## SOCIOCULTURAL IDENTITY

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# BABY JESUS' STANDING<sup>1</sup>, THEFT AND SEARCH – A TRADITIONAL VENEZUELAN CHRISTMAS FEAST

**ABSTRACT** *Baby Jesus' standing, theft and search* is a religious feast that is mainly celebrated within the Andean region of Venezuela, and as time has passed by, it has become part of the national cultural heritage. From our perspective of participant observers of the cultural object, this is an attempt to describe the celebration and to offer a possible hypothesis about the meanings related to the child's search. Considering the generalized significance of this festivity, it would emphasize the fact that this tradition ratifies and evokes the recreation of several biblical episodes and the constant incorporation of Baby Jesus in the family as well as in the community which turns out to be an exaltation of religious, affective, cultural, and social values.

KEY WORDS Christmas Festivities, Venezuelan religious tradition, Baby Jesus, devotion, identity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> In Spanish: Paradura.

## INTRODUCTION

Christmas is a very special time in Venezuela, during which the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is celebrated, hopes are renewed, things are smoothed over people and there is more confidence in the future. It is a time lived embracing these holidays profound meaning for Christians, it is one of the most important holidays in Christianity along with Easter and Pentecost. Christmas is not like any other celebration, is a solemnity which fosters true love for God and our fellowmen. It is a get-together with family, friends and the community where one lives. A gathering that starts in some cases before December as in Zulia State where Christmas begins on November 18th, the patron saint's day: *Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Chiquinquirá*.

Each year when November turns up, gaitas<sup>2</sup> and Christmas carols<sup>3</sup> are played in all Venezuelan radio stations and although the first ones mainly deal with regional concerns as in Zulia state, other issues are also included especially religious and Christmas. The latter two are dedicated to Baby Jesus and Christmas as a polarizer axis.

In other parts of the country, the Christmas experience has special connotations such as in the Andean states. In Mérida, Táchira and Trujillo, a tradition called *Baby Jesus' standing, theft and search* still remains intact; these are celebrations which portray biblical passages of Christ's childhood, specifically the Child's lost and found in the Temple. During these festivities musical stanzas are sung and the rosary is said, in addition, a serenade and a procession with Baby Jesus' image in the hands of his godparents are carried out surrounded by the town people.

This tradition condenses one of the religious expressions for devoted people and as a major cultural attraction for its musical and culinary heritage which plays a crucial role in this festivity. At the same time, it reaches a vivid spiritual depth within familiar warmth (without the priest presence) that leads to a direct, intimate encounter with the human God incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth who is a constant motivation for Christian faith's believers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The gaita, known as *gaita zuliana* or *furro gaita* is an original musical rhythm from Zulia State in Venezuela. Today it is a genre which is related to Christmas in all over Venezuela and in Venezuelan communities around the world. The performers of this genre cover songs themes associated to love, religious figures, humor and protest. The political element is also present in many pieces. However, in many *gaiteras* pieces the chiquinquireño theme – alluding to Chiquinquirá Virgin – and Christmas are predominant. The fundamental instruments in this musical genre are the typical ones: *cuatro, tambora, maracas, charrasca* – wood or metallic cylindrical piece with transverse grooves over which a wooden/metal stick is slipped rhythmically, producing a vibrant sound – and the furruco – or furro, a barrel made of wood with a leather membrane crossed by a stick when it goes up or down, produces a deaf sound.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The word *song of praise (Aguinaldo)* has two meanings in Venezuela. The first relates to gifts, donations or salaries which are usually delivered by end of the year, especially to companies or public institutions employees. The second, song of praise or Christmas Carol, a genre of folk music, also associated with New Year's Eve parties or festivals that are celebrated in Christmas, Christian traditions or the season in general with songs that can be or not accompanied by instruments.

Therefore, *Baby Jesus' standing* will be approached in the following way: we will present its background, description and its analysis as a cultural object. Hence, this article is divided into four sections, namely: festivity background, the standing: demonstration of Baby Jesus' worship, festivity analysis and closing statements.

