

**Social representation and youth identity construction in the *Hakib'al*,
collective of Mayan Chuj cross-border people**

**Representación social y construcción identitaria juvenil en el colectivo *Hakib'al*,
del pueblo transfronterizo maya chuj**

Melina Arredondo Velázquez,¹ Fernando Limón Aguirre² & Jorge Urdapilleta Carrasco³

ABSTRACT

The research revolves around the construction of the social representation that is made of the “being young” within the *Hakib'al* collective, whose members, from Guatemalan families of the Mayan-Chuj people who were refugees, have had to migrate for academic reasons. In Mexico, their ethnic identity has been negatively affected by the disrespectful naturalization process of their culture through discriminatory policies and dynamics, which, as a group, they seek to confront through their cultural reivindicación. Analyzing these representations, with a methodological triangulation contrasted with their cultural knowledge, an intention to extend their youthful condition is first distinguished, which breaks their conceptualization as a mere transition stage; that his dominant representation of “being good young” reaches his entire being chuj and that the main transformation, product of his participation in the group and the completion of his studies, takes place among women.

Keywords: 1. social representations, 2. indigenous youth, 3. Chuj people, 4. Chiapas, 5. Mexico-Guatemala border.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la construcción de la representación social que se hace del “ser joven” dentro del colectivo *Hakib'al*, cuyos integrantes, provenientes de familias refugiadas guatemaltecas del pueblo maya chuj, a su vez han tenido que migrar por razones académicas. En México, la identidad étnica de estos jóvenes ha sido negativamente afectada por el proceso de naturalización irrespetuoso de su cultura, con políticas y dinámicas discriminatorias, a lo que buscan hacer frente como colectivo por medio de su reivindicación cultural. Analizando dichas representaciones con una triangulación metodológica contrastada con sus conocimientos culturales, se distingue primeramente una intención de elongación de su condición juvenil, que rompe su conceptualización como mera etapa de transición; que su representación dominante de “ser buen joven” alcanza a todo su ser chuj y que la principal transformación, producto de su participación en el colectivo y por la realización de sus estudios, se verifica entre las mujeres.

Palabras clave: 1. representaciones sociales, 2. juventud indígena, 3. pueblo chuj, 4. Chiapas, 5. Frontera México-Guatemala.

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¹ El Colegio de La Frontera Sur, Mexico, marredondo@ecosur.edu.mx, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0591-558X>

² El Colegio de La Frontera Sur, Mexico, flimon@ecosur.mx, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1715-3612>

³ Independent researcher, Mexico, jurdapilleta@ecosur.edu.mx, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4132-2570>



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INTRODUCTION

Cultural fragmentation and the various experiences of life among people from different generations have propitiated tensions inside the Mayan Chuj⁴ people as regards the way that *being a youth* is conceived, including the virtues that have to be fostered and the responsibilities to take up over that period of life. For the purpose of understanding this process, in the present article the social representations (SR) of *being a youth* inside *Hakib'al* are analyzed. This collective, focused on reasserting its culture, comprises youths from the Chuj Maya people, who have systematically faced the discrimination and denial of their culture. The members of the collective under study come from the municipalities of La Trinitaria and La Independencia, located at the border of the state of Chiapas and Guatemala, from families that experienced enforced displacements due to the domestic Guatemalan armed conflict. In this context, the collective has as an objective to promote the assertion of their ethnic identity by means of invigorating their memory and culture, which attenuates the tensions that such adverse elements represent that make a difference in the ways of conceiving the idea of *youth* by the Chuj Maya people.

For the development of our analysis, we understand SR as the manifestation of the synthesis the individuals make of the information received from the communication and social thinking of a phenomenon, fact or object that is useful for them to understand the surrounding reality and organize their daily life. To understand the notion of youth this collective builds, we resort to the theoretical-methodological proposal of SR according to the proposal of Moscovici (1979, 1981) and Jodelet (1986, 2011). Our analysis follows the methodological strategies of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2002), and methodological triangulation put forward by Denzin (1970), in this case contrasting with the ontoepistemic category of cultural knowledge (Limón, 2007).

We define two concurring aspects: 1) the explanation of theoretical referents that work as an a priori theory, namely SR, cultural knowledge and indigenous youths; and 2) the determination or emergence of *in vivo* categories, obtained by means of *convivencia* (coexistence), participant observation and semi-structured interviews with each member of *Hakib'al*, and quality informers from their communities.

Our analysis was exposed to the collective to have their reactions aimed at their validation and/or correction. Finally, some conclusions that counteract the essentialist vision of the native peoples' cultures are produced with a view to understanding their dynamism and vitality and distinguishing cultural change processes.

⁴ We respect the orientation of the Mayan Languages of Guatemala regarding the names of indigenous groups must be capitalized. In this case, by the editors' request the convention of the language it is written in will be used.

TN: in this English language version these names will be capitalized.

Our conclusions agree with MacIntyre (2001), as regards each society must carry out collective deliberation every certain time by means of which the definition of practices, values and virtues that contribute to social flourishing. We want to contribute to each people to take control of its cultural elements, and if possible, decide the incorporation of other elements that are consistent with our subject of study, we offer the theoretical-methodological elements that substantiate our analytical approach.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The theory of social representations (SR) has in Moscovici (1979, 1981) its main precursor. In his proposal, human being must be understood as an active being producer and communicator of information, meanings and representations. Moscovici defines SR as a “particular modality of knowledge, whose function is to elaborate behaviors and communication between individuals” (1979, pp. 17-18). This comprehension has been enriched by a multiplicity of proposals (Banchs, 1986; Gutiérrez, Tuñón, Limón, Morales & Nielsen, 2012; Jodelet, 1986; Urbina & Ovalles, 2018) which orient our work (see table 1).

