



Paola Suárez

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Paola Virginia Suárez Ávila*

Young CISAN Researchers, Cyberculture, And Digital Education

Globalization sparked the beginning of a new history for the North American region, under a strategic vision in the areas of social and cultural life and development of technologies for transfer of knowledge in higher education. Starting in the 1990s, with the creation of economic regions like North America and the European Union, integration projects were promoted in all areas of human life globally. Since then, Mexico, allied with the United States and Canada, has been part of one of those regional economic blocs, which can be viewed from the perspective of various regional inte-

gration phenomena under the aegis of the logic of economic liberalism.¹

Those of us who were born and raised in the first years of neoliberalism's rise, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were soon drawn in our university studies to trying to understand regions and their alignments in the globalization process and to learn about a new vision of development, in the light of emerging —and at times contradictory—critical currents in economic liberalism and its contemporary expression in the form of globalization, which has transformed the logic of interpreting integration based on economic regions worldwide.

Critically addressing this economic integration of regions, young researchers who have joined the Center for

* Researcher at the CISAN and member of the UNAM Program for Studies of Higher Education; caraxola@comunidad.unam.mx.

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Research on North America (CISAN) in the last 10 years constantly question whether or not we are a region in our research seminars. This will provide the title for the First Biannual North American Studies Congress, to be held in 2020. Its aim is to renew the relevance of our region as a space for integrating projects by institutions, governments, collectives, communities, and individuals. It will be examined with a multidisciplinary and multicultural approach that broadens the meaning of the integration process in the region, while questioning the validity of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as an integrating element, as well as the appearance of a new document regulating regional economic integration, the USMCA.

To mark the celebration of 30 years of studies of the North American region at our research center, I offer this series of reflections to better understand a new era in studies of North American integration and development. In this period, NAFTA (1994) expressed an approach and a theoretical tool to discuss our region's possibilities and socioeconomic development, and other integration phenomena could be seen to parallel an economic process linked to the election and integration of three nations in a unique macroeconomic region. In this context, in the last decade and in the new decade of the 2020s, young researchers and post-doctoral students have embarked on a new research and teaching project in the CISAN to support new and old models of education on North America that include new academic communities in the digital age.²

Integration and Cyberculture Of Development Studies And Education in North America

From fashion trends, the twist and rock-and-roll dancing, and other cultural forms that have gradually brought us closer to U.S. culture in Mexico, to the most complex ele-

ments of our economy and cyberculture, spaces exist for study in micro- and macroeconomics to express new avenues for encounters between our diverse communities and the culture of our shared region.³ Amidst this cultural diversity and socioeconomic dynamic, we construct studies of the integration of our North American region in the CISAN.

Our center's presence in shaping new proposals for analysis and developing schools of thought on processes of North American integration has been extensive and has facilitated the formation of new relationships with research centers and other educational institutions open to knowledge of the integrated North American macro-region. This has been based on its processes of educational development, which include access to a new cyberculture in our university.

This production of new academic and scientific knowledge about our region has opened up new spaces for the interpretation of culture and educational cooperation in the area of regional integration from an interdisciplinary, cybernetic, and multicultural perspective. This has given new impetus to agreements and collaboration with other educational institutions. A notable example may be the CISAN's current cooperation agreement, under the auspices of the Department of Humanities, with the University of Arizona,⁴ and the formation of new research groups. The latter include the constant efforts of researchers in North American research networks, among which I can cite my current work with the Law and Society Association (LSA), where CISAN researchers have developed platforms for joint efforts among international researchers and participated in special networks (for example, the Collaborative Research Network [CRN]) for the study of public policy, the state, and society.

In particular, my work on the CISAN's area of integration has allowed me to collaborate with colleagues at the center and from the Academic Unit for Development Studies at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas (UAZ) to enter into a five-year collaboration agreement (2019-2024), which gives us experience and strategies to construct knowledge on integration and development in the North American region.

At the First Seminar on Methodologies for Regional Studies of Development in North America, held November 4-6, 2019, coordinated by CISAN-UNAM and the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, we finalized a collaborative

agenda for studies of North American development and integration, which includes emphasis on lines of inquiry like science and technology in the region; comparative public policies between regions, macro-regions, and local development; access to higher education; financialization in the North American region; development of the North American and Latin American regions; perspectives on North American integration; paradigms of inequality in North and South America; and actors in North American development, among others.

The opportunity to share experiences with researchers from the Academic Unit for Development Studies at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, with recognition by the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT), opened doors to the UNAM for the study of a state in northern Mexico. Zacatecas is known as a state that has historically exported migrants to the United States and has a long tradition in studies of migration and development.

In the words of Humberto Márquez Covarrubias of the UAZ Academic Unit for Development Studies, “In the absence of major public and private investments, we now operate on the assumption that remittances properly channeled in terms of social and productive investment can be true catalysts for development.”⁵ In this context, he writes, we observe the limits of development in the national government agenda, which has been based traditionally on the study of dependency on remittances from Mexican migrants in the United States and the depopulation of certain states in Mexico, which hinders local or regional development. In addition, Mexico has a long history of migration and integration studies that attempts to understand the dynamics of social mobility.

The strategic guidelines developed at this seminar are a clear sign of the vibrant possibilities for developing a new period for studies on integration and development in the region. This will be based on new themes, such as the study of inequality as an obstacle to integration; public policy on education, science, and technology; and cyberculture as a phenomenon of integration.