# FESTIVITY BACKGROUND

On December 25th, before Christianity was established, the winter solstice was celebrated.<sup>4</sup> In this date, the sun was adored and some fêtes were done in order to commemorate its birth. When Christianity began spreading over the lands, the Lord's nativity substituted that of the sun's worship, because, for Christians, Christ was the new sun of justice and salvation, with the Holy Virgin, as salvation dawn, as it is mentioned by the Holy Fathers Saint Ambrosio and Saint Augustine among others.<sup>5</sup>

Within the Hispanic tradition, at Saragossa Council in 380, it was agreed to have special worshiping from December 17th to – every December 25th – Christmas and the Epiphany – every January 6th, the Three Wise Men<sup>6</sup> adoration day. As time passed by, Spain and other countries incorporated various festive elements such as dances, musical pieces and the staging of these cults between the IX and XII centuries, these events took place in temples where priests collaborated and participated in them. They brought excesses, so Pope Innocence III forbade these celebrations to be done inside the Lord's House.

This prohibition of celebrating theatrical scenes and dances in sacred precincts was formalized in the 16th century. This policy, on one hand, led to songs composition, dances and dialogues related to winter festivities, a consequence of this<sup>7</sup>, there was the emergence of the first carols and, on the other hand, it made possible moving the venue from the inside sanctuary to the temple atrium.

When the Spanish Crown arrived to the new continent, settlers and Catholic representatives came with their weapons, titles, laws, power and established a new order incorporating faith practices too.

In Venezuela, as the cities and towns foundation plan progressed, the Franciscans, Dominicans and Capuchins, first congregations settled in Venezuelan land built chapels, churches, convents, taught Catechism, and gave sacraments as well as being in charge of replacing the idol rites by Christian worship, sometimes by inserting Roman Catholic Church ceremonies into pagan traditions. The sun's worship was substituted

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The tradition, from oriental origin, remembered the birthday of the Sun under diverse denominations. Over time, this devotion reached the Roman Empire.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> O. Cullman, Origen de la Navidad, Madrid 1973.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> F.A. González, *Colección de cánones de la Iglesia Española*, Tomo 2, trad. J. Tejada, Madrid 1850.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The word *song of praise (Aguinaldo or villancico)* comes from the villagers or inhabitants of villas, who gave life to spontaneous and simple compositions. Juan de Encina was the most representative author of this genre at the end of the XV century. Although singing initially was about polite love, in the XVI century, the *song of praise* evolved centering on religious topics.

by Eucharist in Mucuchíes and the one for the Moon by the Immaculate Conception in Mucurubá, both Mérida State populations. This was done by the Augustinian father Bartolommeo Diaz at the end of the 16th century, in order to preserve indigenous dances that typically mark Corpus Christi and Christmas festivities and rites<sup>8</sup> in Venezuelan Andes.

During the colonial period, *Baby Jesus' standing* and other Christmas merriments were indeed celebrated in Venezuelan Andes. This tradition initiated by the Augustine who indoctrinated and evangelized that area, is still kept nowadays as an expression of Baby Jesus' worship.

#### THE STANDING: EXPRESSION OF BABY JESUS' CULT

In general, *the standing* is an Andean holiday from Venezuela which ends Christmas in the home where it takes place; this tradition, honoring Baby Jesus, is celebrated every year between January 1st and February 2nd, and is known as La Candelaria day<sup>9</sup>. In an atmosphere full of joy, several Catholic families get together to prepare typical dishes and sweets of the region; then, they pray and sing Christmas carols surrounding the Holy Infant who is in the manger. It is customary that the host house owners distribute candles, then chooses one or more from those present as godparents for Christ Child and once the candles are lit, the procession begins.

Enrique Alí González Ordosgoitti, Darío Novoa, Yolanda Salas and Luis Arturo Domínguez, are some of the most well-known scholars on this topic. They have found

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For more details about the Augustinians in Venezuela and their influence on the veneration festivities for Jesus Holy Childhood, see F. Campo del Pozo, *Historia documentada de los agustinos en Venezuela durante la época colonial*, Caracas 1968.