Table 1. Summary of SR elements and dimensions

| | | |
|------------|----------------------|---|
| Elements | Central nucleus | “The nucleus defines the group homogeneity. In it the constitution of common knowledge is generated and thereby, it is associated to values and norms, defining with this the fundamental principles around which representations are constituted” (Gutiérrez et al, 2012, p. 112). |
| | Peripherals | “Peripheral elements associate with individual characteristics and the immediate context the individuals are immersed in; this way, they enable differentiation on the basis of the lived and the integration of daily experiences”. (Gutiérrez et al, 2012, p. 113). |
| Dimensions | Information | A cumulation of data received from discourses, face-to-face communications, opinions, communication media about an object/phenomenon/fact that generates opinion and action. |
| | Representation field | “The organization of knowledge possessed by a group regarding a social object” (Banchs, 1986, p. 33). It is the cognitive dimension that favors the assimilation and appropriation of the information received; this allows expressing it as propositions suitable for determinate contexts. |

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Attitude

It is the orienting manifestation of the behavior based on the representation field. “It is the surveillance machinery we acquire, make ourselves part of and make it part of us, this way we reproduce it. So, in this case, it is what we make before the eyes interested in punishing our behavior” (Gutiérrez et al., 2012, p. 138).

Source: own elaboration based on Banchs (1986) and Gutiérrez et al. (2012).

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Referring to cultural knowledge (CK) means focusing attention on the way of living life from cultural alterity in the context of historic and hegemonic relationships in the spaces inhabited as territories and prominently with a meaning of resistance (Limón, 2010).

By Cultural Knowledge we understand the proper and particular cognitive structure of various peoples and cultural groups, which joins memory and hope, it works as a resistance for context inertias and establishes a dialectical relationship with the way of collective living, providing the latter with a meaning (Limón & Pérez, 2019, p. 59).

Urdapilleta (2016) underscores five characteristic features of CK: 1) they must be seen as a constellation of the existence linked to the past that provides the present with meaning; 2) the particularity from which knowledge about the territory is articulated, signified and re-signified; 3) resistance before hegemonic visions, imposition of alien values and against forgetting; 4) hope as a lucid dream that contests the determinations of the present; and, 5) renovation that refer to the revitalization of meanings of existence and the specific practices with which changes in the generational transition are made evident.

We consider it fundamental not to take SR on their own, but enrich them with CK. Since they are cognitive mechanisms, they may go from complementary to contradictory, being the former the prevailing forms in the context, whereas the latter disclose resistances and actual alterity construction mechanisms and critique from cultural diversity (specifically in the case of subordinated cultures). And it becomes more relevant as we verify, namely:

Resorting to cultural knowledge is resorting to a cognitive corpus whose content, validity and currency is strongly contested, particularly from schools and media, promoters of modernity and developmentalism with their hegemonic power. However, in the face of the overwhelming context, their presence remains, offering a deep meaning of existence and orienting all the interactions (Limón & Pérez, 2019, p. 66).

INDIGENOUS YOUTHS

In Latin America, anthropology and cultural studies by and large started researching on youth by the end of the eighties. However, studies on indigenous youths appeared by the end of the century (Cruz, 2012; Pérez, 2008; Urteaga, 2008). Duarte (2012), underscoring the condition of diversity and plurality that referred to youth and that there are various ways of living it, points out that their comprehension refers to a stage of life, a social group and even, an attitude for life. For Cruz (2012):

Indigenous youth as a XXI-century category refers a stage, a process, a result or a condition of life recently identified among indigenous peoples and in social sciences. It is structured by gender differentials and by generational transitions in Latin American ethnicities (Cruz 2012, p. 157).

Urteaga (2008) identifies various XX-century research works for instance, some with Zapotecos and Huicholes from Nayarit, which conclude that in their life cycles these indigenous peoples have no similar phase to that conceived as youth in occidental societies. For his part, Pérez (2008) points out that:

In the populations where the concept of youth exists in the own tongue language, in general, it is a social category that defines a stage of life that starts with the individuals' biological maturity and concludes with social maturity. That is to say, it begins with the acquisition of certain biological features –those of puberty– and concludes with the incorporation of the youth into adult life, which is recognized because it is when the individual takes up a series of commitments associated to marriage, with the responsibility of having and supporting a family and acquiring social responsibilities with the community (Pérez, 2008, p.12).

Furthermore, in research with *Q'anjob'al* Guatemalan refugees, Ruiz (2011) remarks that such category does exist, but it goes beyond referring a dimension of biological development, it is related to the process of responsibility acquisition. In like manner, in the studies with Akateco youths, Ruiz (2011) analyzes how the youth category has changed and how it has been made complex due to the historic displacement process, context, interactions with other peoples, experiences of the new generations (labor migration and because of studies) and the set of elements that cross the construction of their identity (migrant, indigenous, young, Guatemalan, and so on). Ruiz's research works show us contexts and experiences very similar to those of *Hakib'al*, as the author worked with youths of the two first generations born in Mexico who have experienced enforced displacement, asylum or discrimination by the Mexican state and other cultural groups.

The suggestions made by Ruiz (2011) and Pérez (2008) have oriented us to take the self-perception and self-denomination of these indigenous groups into account, considering their tensions, contradictions, changes and dynamics, for only so will we be able to enhance the study categories, surpassing the preponderantly adult-centric and ethnocentric positions. To round this section up, we make it explicit that our analysis does not correspond to a relative generalization for the Chuj youth, but exclusively for what is lived

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and expressed by the members of the *Hakib'al* collective. With their reasserting endeavors, this case offers a contribution to the debate and comprehension of indigenous youths.