The Uses of Technology and the University

With these exchanges of knowledge and mobility among researchers, academics, and graduate students, the CISAN

renews its capacity to build ties for the development of knowledge, transform ways of teaching and learning, and improve the participation of young teachers and researchers,⁶ based on research internships to acquire advanced communication skills and develop methodologies on regional studies of integration and development in spaces for digital education.

Some of these leadership initiatives for young researchers and students include improving academic and technological skills for the development of cyber platforms; one example is the ZOOM platform. This has facilitated communication among researchers and academics in virtual seminars, and constant exchange among researchers and enterprising young students in digital networks and writing online texts that broaden the discussion in virtual forums that we share with other institutions to make them equally accessible to the new generation of undergraduate and graduate students. These projects have been developed as part of Support Programs for Projects in Technological Research and Innovation (PAPIIT), as an incentive for the formation of research groups in and among academic bodies in the UNAM, promoted by its Office for Academic Personnel (DGAPA).⁷

In the context of these collaboration agreements between the CISAN, jointly with other academic entities in the UNAM, and other universities in the North American region that promote and lead new forms of cyber communication and digital education, we can grasp the importance of studying regional integration democratically and equitably. At the same time, we understand the importance of efforts to reduce areas for gender violence and vulnerability in schools and public spaces, which help build greater understanding among university communities and are ever-present issues for our university.

As we reflect on educational spaces in the CISAN, additional questions arise related to the difficulties attendant on integration, such as an increase in gender violence and the violence young people perceive in universities.

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In the context of answers regarding greater regional integration, violence is a crucial issue for finding solutions to the effects of the inequality prevalent in our region, in well-located and specific spaces where different kinds of violence manifest constantly.

In this context, CISAN researchers, together with colleagues from the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters, have advanced a PAPIIT project entitled Gender and Globalization, crystallized in the book *Juventudes, mujeres y vulnerabilidad: Visiones críticas sobre la globalización* (Youths, Women and Vulnerability: Critical Views on Globalization) (2019).⁸ This was the product of a collective effort by students and professors at both institutions to “obtain a critical vision of the empty spaces nation-states and their institutions have left for the care and well-being of vulnerable populations in our region, including women, young men, and children living in countries throughout the Americas.”⁹

This research end-product concludes that both the reduction of the state and the increased role of the individual in social and historical studies, as well as the appearance of the market as a new actor, have transformed the perspective of studies on our region’s integration. Its diversity is so complex that it leads us to wonder where we can find the opportunity to relate individuals to each other in a global and social context that fragments communities and threatens us with new violence and inequality. In this sense, faced with the fragility of human life in conditions of inequality and in violent settings, many institutions act on a logic of human development, using the liberal economic integration framework, which must be reconceived as part of the renewal of a public policy agenda to reduce this vulnerability and extend social and civil rights, thus facilitating integration and access to the construction of more and more just public policies.

Final Reflections

Inspired by the mural at the UNAM School of Political and Social Sciences, in this reflection on 30 years of research in the CISAN-UNAM, I examined the current matrix of knowledge among university students, which is anchored in our country’s deepest historical roots of communication and in the evolution of the region’s contemporary integra-

tion. This foundation can provide a roadmap for democratic change and equalitarian and harmonious development in our region.

Also, the uses of technology and university space broaden our experience as young researchers to create a more egalitarian university cyberculture among men and women and new educational and creative spaces that see the new digital age as a mechanism for digital communication and dialogue that fosters exchange and the creation of new communities of scientific and university knowledge in the university space.

Therefore, I believe that holding working seminars and virtual forums that support strategic lines of research on regional integration in North America and recognizing the emergence of new epistemologies of knowledge of the region’s integration and development at our research center will be indispensable for future generations of young researchers. ■■■

Notes

- 1 Monica Gambrill and Pablo Ruiz Napoles, eds., *Procesos de integración de las Américas* (Mexico City: CISAN-UNAM, 2006).
- 2 This research project would not be possible without the development of research laboratories with the participation of graduate students from the Graduate Unit at the UNAM School of Political and Social Sciences and the Graduate Program in the Master’s Degree Program in Studies on Mexico and the United States that I taught, both at the UNAM University City campus and at FES Acatlán.
- 3 In Turner’s words, “In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the same economic and technological forces that had long shaped work lives in Silicon Valley swept across much of the industrialized world.” Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture. Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).
- 4 For more information, see the website of the Emerging Actors in National Security Binational Seminar, UA-UNAM Binational Consortium, <http://www.cisan.unam.mx/seminarioBinacional/index.htm>.
- 5 Humberto Márquez Covarrubias, “Zacatecas, laboratorio social de migración y desarrollo,” in Humberto Márquez Covarrubias, *Diccionario crítico de migración y desarrollo* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, UAZ, UNESCO, and RIMD, 2012), pp. 339-349.
- 6 The support of the CISAN-UNAM’s current director, Graciela Zalce-Martínez, and researchers Juan Carlos Barrón (academic coordinator) and Silvia Núñez (former director of the CISAN-UNAM) has been invaluable in developing these projects.
- 7 <https://dgapa.unam.mx/index.php/impulso-a-la-investigacion/papiit>.
- 8 For more information, see the project’s official website <http://www.generoytiempo.unam.mx/>
- 9 Paola Suarez Avila and Virginia Avila, *Juventudes, mujeres y vulnerabilidad: visiones críticas sobre la globalización*, FFYL-UNAM (Mexico City: Repository of the School of Philosophy and Letters-UNAM, 2019), <http://ru.ffyl.unam.mx/handle/10391/7506>.