<sup>9</sup> La Candelaria, as it is popularly known as La Candelaria Virgin, Our Lady of Candelaria, is one of the oldest Marian devotions of Virgin Mary; her feast is celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church on February 2nd. This festival is a popular one held by Christians, in honor of this Marian avocation that appeared in Tenerife (Canary Islands), on the southwest of Spain, at the beginning of the XV century. Initially the Candelaria feast or the daylight had its origin in the east with the name of 'meeting'; it subsequently spreads to the west in the VI century, coming to be held in Rome with a penitential character. This feast is celebrated, according to Roman Catholic calendar, on February 2nd to honor the biblical passage called Baby Jesus' presentation in Jerusalem's Temple (Luke 2; 22-39) and Virgin Mary's purification after childbirth, to fulfill Old Testament law obligations (Leviticus 12, 1-8). This event is known and celebrated with various names: the Lord's presentation, Virgin Mary's purification, the feast of light and the feast of candles; all of these names express the feast meaning. Christ the Light of the world presented by his Mother in the temple has come to illuminate as a candle or lights, from which the name of 'Candelaria' is derived. After the Virgin's apparition in the Canary Islands, and its iconographic identification with this biblical event, the festivity began to be celebrated with a Marian character in 1497, when Tenerife's Conqueror, Alonso Fernandez de Lugo, commemorated the first candles' feast (as Virgen Maria de La Candelaria), coinciding with the purification feast. Later on, this Marian avocation and its fête would be carried to several American nations by Canary Islands emigrants as the Venezuelan case where it is venerated in cities such as Caracas, the capital of the nation, San Diego de Alcala (Carabobo State), Turmero, (Aragua State), Valle de la Pascua (Guárico State) and Barcelona (Anzoátegui State) to mention just a few.

a more or less common structure for *Baby Jesus' standing* ritual in Venezuela. We shall just limit ourselves to present the concurrent lines.<sup>10</sup>

The *standing* encompasses several stages which vary according to the region to which it refers to.

# FIRST

My sweet Jesus My beloved child Come to our souls, Come, do not delay Andean Popular folk song<sup>11</sup>

The *child's theft* is the act that precedes *the standing* and may occur on the same December 25th. After knowing that the child is 'lost', the family begins a symbolic questioning to find out his whereabouts in order to have him back with his godparents<sup>12</sup> and all the guests on the *standing* day.

In it, a confident close person takes little Jesus image from the manger in a moment of distraction and leaves him in another house. This act is the ploy to make the theatrical action of the child search happens. All the community knows his whereabouts, but not the owners, who start the search to find out what had happened.

# SECOND

The portal we're going with great joy to worship the baby son of Maria Andean Popular folk song

The gathering takes place on the agreed day (almost always early evening) previously congregated at the host house, candles distributed, godparents selected (four boys, two

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> To the ones interested in knowing details about the standing in cities, to establish similarities and/ or differences with the ones in towns, we recommend to read D. Novoa Montero, *Paradura del Niño*, Mérida 1957; E. González Ordosgoitti, *Calendario de manifestaciones culturales de Caracas (2.201, fiestas caraqueñas)*, Caracas 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Copla in Spanish.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The godparents are the most important figure in Christian religions, these are the ones who attend other persons (godchildren) in certain sacraments and guide them along all their lives. In *the standing*, to be a godfather means to honor the child, performing the ritual in all its steps. Godparents are by no means the house's owners, unless the standing is limited to familiar intimacy. The standing's godparents must always be four; they receive special colorful candles to be distinguished from the rest of the guests.

married couples, or public administration authorities) with a white handkerchief in hand and the musicians in tune, the ceremony leader indicates the route to be covered. During the event, many people walk up and down town streets, between songs, knocking on family house doors asking if anyone has seen the child. This sort of drama is based on the biblical scene of Jesus' loss in the temple. When the lost infant is found, he is returned to his home by his godparents, who tell about the finding with joy. The child is placed back in his manger, the party starts and later *the standing*.

## THIRD

All on your knees in front of the altar, to kiss the child that today is going to stand up Andean Copla

Once the house's threshold is passed, people are located around the manger according to their hierarchy and affiliation status with the host family to fill in the place; the family elders are sat in the first row, very close to the manger, and young people and other relatives are placed towards the back or in some cases around that space.

All stand up, and the sign of the cross made, while candles are being lit little by little. The participants sing chants which describe *the standing* process in simple six syllables verses full of Christian devotion.

The image of Baby Jesus is taken from the manger and placed in a large handkerchief; then his godparents raised him by each of the handkerchief ends. Then he is paraded in procession, around other houses and streets, with the musicians leading the group, behind them the godparents and then the guests with lit candles. After the procession is over, before enthroning the child, the act of kissing is done, which consists in that everyone kisses the child and makes a wish, some *songs of praise (Aguinaldo)* are sung and the child "standing" is placed back in the manger.