METHODOLOGY

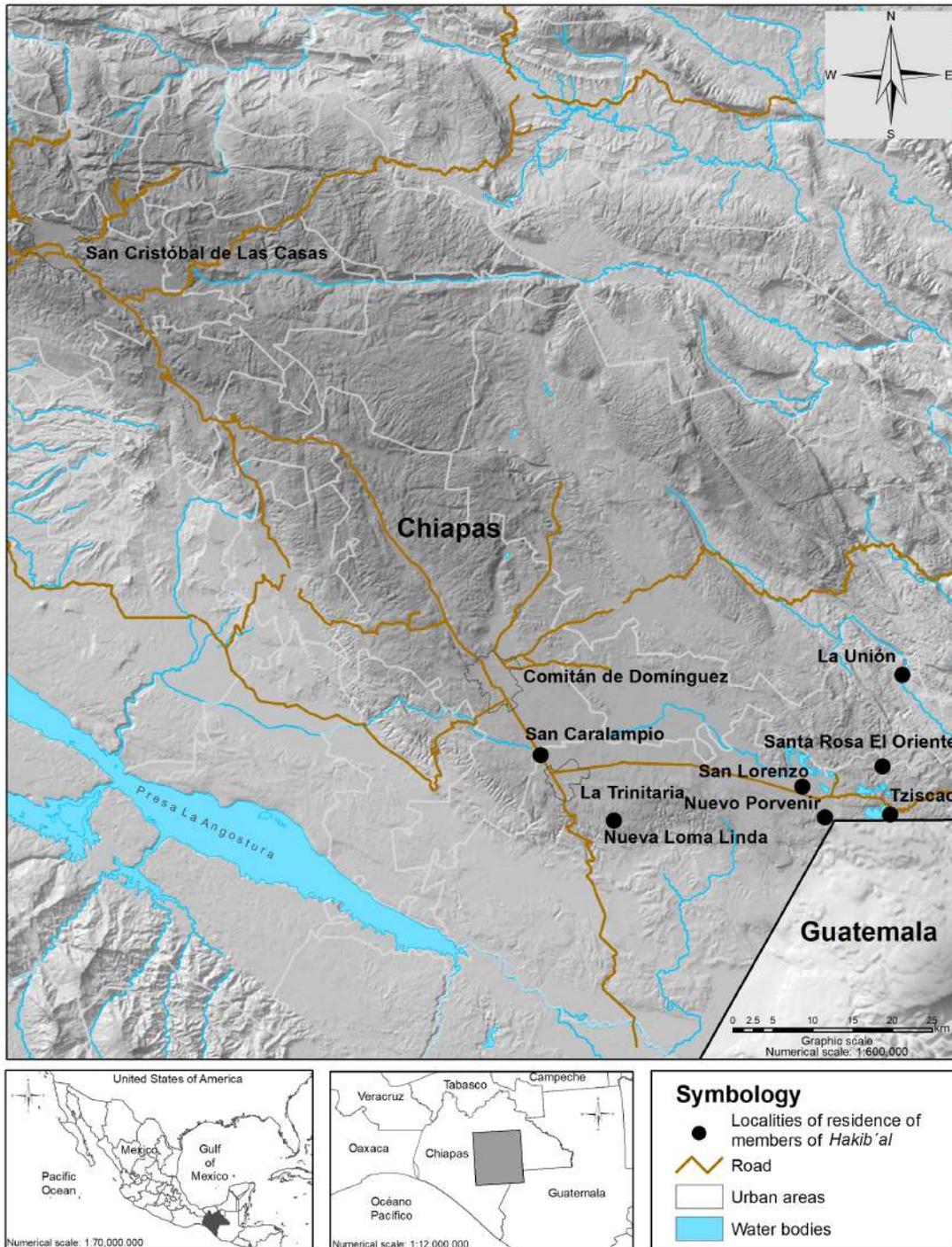
The present research, of qualitative nature, is conceived from the logic of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Anisu and Fals, 1992; Fals, 1979); while field data were built by means of interaction and complicity with *Hakib'al* and its collective project.

The analysis of data is inductive and systematic, after the proposal of Grounded Theory (GT) put forward by Strauss and Corbin (2002) and the methodological triangulation exposed by Denzin (1970). The process consisted in a priori identifying categories –what we have exposed so far about SR, CK and indigenous youths— that were the starting point to analyze key testimonies, offered by the respondents. With the testimonies we produced analytical tables with a view to, by means of axial codification, associating some scores that accounted for situations of presence or absence of *in vivo* categories (in brackets, with an “a” in case of absence, *a posteriori* placed). After multiple revisions in which we *constantly compared* the various testimonies, we identified emergent categories (also underscored by means of scores), which we ordered in the form of first-order (central nucleus of SR) and second-order (peripheral elements) categories.

The result of this analysis was integrated into an interpretative section where we identify the three dimensions of SR: information, representational field and attitude. We support on the analytical sequence broken down by Limón (2011) to understand what is assumed by *being a Chuj youth* inside *Hakib'al*, and contrast it with the relative notion of what full life is they received inside their Chuj towns.

The field research process that supports the present analysis started in January 2018, when the bases, objectives and procedures to do it were presented to *Hakib'al*. Though, our relationship and accompaniment of their process has been from its inception in 2013. We have been with the collective in its meetings (monthly assemblies and anniversary celebrations) and individually with each of its members in their daily dynamics, both in their communities of origin (municipalities of La Trinitaria and La Independencia) and where they reside in order to study (San Cristóbal de Las Casas) (Map 1).

Map 1. Location of residence and life places of the members of *Hakib'al*



Source: own elaboration based on data from INEGI (2010).

Over nine months we met several times in the places where they live due to studies, and we visited each community about 12 times for two weeks approximately. Over these stays we were together and, when convenient, we accompanied them in their tasks. Likewise, we devised an observation guideline, carried a daily registration in field diaries and held 19 standardized conversational interviews with the members, some relatives and elderly people. The standardized interviews dealt with youth and its relation with other existential aspects such as being members of Chuj people and this collective, the relationship and comparison of life between generations, migrations, studies and some personal experiences.

HAKIB'AL (OUR ROOTS)

Hakib'al is a collective comprised by Chuj youths, plus a female member of *Q'anjob'al* people. Most of them belongs to Guatemalan-Mexican families displaced from Guatemala, refuged and later naturalized as Mexicans, who live in the towns of Tziscaco, Santa Rosa el Oriente, San Lorenzo, Nuevo Porvenir and Nueva Loma Linda, in the municipalities of La Trinitaria, La Unión and La Independencia. The collective is composed of 14 members (eight women, six men) aged between 18 and 29 years; most of the members hold a degree, one studies high school and there is an individual who holds postgraduate studies. In order to study, they had to migrate inside the state of Chiapas (to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Las Margaritas, Comitán or La Trinitaria); two migrated temporarily to Jalisco and Quintana Roo because of work. Most of them plans to return to their communities after they conclude their studies, which may be modified by employment opportunities or affective relationships.

