a little over a decade I worked on matters linked directly to men and women agricultural laborers who year after year migrate “seasonally” to Canada without their families, in the framework of SAWP. But always present in the debate and the research were the *farmas* and *farmeros* (that is, the companies and business owners).

Now, in the new line of research I will be delving into in the coming years, my relationship with the topic will expand since I will try to link up to every one of the actors involved in the companies commercializing cannabis or marihuana both in Canada and the United States. I will approach all of them as “social universes that have distinctive ways of life, norms, and values,” and the companies as “builders of hegemony in the framework of specific production regimes”¹ and that energize the field of society they are part of.²

In our time, companies have increasing involvement and impact on the lives of human beings, since, according to Alejandro Saldaña, in these spaces the destiny of millions and of the environment, which therefore includes the life of the planet, comes into play.³ This means that it is essential to analyze profoundly from the point of view of daily life and the sphere of the men and women actors who make up the interest groups in the marihuana industry, whether these companies act with social responsibility as a philosophy or they simply do it because it’s “fashionable,” “to clean up their image,” or as a mere publicity strategy that disguises their neoliberal ideals with the sole intention of being more competitive in the market through, among other measures, influencing the creation of public policies.

Discovering these perspectives will make it possible to observe innumerable nuances that will nurture understanding. Concepts like legality, illegality, security, stigma, criminalization, precariousness, profitability, competitiveness, market, justice, rights, responsibility, education, recreation, and public health, among many others, will most certainly make visible problems that urgently need to be brought out into the light and explained to the different levels of government so that they can design less contradictory public policies more in line with everyone’s needs.

The research that I am beginning now will make it possible in the medium term to contribute elements needed to design a theoretical-methodological assessment

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proposal in line with the discourse of social responsibility and with the practice of the marihuana industry companies themselves.

I'm certain that marihuana, conceived as a social fact, is one of the most complex and interesting. Dealing with it from the social sciences and the humanities opens up a vast range of topics that urgently require analysis. This is because in recent decades, discussions on the matter have brought into play sectors of the population that, in one way or another, continue to be impacted by the fate of this industry. For that reason, I think it is essential to research the contradictions that arise both in Canadian and U.S. marihuana processing, since both countries are certain to very shortly become world leaders in the sector.

In this sense, Mexico occupies a key position in the region economically, politically, socially, and culturally. This means that if we do not create work strategies to understand the facets of this market in terms of global and local structures which, in turn, allow us to design public policies that benefit not only the large multinationals, but fundamentally the working class and the members of the communities where these companies operate, we will certainly repeat the mistakes and abuses committed in other industries, like mining, energy, construction, tourism, and agribusiness, among many others.

It would be discouraging to wait until H2A visas and the "exemplary" SAWP program turned Mexico into the main supplier of men and women to go to the United States or Canada to plant, cultivate, and pack marihuana. That is, they would be sustaining an industry not their own in the same precarious conditions that they have been doing for decades. It also would be unacceptable that in the medium or long term our country had to import marihuana for therapeutic or recreational or any other use.

I agree with Alejandro Saldaña that we academics must take a critical stance regarding social corporate responsibility and its impact on public policies. We must base our work on innovative theoretical epistemological approaches and methodologies that capture the different ways of looking at things that they imply. In this sense, I consider it fundamental to generate analyses that make visible the problems surrounding these issues from the perspective of workers, their families, consumers, and the communities where these companies operate, in ad-

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dition to that of shareholders and managers. We must not just take into account the points of view of corporations and multinationals, but work together with small and medium-sized companies. Research projects into this continue to be very few and far between.⁴

From our sphere of work, it is essential to be ethically committed to critical, pro-active research projects that can spark transformations that foster the construction of just societies, respectful of all the men and women in them regardless of their particularities. And what better place to do that than the CISAN, a space I am familiar with and that has embraced me for years? I profoundly respect everyone there for their commitment to their work. We must not forget that what we are trying to do is to build a better world for all, regardless of our nationality, economic level, sexual orientation, ethnic identity, or other particularities that make us each unique. Amidst our differences, we coincide in the need to belong to groups that allow us to develop skills and knowledge that we can only achieve together.

I hope that in this new stage of work and together with the CISAN I will be able to contribute more to the construction of a less unjust, more inhabitable world for all. Work in universities is fundamental for this task, and I hope that the UNAM will continue to encourage this enormous endeavor more and more intensely. **MM**

Notes

- 1 María Julia Soul, "La antropología del trabajo contemporánea: Una revisión histórica de la constitución de su campo disciplinar," *Revista de la Escuela de Antropología* vol. 30 (November 2015), pp. 3-5.
- 2 Patricia Torres Mejía, "Nuevo capital transnacional en México. El caso de Polaroid," *Nueva Antropología* vol. 11, no. 40 (1991).
- 3 Alejandro Saldaña Rosas, "Las empresas socialmente responsables en México: Auge, paradojas y perspectivas," *Ciencia Administrativa* vol. 2 (2009), p. 6.
- 4 Gonzalo Maldonado Guzmán, Gabriela Citlalli López Torres, and José Felipe Ojeda Hidalgo, "¿Es posible hablar de Responsabilidad Social Empresarial en las Pymes?: Una reflexión sobre adopción," in Martha Beatriz Santa Ana Escobar and Esther Morales Franco, comps., *Organizaciones y responsabilidad social. Narrativa y crítica* (Colima: Hess/Universidad de Colima, 2015).