## FOURTH

Christ said that At the Calvary foot Verses are finished The rosary follows. Andean Popular folk song

When this ceremony is completed, prayers, wishes and the rosary begin; at the end of the event, the hosts deliver sponge cake and wine to the guests. Then, the guests go and

the manger will stay with a candle lit next to it and the *Baby standing* until February 2nd, when he is taken from the manger, to finish a ritual that goes over every year as a Christian faith promise of the house owners.

In all stages mentioned before, music plays a leading role. Songs are usually sung in two voices and accompanied by string instruments such as violin, cuatro and guitar. Among the types of songs are *popular folk song*, romances and stanzas for mystical moments, and *songs of praise* and *parrandas* for the ride and festive moments. The musical atmosphere can never be improvised.

First, the musicians play popular pieces. This is done before the ceremony, when various people are coming. Second: They play and sing the Verses of the Child. This is done during the solemnity of the Standing (...) Third: After the Standing (...) popular pieces can be heard again  $(...)^{13}$ .

We see therefore how music is a key element in this festival. Everything moves at the chants' rhythm. After what has been mentioned previously, it is pertinent to add that nowadays the celebration of *Baby Jesus' standing* has transcended the Andean sphere and has spread across different cities in the country. A significant case is one in Caracas. In Caracas, there are notorious demonstrations mostly carried out by Andean origin families that lived in the capital city as Ramírez Ramírez family.

Ramírez Ramírez family carries out every year *Baby Jesus' standing* in their house in Lomas de la Trinidad. This standing locally recognized, is a legacy of their ancestors from Mérida State. In it, several relatives' generations are involved, as well as the community participation because neighbors get into the event's preparations and in the very act. In addition, it is essential to faithfully follow *the Andes standing* steps already passed over generations.

Fanny Ramírez de Ramírez, the hostess who annually invites to *the standing* every January, has 25 years following this tradition and considers it to be a devotion transmitted by his father from whom inherited not only this belief but also a Baby Jesus' image. This piece of deep veneration yearly receives pledges' payment and is given garments among other votive offerings.

Ramírez devotion is so deep-rooted that it has been spread and carried out in UPEL, as a creditable extension course called *"Baby Jesus' Standing*: a tradition case in Venezuela", a higher education institution where Mrs. Ramírez teaches and where teachers and students have accepted this faith avowal as their own that has been taking place the last 17 years.

Another representative example of preserving this tradition is its celebration in the densely inhabited area of Sarría located in El Recreo parish, Caracas. The meeting place is the San Pascual corner, where the Jimenez house is located, a family that has kept this Andean origin tradition for three generations.

Efrén Jimenez, Member of Red Urbana Sociocultural and general director of Alegría Sarrieña a cultural folkloric group founded in December 1981, explained that *Baby Jesus' standing*, though is an Andean tradition, it has been adopted in various com-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> D. Novoa, Paradura...

munities in Caracas with different approaches.<sup>14</sup> He adds that *the standing* evokes, according to the Bible, the disappearance of Jesus as a child at age 12, when during Easter days he gets lost from Joseph and Mary on the way to Bethlehem and some days later he appears in Jerusalem's Temple.

#### **FESTIVITY ANALYSIS**

This lengthy description of the celebrations is the starting point for three considerations, namely, first, the fusion of private and public; second, convergence and coexistence of sacred and profane; and third, the manifestation of collective memory.

#### The private and the public

In this festivity, boundaries between the private space (home-family) and the public (street-community) are diluted, when the central image of the manger is taken outside its usual place and (re-) located in another context. This mobilization updates the *oikos*, the *ecclesia* and the *agora* conceptions.

For Greeks, *Oikos* referred to the private space understood as the place for home, residence, means or vital area where the family lived and matters relating to the economy and home maintenance were solved; in the Aristotelian tradition, the *oikos* continued to be considered as the private, familiar ground. Whereas the *ecclesia* was the meeting place for Assembly and public authorities; and the *agora* were the public and the private. In the latter combined the continuous practice of tradition amongst these two areas, since there was a conversion of problems into public affairs and public welfare into projects and private tasks.