This collective has its inception in *Sociedad de Solidaridad Social Los Lagos de Colores*, SSS Lagos [Los Lagos de Colores *Social Solidarity Society*], seated in Tziscaco, which motivated the creation of a number of organizational and self-management projects such as the cooperative *Productores Alternativos de la Selva*, PAS [Alternative Producers of the Rainforest]. Economically supported by the Maya Educational Foundation, in 2007, PAS started to provide student scholarships for education above the basic (the education level for most of the Chuj population back then). By the time of the fieldwork, there was the first generation of graduated Chuj youths (Limón, 2015). The participation of those youths in PAS assemblies was the initial stimulus to autonomously organize and approach collective interest topics of cultural nature (Limón, 2015).

They identify October 26, 2013, as the day when they decided to organize to support themselves in their studies, motivate themselves to speak Chuj (more than a half did not speak it, even though their parents did) and recover and promote their culture (*Hakib'al*, a registration made by the collective in 2015).

The organization base is the performance of monthly assemblies that change venue between the communities, in which, in addition to broadening their horizon about the Chuj

way of life (their localities and respective organizational modes), they make friends, discuss interchange experiences, while tasks and responsibilities are assigned. The participation of *chichimtak-ichamtak* (wise elderly individuals)⁵ is intended for them to offer guidance and share their wisdom-word (*syal sjelanil*), a product of their life experiences and thinking (*Hakib'al*, record made by the collective in 2015 and information gathered in 2017 assemblies).

They started as an organization working in gardens of vulnerable members of the communities, conversing with the *chichimtak-ichamtak* of the places, visiting the high-schools they studied in to share their experiences and analyses, keeping a collective garden of medicinal plants in the plot of PAS (*Hakib'al*, record made by the collective in 2015). In a text drafted by the collective as part of its minutes, the following was stated regarding their main goal:

We are a group of youths who work and hope for the reassertion of our people by means of our individual and collective actions, learning and practicing the cultural knowledge that our grandparents have been teaching us for thousands of years (*Hakib'al* collective, personal communication, February 29, 2016):

Among their main interests are recovering the community way of life, reasserting the historic memory that roots collective identity, raising awareness among the Chuj youths of school and building a world of bonds of solidarity and mutual respect, with a view to accomplishing what they call *junk'olal kob'a* (we in peace, joy and harmony) (*Hakib'al* Collective, personal communication, February 29, 2016). They have propitiated and participated in coexistence spaces among Chujes, with youths from other peoples and with *mestizos*, looking to build liberating, horizontal critical intercultural relationships.

CHUJ PEOPLE IN MEXICO

Before approaching SR for being a *Chuj* youth in the collective *Hakib'al*, we offer an approximation to the situation and experiences of Chuj people in Mexican territory.

The Chuj Maya people inhabits a space, which is its territory before the boundary was defined between the two countries, that ranges from northeastern Guatemala, in the department of Huehuetenango, in the north slope of Sierra de los Cuchumatanes, in the municipalities of San Mateo Ixtatán, San Sebastián Coatán and Nentón, occupying a sizeable proportion of Comitán's plateau, in Chiapas, México. After experiencing the genocide violence of the conquest, dispossession and their congregation in a single place (San Mateo Ixtatán, presently the Department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala) (Limón,

⁵ We will expose the basic categories in Chuj language. *Nun chichim* means old mom, generically, granny. Ever though she is not a kindred grandmother, there is a sort of appropriation to be able to receive the inheritance of her knowledge and legitimizer learning. Similarly, *mam icham* (old dad). It is frequently expressed as a binomial and in plural: grannies-granpas (*chichimtak-ichamtak*).

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2008, 2009a; Lovell, Lutz & Krame, 2016; Piedrasanta, 2006, 2009), the consolidation of prejudices based on ethnic discrimination (Martínez, 2009) over the colonial period (1521-1824) and that in the liberal period the privatization of indigenous lands was promoted (Böckler & Herbert, 1970), all of these social and economic policies in detriment to the indigenous population and their territories, with particular affectations to Chuj people (Piedrasanta, 2014), over the last period a process we may call re-expansion was undertaken by Guatemalan Chuj families searching for lands (Hernández 1998; Limón, 2009; Piedrasanta, 2014). Owing to ignorance of the history of this people and as they were identified as Guatemalan families, the Chuj population that lived this re-expansion in Mexico is identified as parvenu, even though they are living in their own ancestral territory.

In the 1980's, enforced displacement took place due to Guatemala's internal armed conflict; the armed forces directly attacked indigenous communities and peoples, including the Chuj, deploying a policy of "scorched earth" under general and president Efraín Ríos Montt. This conflict, in addition to being genocide, very strongly marked the social fabric (Doyle, 2009; Herrera, Giracca, Díaz, Mayén & Cahuec, 1997; Limón, 2008; López, 2012). Many exiled families settled down in localities in Chiapas and camps under the control of official agencies. By the end of such armed conflict, some families opted for remaining in Mexico; such is the case of most of the families of the members of collective *Hakib'al*. With this they had to start their procedures and with this their sociocultural naturalization process (Limón, 2008; López, 2012; Pérez, 2015; Ruiz, 2018).

IDENTITY IMPLICATIONS OF NATURALIZATION

If for the set of native Mexican peoples, the implementation of indigenist policies and more recently, neoliberal, were bloody, for the peoples of the border zone (which includes a high percentage of naturalized individuals) has been doubly cruel because, as it has been very well analyzed by Hernández (1998), they were forced to assimilate into a *mestizo* culture from a commoditizing logic. This way, they were subjected by means of resorting to incisively *Mexicanizing* discriminatory logics that produced sociocultural fragmentation regarding the rest of their respective peoples on the Guatemalan side.

At present, the native peoples who live in Mexico but whose cultural center is in Guatemala face the pauperization of their daily life and the lack of guarantee for their rights, including access to land and resources that secure their social reproduction. There also exists a noticeable generation fracture that appeared during their refuge and naturalization process in Mexico, the elderly were forced to an acculturating integration that entailed the denial and forgetting of cultural resources and the expedite communication of their CK. In point of fact, a widespread familial strategy of protecting against discrimination was their identity self-denial, stopped talking (and teaching) Chuj

and the abandonment, as already mentioned, of the very diverse practices that revealed them (Limón, 2008, 2009a; López & Limón, 2016).

To a large extent, the dynamic above made younger generations stop practicing *emnakil* (basic category of their axial structure, which may be translated as loving-humble respect) toward their elders, so the opinion of the latter is that more schooling makes youths “behave badly”. This places responsibility on the education system, which we consider has been the main ideological imposition tool of the Nation State.