According to Bauman<sup>15</sup>, in the current world, there has been a growth of *ecclesia* (public power) and a decline of *oikos*; whereas the *agora* has been left since there are no spaces where the public and the private can interact, projecting man's solitude in contemporary society.

Following this plot line, we would have that this festivity election was not a casualty or symbolic; but it was determined by the close relation between the public and private spheres – let us remember that moving the natural stage of these celebrations from inside the temples to the atrium, after the XVI century formalization, by the Pope Innocence III forbidding them to be done at the Lord's House, and because it equally unites in "communion" relatives and strangers – it is pertinent to bring about that the *Baby Jesus' standing* carried out by Ramírez Ramírez family, the fact that they receive in this celebration anyone that comes and wishes to take part of it, even if they were not invited or is an unknown one.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The program developed by Alegría Sarrieña includes: words by Maria Auxiliadora de Sarria sanctuary's pastor, staging of Baby Jesus disappearance and worshiping of La Candelaria Virgin, among others.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Z. Bauman, *La sociedad individualizada*, Madrid 2001.

In this, the Andean tradition is also followed. In this sense, it is possible to interpret *the standing, theft and the search of Baby Jesus* as a meeting place in accordance to the Greek meaning and interpretation; in other words, a new *agora*, where the public and private of our lives come together for a festive and repeatable time every year which also means new hopes.

From this perspective, *Baby Jesus' standing* implies a reaffirmation of community bonds, an expression of the community to strengthen their ties in an urban environment which seems to be more and more insecure, hostile, vulnerable and that generates uncertainty and instability; as the public space has stopped representing the community of interests with *ecclesia* conscience, at the same time, the private as a familiar *oikos* has become the spectacle space, especially through the reality shows.

# The sacred and the profane

On the other hand, those blurring boundaries between the private and the public space are also presented in the rooted religious ritual, where the sacred and the profane converge and coexist. It is necessary to point out rooted that during the colony, these borderline manifestations, supported and favored by the Church, served to confirm people's principles and faith; but, since the end of the XVIII century, this institution started disassociating from these popular resources (Saints festivals, temples consecrations, etc.) by changes in its policies and because town people had been taking them, introducing profane elements, and there was no way to control it.

In this type of festivity, the proper sacred dimension comes from Christianity which originated the holiday thematic and structure, and the profane dimension is built from social life current practices, both mixed in a perfect symbiosis where everything happens as if the forces of the sacred and the profane omnipresence produce a suitable and flexible system that corresponds to thought and popular beliefs structures, where religious practices unleash the extreme constraint of the official religion. In Talavera's words<sup>16</sup>, (...) *it is the exercising of the sacred word. It is a representation of the sacred at the profane level, being born from pagan forms, while it is people's expression* (...) is a moment of the popular sacred (...).

It is a popular, spontaneous and religious phenomena, (...) brought by collective creativity. It corresponds to affective needs. It comes from mankind desires to tie the divine with simple, direct and worthwhile relationships. Making and recreating himself, he is constituted by the opposition of the established religion (...) official (...) distant and cold.<sup>17</sup>

So we observed a vibrant religious practice at the level of representations, affects and traditions that without having church support, has perpetuated over time and has been carried out for centuries; hence it is a cultural practice which connects human beings to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> M. Talavera, '¿Dónde esta la religión del pueblo?', *Mundo Nuevo*, Nº 92-93 (July-December 2002), pp. 161-174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> M. Meslin, 'La psychologie devant la religion populaire' in B. Lacroix, P. Boglioni (coords.), *Les religions populaires. Colloque international 1970*, Quebec 1972, pp. 114-170.

the religious essence, that is to say, with the supreme values of spirit and faith. Since *only in a relatively stable world, in which things and acts preserve their value over a long period of time, a period in line with human life length, it is likely to offer such confirmation*<sup>18</sup>, and in this case, that happens.

## **Collective Memory**

Precisely, the preservation of this valuable practice in a long period of time according to human life<sup>19</sup> and its relation to religious and pagan traditions, apart from the historical significance implied in the celebration, this is what allows us to think of it as a component of Venezuelan cultural heritage and its collective memory.

In this sense, Jedlowski<sup>20</sup> proposes that collective memory can be said to be *the accu*mulation of past representations that a group produces, maintains, develops and transmits through the interaction between its members.