Another element that stresses this forgetting is labor migration, which largely takes place toward Cancun and Playa del Carmen, in Yucatan and Quintana Roo, but also toward states in the center and north of the country (Jalisco, Michoacan, Mexico City) and even toward the US (Alabama, Atlanta, Florida), which have distanced the new generations from community life, particularly work in the land, with the consequential deepening of the fracture between generations (Limón, 2008, 2009a, 2015; López & Limón, 2016).

Seeing that self-denial is still noticed and counteracted inside the collective, whose members reaffirm and recognize themselves and intend to dignify their *ket chonhab' kob'a* (the way of identify one another as Chuj; it literally means “we are from the same people”) and search for possibilities for the compatibility of being Chuj, Mexican and student, against the grain and in opposition to the surrounding discourses (Limón, 2008), maintaining any practice that reveals *emnakil* toward their people, with an emphasis on the elderly.

CONFIGURATION OF SR ON BEING A *CHUJ YOUTH* IN THE *HAKIB'AL* COLLECTIVE

After exposing the above and in order to approach the construction of the identity and SR of the individuals in the *Hakib'al* collective, it is necessary to start from the already recorded fact (Limón, 2009) that the three categories most repeatedly exposed as essential and which substantiate, structure and unite CK in the Chuj people are: *emnakil* (respect as constructive inter-subjectivity), *tas kojtak* (“what we know” –knowledge as a favorable being for life), and *lajti'* (“history – what has been said” –communication, under the logic of heading understanding toward agreement); the first is the principle of Chuj ethics and support for their community life.

It is convenient to underscore it since for the process of identity construction in question inside *Hakib'al*, go to meet (*chalajb'ahil*) grannies-grandpas and mothers-fathers to dialogue (*lajti'*) is the mechanism that, expressed, is par excellence exposed to weave (*yamanb'ahil*) their culture and asserting it. With our analysis we identified that effectively each of these elements has been part of the **nucleus of the SR** that defines their identity: these are notions that constantly resound in their minds and hearts, in their *chamna'ab'il* (their thinking and feeling before acting).

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An instance of the above is the following testimonial (table 2) in which a youth recreates the way in which, by means of counsel, his father tried to transmit him meaning of life for Chuj people and the particular way in which this becomes by means of *emnakil*.

Table 2. Respect as a way for a better life

To have a long life (1), you, children, have (8) to kneel (2) before the elderly (3), so that they take (6) your heads (4) and thus be lucky (4) and have a good future (1). The grandparents (3) respect (2) all that (4), it is because of that they have a long life (1); they respect the trees, water, stars, the sun and the moon (5). Now we have no (7) respect (2) for that (5), owing to that we die young (1a), and their foods were natural (5) and now we eat sodas and canned food (7).
(1) *Junk'olal*; (2) *emnakil*; (3) *chichimtak-ichamtak*; (4) *tas Kojtak*; (5) nature; (6) *lajti*; (7) forgetting; (8) resistance.

Source: own elaboration based on fieldwork.

As a central value, *emnakil* (respect) is reaffirmed in the following classification that we make for the stages of life for Chuj people. By means of interviews and collective discussions, we found out that such stages divide into *unin anima* (childhood; *tender aged* person), *kob'estak/kelemtak* (being a young woman / man), *ek'um ix/ek'um winak* (being a *middle-aged* woman / man), *chichim ix/icham winak* (being a mature woman / man) and *chichim/icham* (being elderly) (table 3). More than age issues, they match activities and interpersonal relationships that are acquired and built, all of which are heavily marked by the realization of practices that lead people to cultivate the virtue of *emnakil*: strength, humility, responsibility, maturity, knowledge and practice of land work and community life. This last is to a good extent the most encouraged over the construction of their juvenile identity (*heb' unin anima*) and as individuals (*heb' anima*).

Table 3. Stages of life for Chuj people

| Stage | Characteristics |
|-------------------|---|
| | 1 st stage (babies). The five sense develop: cry, breathe, move head, suck, and open the eyes to look). |
| <i>Unin anima</i> | 2 nd stage. Simple tasks based on gender |
| | Girls: accompany their mothers in the house, kitchen, make <i>tortillas</i> . Boys: accompany their fathers to the <i>milpa</i> , run errands. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Kob'estak</i> and <i>kelemtak</i> | <p>Thinking matures They know themselves and face problems Labor is considered They start leaving home (mainly men) More freedom New responsibilities and decisions on their future The performance of community services begins (police officers or secretaries).</p> |
| <i>Ek'um ix</i> and <i>ek'um winak</i> or <i>chichim ix</i> and <i>icham winak</i> | <p>Learn trades. Men: cut firewood and trees, clear the <i>milpa</i>, saw, weed, harvest, among others (traditionally 12). Women: make <i>tortillas</i> and coffee, cook maize and beans, do the dishes, among others (traditionally 24). It closes with marriage to go on to the next stage There is mature thinking Own decisions are made Stop depending on the parents Make and support a family Work and money are offered to the community The community allots the land to work Councilors and example for <i>kob'estak</i> and <i>kelemtak</i>. Their words are the most important</p> |
| <i>Chichim</i> and <i>icham</i> | <p>They are respected and heard and lessons from their words and experience are learnt Their advice is the most valued</p> |

Source: own elaboration based on fieldwork.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF *KOB'ESTAK* AND *KELEMTAK* (SINGLE YOUNG WOMEN / MAN) IN THE COLLECTIVE *HAKIB'AL*

As previously mentioned, in order to identify the dimensions (information, representational field, attitude), elements (central nucleus and peripherals) and moments (objectification and anchoring) that characterize SR, we used the proposals by Banchs (1986) and Gutiérrez et al. (2012) as guidelines.

The main information sources inside *Hakib'al* about being *heb' unin anima* (being a young Chuj) are the conversations, mainly with their parents/grandparents, but also with the collective members and their interactions with other cultural groups (indigenous and *mestizos*) and the links fostered by social media (mainly *Facebook*), though the latter to a lesser extent.

The representation field of being young has notions such as having no commitments and gradually taking up responsibility. The case of *Hakib'al* verifies that nuclear elements that

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underscore certain group homogeneity around values, norms and characteristics, though in their case they add it to the one they enthrone as the main: attention to their studies. And they underscore elements that do not correspond to the findings of the rest of individuals from their people (young and adult people) such as enjoying life, having fun, go out with friends and going to places. Indeed, it is remarked as a learning stage, but what for? Their common answer underscore two aspects: start to make decisions regarding their future (which includes their professional profile under construction) and execute the right to have an opinion of their own, even though it is divergent. This may be due to the fact of having a broadened informational corpus, a result of their emigration experience and their condition of university students. In their relationships, these two profiles send them to their families and communities, but also to society at large.

It is possible to recognize some attitudes (as peripheral elements –individual and/or contextual characteristics that generate a differentiation in experience), for instance, adopting the traditionally role assigned to men being women and taking up the responsibility of supporting themselves or making a family. These facts reassert them without contravening their being youths assuming that their current apprentice state and without fully assuming social expectations for someone who have procreated or made family. The foregoing points at the remarking that youth is not only a transition stage, but a period that allows certain permissibility in function of living a moment and learning process for which there are certain expectations and which is assigned some demands (as it will be clarified). In this regard, Kixtup⁶ affirms: “what supports my youth is that I don’t know the 12 trades”, making a reference to the line that divides *kob'estak/kelemtak* from *ek'um ix/icham winak*” (personal communication, April 3, 2020) (table 3). This affirmation makes it evident the tension between the established (in function of not having assumed certain responsibilities and remain learning) and their personal search to be considered “youths”, though at present they have made a family of their own.

Likewise, the voice of *nun chichim* and *mam icham* (wise elderly people) has a theological weight around what a “good Chuj youth” is, which accounts for the heaviest **nuclear element** inside the collective to build SR (table 4).

⁶ Each member of *Hakib'al* defined the way they wanted to appear in their interventions, owing to which quotations bear the nickname, pseudonym, initials or else full name of the respondents.

Table 4. On being a good Chuj youth

They always talk us about (6) a past time (4), where youths (10) respected (2), where they were given (10) certain errands (11) and orientations for the community (7). A youth (12) is already (10) able to take posts⁷ (11) as police officers, secretaries –or back then- carriers (9) of candles⁸ (4), fireworks or the drum. Somehow, they head for (10)(11) these processes and community (7) services (11). But now, in the words (6) of the elderly (3) it is decomposing (7), that form is fracturing (7) [...] it is no longer reliable (10) to leave the destination (4) of the community (1)(9) in the hands (11) of youths (12). (Kixtup) (1) *junk'olal*; (2) *emnakil*; (3) *chichimtak-ichamtak*; (4) *tas Kojtak*; (5) nature; (6) *lajti*; (7) forgetting; (8) resistance; (9) community life; (10) trust; (11) responsibility; (12) youth.

Source: own elaboration based on interviews (Kixtup, personal communication, April 3, 2020).

This testimony enables us to notice the emergence of the categories Trust and responsibility, which we consider to have dialectical relationship between them that expresses the tension on the continuity of the Chuj people's CK. In specific, talking about community posts and services, Kixtup exposes how youths were trusted for fundamental aspects in which they demonstrated their responsibilities in caring about tradition (symbolized by the candle and prayer) and the society dynamic, learning vital functions in community services as midwives, herbalists, bone healers (once they are publicly and socially recognized to have dexterity or ability to carry out such tasks of importance and responsibility).

The antipode of a good Chuj youth is the one “who does not respect” (the elders or the land), who on the contrary are “misbehaved” (frequently associated to those who are at intermediate schooling), “no longer practice the customs” (foods, healing, dressing, working, language, community life) and “do as they want” (carelessness and egotist individualism, do what they want with no consultation), according to the phrases shared by Kixtup, Dory and A.R.G.F as regards the words their elders tell them (Kixtup, personal communication, April 3, 2020; A.R.G.F, personal communication, March 9, 2020).

Within this context regarding the good Chuj youth (which is a weighty category), and thereby, in opposition (bad Chuj youth), proposed the moment of **objectification**, it allows us to also identify the third dimension of this SR: **attitude**, which manifests as a definer for behavior. By promoting the reassertion of their culture, *Hakib'al* insists on reverting the intergenerational fragmentation. For *Hakib'al*, responsibility goes beyond efficiently fulfilling tasks, it takes a deep meaning when it is the concretion of a conscious act: “we in *Hakib'al* have a job out of consciousness, now I'm young and if grandparents are saying that we're ruining our culture, I have to find out with which tools they can trust in us”

⁷ It refers to taking up responsibility for a service-authority in the community.

⁸ It refers to young people who accompany the praying people and carry the candles to the sacred places where the offering will be placed.

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(Kixtup, personal communication, April 3, 2020). This statement, for its part, sheds some light on **anchoring**, that is to say, that which leads the way for their behavior.

Furthermore, differences also propitiate a tension that is being reflected about; it is so referred by the female members of *Hakib'al* in table 5.

Table 5. On gender differences

| |
|---|
| <p>Women <u>must</u> (11) make themselves be <u>respected</u> (2) and be <u>indoors more</u> (15); while men <u>have more</u> (20) <u>freedom</u> (13). A <u>woman</u> (17) is not as <u>free</u> (9) because her <u>parents feel</u> (20) she is <u>weaker or more fragile</u> (17). Our <u>gender</u> (14) is still more severely <u>judged</u> (15) than men because I am a woman and <u>I cannot do</u> (15)(22) <u>things I shouldn't</u> (11), I should be home (10). If I'm a woman with some men that <u>is seen bad</u> (10)(17): <u>you are a woman</u> (14), <u>you're making me my food</u> (15); I <u>went to work</u> (19) now <u>serve me the food</u> (15)(19). If grow older than a <u>certain age</u> (18)⁹ and don't marry, you become a <i>Chichimtak k'obez</i> (17) [spinster];¹⁰ they <u>have their laws</u> (20), <u>they pay</u> (19)(20), they <i>chapean</i> (19); we (women) <u>do not have</u> (15)(22) <u>the right</u> (10). In football, women are sort of <u>denied</u> (17) <u>the chance</u> (13)(20) to be able to <u>practice some sport</u>, while <u>men are not</u> (20).</p> |
| <p>(2) <i>emnakil</i>; (10) trust (11); responsibility; (12) youth; (13) freedom; (14) gender; (15) submission; (16) practices; (17) discrimination; (18) age group; (19) social role; (20) power, (22) equality.</p> |

Source: own elaboration based on interviews with female members of *Hakib'al*.