One the other hand, Bellelli, Leone & Curci<sup>21</sup>, pose that collective memory is more than shared memories of specific events; it is a systematic approach to the past, which implies distinct explanatory levels, that takes into account group processes and general social dynamics as inter-individual processes.

According to Halbwachs<sup>22</sup>, there are two important features about collective memory. On one hand, 'it does not hold from the past more than what it is still alive or able to live in the group consciousness that keeps it' (131), and, on the other, it always possesses a local dimension, 'it has as support a limited group in time and space' (137). In other words, collective memory is associated and anchored in a specific group, with which it shares space and time. It reconstructs the past, ensures its unification with the group's previous memories. It is concrete and affective and provides the cohesion experience of time and space and their subjection to an order. It gives a sort of framework that accounts for sense wholeness and coherence that presents it as the experience of an organizing center, the beginning of an institution or a group vision of the world.

To this, the importance of the religious space should be added for memory; a relevance given for being one of the privileged places for remembrance. Liturgy, ceremonial and religious experience gather and recreate the collective memory of any faithful to a particular faith. The catholic liturgy is all a recollection of history, of the living, of the dead, of Saints. The Christian ceremonial is built from the need to recreate certain history and myth passages to bear them in mind. The often repeated, not always so conscious, anonymous ritual binds and expresses a world of emotions and beliefs that most of people keep inside. A mythical past that is somehow a promise renewed at each gathering.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> P. Jedlowski, 'Collective memories' in *Proceedings of the EAESP Small Group Meeting on Collective memory. Theoretical, Methodological, and Practical Issues*, Polignano a Mare, 14-17 May 1997, Bari 1997, p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> G. Bellelli, G. Leone, A. Curci, 'Emoción y Memoria Colectiva. El recuerdo de acontecimientos públicos', *Psicología Política*, Nº 18 (1999), p. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> M. Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1997, pp. 131-137.

Hence, we can think about the standing as an expression of the collective memory, as part of a group experience and, therefore, the way in which the group relates their past and takes it as their present and future. As an experience organized by a significance and evaluation social logic that speaks about memories as an experiential practice of a religion lived at the level of representations, affections and traditions.

# **CLOSING STATEMENTS**

The *standing, theft and the search of the child* situates itself as a meeting place according to the Greek meaning; that is to say, a *new agora*, where the public and private of our lives converge in a festive moment which is repeated year after year and that endow with new hope the ones who gather together in it.

This rooted religious ritual allows the private and public boundaries can be interwoven since it promotes community neighbors embracement, it gives a space for strangers to come and pay tribute to Baby Jesus and above all, it generates a cooperative spirit among those involved in this festivity where sacred and profane come closer and coexist.

Hence the standing rememorizes a community united over a celebration that allows the establishment of permanent relations with a historical past when social mechanisms are cracking; this is, looking for a way to connect younger generations with the older ones who have built a legacy of traditions linked to folklore, to the national, to Venezuelan. When assuming these cultural phenomena as part of a community identity, traditions become living manifestations of a historical, cultural, syncretic heritage and uniqueness which consolidate a country's idiosyncrasies even though economic and cultural globalization wants to slowly erase these regional and national culture expressions. It also means the reaffirmation of community bonds where family ties are consolidated in an urban environment which is a form of emotional expression of members of that community.

Nowadays, *Baby Jesus' standing* is much more than a Christmas holiday, is a place full of meaning. It has become one of Venezuela's intangible cultural heritages, as long as it is a practice that communities recognize as part of their identity and collective memory. "It is, consequently, about a dynamic and complex set of social processes, practices, values and goods that society recreates, enriches and passes on as part of their identity".<sup>23</sup> Its preservation is a responsibility that exceeds the domestic surroundings, that is why, to-day, there are groups and institutions which organize and carry out these celebrations – such as Alegría Sarrieña and Bigott Foundation, just to mention two examples-in order to pass on these national identity values to other generations and to make this tradition known, this symbolic good, for the population to continue celebrating it over time.

The word tradition (from the Latin noun *traditio*, and this from the verb *tradere*, 'to deliver' equals 'delivery', what passes on from one to another because it deserves to be kept, not any custom. In this sense, Baby Jesus' standing is a Venezuelan tradition.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> UNESCO Convención para la salvaguardia del patrimonio cultural inmaterial, París 2003, p. 2.

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