The fragment above evinces the critical look with which young women from *Hakib'al* contest the SR related to gender assignments. For them, socially defined roles have a discrimination and submission load. Conversely, men are those who define the regulation and degrees of freedom on the basis of gender. Facing this, instead of detonating a radical rupture, female members of *Hakib'al* take a stake on the renovation of their own CK. Due to the work in the collective, and studying outside their homes, they have fostered dialogue with their fathers, mothers and the elderly so as to practice respect as a way to recognize the 'possibility of developing at the household and also professionally'. This was referred by A.R.G.F. and Dori (table 6):

⁹ Between 20 and 25 years.

¹⁰ *Chichimtak k'obez* (spinster).

Table 6. On the search for gender equality

| |
|---|
| I have (11) to defend (8) many of our (14) rights (20), any women (14) who comes to me (21), to defend (8) her rights (20) as an indigenous woman (14), we are not (8) less worth (17). We're not (8) to be hurt (15) [...] Demonstrate (8) there are lots of things men do (16) and we (14) cannot (20) (16) (A.R.G.F., personal communication, March 5th, 2020). |
| I tell (6) my father: I am a woman (14) in a machista group, indigenous, brown-skinned (17); we're refugees (17) and all that hurts us (15), upsets (15), limits (20), hides (17)(14). How can we say (20): we're here (22), we are also humans (2)(22), we want (20) to live (1)(13), we want to be heard? (10)(13) [...] So, with this idea (22) I'm starting in women football (16)(14) because I'm (20) there (8); ever since we are (14)(8) playing football (16) we are creating (20) resistance (8). It is a space (16) of resistance (8) we are making (20) because "it is a space (16) where women (14) do not play football (17)(16) because "women (15) who play football (16) are whores ¹¹ (17)". So, we're here (20)(8) as whores playing football (8)(14), so what? (8)(22) (10)(12)(13) (Dori, personal communication, February 18, 2020). |
| (1) junk'olal; (2) emnakil; (3) chichimtak-ichamtak; (4) tas Kojtak; (5) nature; (6) lajti; (7) forgetting; (8) resistance; (9) community life; (10) trust; (11) responsibility; (12) youth; (13) freedom; (14) gender; (15) submission; (16) practices; (17) discrimination; (18) age group; (19) social role; (20) power; (21) yamanb'ahil; (22) equality. |

Source: own elaboration based on interviews (A.R.G.F., personal communication, March 5, 6, and 9, 2020; Dori, personal communication, February 23, 2020).

Furthermore, for the men and women members of the collective, even if they are aware that studying outside their communities produces a distancing as regards the stereotype of the good Chuj youth, the daily cultural and community life, at once there are other factors that favor a counterweight. Specifically, it is their collective interest to reassert their culture to return to their communities, not to forget, or in their cases, learn their language, to practice respect and revert the intergenerational fracture approaching the elderly to dialogue of all that which they were not talked about (evidence as well of the anchoring process).

In like manner, holding an undergraduate degree (sociology, sustainable development, language and culture, elementary education, nursery, management) or a master (cultural studies, pedagogy of the individual, and educational practices) has largely favored them in their interest in cultural reassertion, in their desire to learn and thus help their communities solve problems. By and large, it denotes a deep interest in living in their communities once again, though with a renewed vision of the communal forms and practices. An example of this is the stake on gender equality, identified as an emergent category which gives a broader meaning to the a priori category of *emnakil*.

¹¹ *Yistzil chonhab*: a public woman (used as deprecation, as an insult) or *chuc al ix*: an ordinary woman, bad woman.

As a complement, and to summarize, in table 7, we show the elements we were able to identify, which characterize being good or bad Chuj youth on the basis of the various answers of the collective.

Table 7. On being a good or bad Chuj

| Bad Chuj | | Good Chuj | |
|---|------------|--|---|
| Naughty, undisciplined, egotistic, individualist, take ways of life different from community life, arrogant, do not speak the language, do not work in the milpa, misbehaved. | | Helpful, do community service, speak or want to speak the language and preserve it, they seek to live in community, work the land, humble. | |
| Disrespectful | | They are reliable for some command | Police officer, secretary, bearer of candles, fireworks or drum |
| Culture, elderly, land | Respectful | Land, elderly living beings culture. | |

Source: own elaboration based on interviews with the members of the collective *Hakib'al* collective

As regards the identity construction of the members of the *Hakib'al* collective, an essential element is feeling part of a transborder culture: for instance, know they are Chuj born in Mexico and at the same time to be Guatemalan with all the implications it entails: discrimination by the others and its counterpart, their personal search for their reassertion as essential part of their being youths of Chuj People. This we see in the following elaborations:

The pangs we have endured because were Chuj, not only discrimination. I still lived it at university. When we arrived and introduced ourselves the three of us as Chuj, and the professor said: “I think you’re from Guatemala”, “yeah” was out answer; and a classmate said: “they are *Chapines*”, laughing. We couldn’t say a thing, we couldn’t defend ourselves. That was when we started university, when we introduced ourselves. We didn’t have the knowledge we have now to defend ourselves, we just remained silent. For me, Guatemala is the place where my grandparents, parents were born, my family is there. I have a sort of roots in Guatemala, I lived there for a year; it is like my hometown. Mexico is my present, the place where I live; but sometimes, they are the same for me because I go often to Guatemala to visit my uncles, my Guatemalan uncles. The only difference is that I live in Mexico and my life will be here, but I have it clear that my origin and roots are in Guatemala. **The border is just a line that is there, but is worthless, it does not mean that much because I can come and go from Guatemala when I want.** I go to visit my relatives in San Mateo, Gracias a Dios, Las Palmas, to visit my granny and sometimes I feel I cross no border when I go there (Check, personal communication, February 28, 2020).

Above things, Guatemala is the place where our root is, where we live, where we come from. It is important for us, we don't see it as an alien country. Guatemala has everything of us. We came here because of a political problem [but] it is our space, our land. It is special for us [...] sacred spaces, culture; that is important for me [...] **The border is only a division between peoples, but that doesn't mean such part isn't mine.** This way, land doesn't belong to one people, they divide us by the political rules of each state [...] I have relatives on the other side, but that doesn't mean we're divided. I don't agree with borders, I don't like them (authors' emphasis) (Cheli, personal communication, March 11, 2020).

Guatemala is a very symbolical place for me, it is the place of my origin, my history, I connect a lot my life and history; it is there the origin of my history, it is the country where my parents grew, that nurtured them. There is this connection that Guatemala is a fundamental part of our life. If I want to continue strengthening as *Q'anjob'al*, I want to find out more about the cultural concepts, celebrations, how to burn the candles; I have to go to Guatemala to live the experience, because here in Mexico, it cannot be. Every single *Q'anjob'al* who wants to live that must go to Santa Eulalia. Many families go there to light candles. This is why Guatemala is very important in my life (María Elena Felipe Simón, personal communication, March 25, 2019).

In spite of being born in Mexico, for María Elena, Guatemala entails elements that become part of their identity construction (family, our space, land and culture) and represents their origin and history, while Mexico is their present. The border is an arbitrariness (it does not represent, is not felt, worthless).

Finally, we retake Villoro's (1998) proposals for Latin American native peoples underscoring the importance of identifying similarities and differences in spatialities and temporalities regarding the relationship with the other. In *Hakib'al*, it is by taking and reflecting on their interaction with youths from other cultures (indigenous and *mestizos*) they have been able to identify the elements that distinguish and help them to produce their identity: territory, demography, culture and historic memory.

Mestizo youth is the alterity most confronted by the members of *Hakib'al*. Recognizing the exceptions, they state that most of the *mestizos* study to make money for themselves, they are *cocky* (arrogant), libertine and disrespectful and usually discriminate; plus, they eat meat, processed and packed food. For their part, the members of the collective see schooling as an opportunity to acquire tools that enable them to help their families and communities. They remark keeping a humble attitude, being respectful to everyone, listen and think before speaking. As regards their foods they restate their conviction –as individuals of their people– to eat herbs, maize, bean, unprocessed foods, fruits and vegetables.

As regards the indigenous youths of other groups, the respondents also point at certain differences. Among the Chuj, *emnakil* is the most distinguishable value, while for Tzotzils, for example –and with whom they are most in contact with–, it is *a'tel* (labor). This way, they underscore their own history, which contains the experience lived after the war in Guatemala, the period as refugees and transborder life (aspects they share with *Q'anjob'ales* and *Akatecos*). For their part, they find common identification points such as the discrimination lived in the broad social context, which is common for indigenous peoples.

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Historically and culturally, unlike other people such as Zapotecos or Huicholes, from Nayarit, among Chuj the category of *youth* (*kob'estak/kelemtak*) has been present, implying a clear way identifying and describing themselves. The SR of being a *Chuj youth* has been modified on the basis of new life experiences. In the case of *Hakib'al*, migrating and studying university moves them away from the possibility of practicing and learning functions which are generally performed at this stage of life (e.g., the 24 and 12 trades referred as traditional). At the same time, their own conviction and collective claim, their genuine interest in favor of cultural reassertion and conversation with the elderly are straightforward counterweights.

A clear instance of this is the way female youths contest gender relationships, or how youths in general ask for confidence to take up leadership in the community in the future and being considered reliable subjects who may take up responsibilities.

The findings of the present analysis referring to SR and the identity of being a *Chuj youth* in the *Hakib'al* youth collective evince the tensions, agreement and restructuring that help the essentialist vision of native peoples –frequently considered statistical- and recognize their dynamism and vitality. The conclusions we underscore are as follow:

- With the characteristic attitudes of being a *Chuj youth* points at the gradual acquisition of responsibilities, freedom of mobility and action (with gender differences) and made decisions for their future.
- It is verified a particular transformation between *kob'estak* and their SR of being young women, which differs from the vision of their families, partners and friends in the collective. The critical vision of their own culture and of the sociopolitical system in general has been acquired through their participation in the collective, their migration and schooling, and also through their interaction with other individuals alien to their community.
- The stage of youth, extended because of schooling, is underscored as a personal decision despite their age, and even making a family; this points at not seen their youth as an eminently transitional stage.

- Participating in an organization process has enabled them to build intergenerational bridges, learn their culture, identify tensions and roads for dialogue (renovating *lajti'*: *diálogo*, with the intention of reaching an agreement).
- Their approach to dialogue with the elderly helps them to understand and, in spite of some ruptures, accept and support what a *good* Chuj youth means; a fact that manifests in their actions, thinking and current decisions.
- Being a *good* Chuj youth is the comprehensive theory with more descriptive elements and at once the heaviest central element that enables us to see the process of objectification and anchoring more tangibly. Being a *good* Chuj youth (work the land, live in community, practice respect and humbleness) is the main guideline for decision making and acting for the members of *Hakib'al*.
- Being knowledgeable regarding their culture allowed them to have the basis to identify the elements needed to reassert or to integrate in their construction identity as favorable resources for their self-perception and self-determination, which reinforces their resistance to be alienated.
- Being part of a transborder culture is an essential element in the construction of their identity as members of the Chuj people. Guatemala is their origin, past and history, whereas Mexico is the present, here and now.

Some of these elements verify that despite living in spaces saturated with inequality, power and domination, they are part of a generation that has the capacity for political resistance as referred by Urteaga, Cruz, and López (2020). Finally, we recognize that among the reflections, questions, dialogue and tensions, the youths in *Hakib'al* confirm and look for the values of the Chuj axiological structure that are useful to build their being a *Chuj youth*, and by and large to reinforce their being a Chuj. In like manner, they put forward the construction of a SR of being a different Chuj youth, who does not break with the hope of continuity for the central elements of being a Chuj and of the Chuj culture in general, but favors the reassertion of such elements as mechanisms to restate and live their culture as something dynamical, which for their part enable them to face alienation processes effectively perceived by contemporary youths.

Translation: Luis Cejudo-Espinoza

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