

The Oral
Legacy of the
Cult of San
Benito Agé:
Identity, Time
and Space in
the South of
Lake
Maracaibo



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MARACAIBO

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Jorge Fymark Vidovic López, Julio César García Delgado (authors).



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In "The Oral Legacy of the Cult of San Benito Agé: Identity, Time and Space in the South of Lake Maracaibo," the cultural and spiritual richness of the cult of San Benito Agé in southern Lake Maracaibo is explored, highlighting orality as a key tool to preserve its ancestral memory. Through testimonies of practitioners, the traditions, rituals, and symbols that connect African with Catholic elements are analyzed, revealing a unique syncretism. The research addresses how orality, music, and geographical spaces shape collective identities and cultural resistance. With an interdisciplinary approach, history, anthropology, and geography are interwoven to understand this cultural expression as an act of re-existence in the face of coloniality.

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Prolegomena

In the early colonial context of America, discussions began about the enslavement of the indigenous people and their treatment after the arrival of the Spanish in the Indies. The worrying decline in the aboriginal population triggered serious accusations that began in the early sixteenth century. These accusations led to certain provisions of Isabella the Catholic, in which the slavery of the indigenous people was prohibited (Bird Simpson, 1970; Konetzke, 1972).¹ As a result, the peninsulars faced a serious problem: the shortage of labor to work in the production units, both agricultural and mining, that had been established in the Spanish overseas dominions.

The Spanish Crown's response was to approve the African slave trade to America, which determined their forced transfer and generated one of the most numerous and permanent migrations in universal history. The slave trade was a very ancient system in Europe, Asia and Africa, and continued in the same context in America, under conditions of servitude and inhumanity due to its commercial nature.

The Hispanics' intention in preferring Africans was based on the higher yield of production, because they possessed the necessary labor force to work in the different production units established in the Indies. Therefore, the *modus operandi* of the colonizer, in terms of trade, not only lay in the purpose of exploiting the territorial wealth of the American continent, but also in human trafficking, the slave trade. These peo-

1 The reaction of the natives of Hispaniola, due to the excessive work to which they were forced, was to revolt against the authority of Columbus himself, in 1495. As a result of these events, the rebels were subdued and enslaved, which made it possible for greater abuses to be committed against the aboriginal population. This situation determined the action of Isabella the Catholic, who relieved Columbus of civil authority and in his place appointed Nicolás de Ovando, as Governor of Hispaniola, who proceeded to regulate the actions of the Hispanics through his ordinances.

ple represented the ideal labor force to continue with the production process, even achieving maximum performance.

From the sixteenth century, the slaveholders had already begun to bring to America, not only African men, but also women. In this regard, Gamboa (2016) explains that by 1518 the first ship with enslaved Africans was chartered to America. In this way, the shipments and arrivals of Africans increased, until in 1713 they began to exceed 40,000 people per year. From 1741 onwards, arrivals ranged between 40,000 and 60,000 people per year, figures that would remain until 1840, when they would begin to decline.

Thus, during the sixteenth century in America, trafficking was encouraged accompanied by atrocity that would not only affect the indigenous people and also the Afro people. While the conquistadors were in charge of continuing to enrich the crown, the original settlers and at the same time both the Amerindians and the African newcomers continued to resist. The indigenous people were dispossessed, and the Africans were forced to remain on a continent in which their original inhabitants were forced to uproot, something that the Africans had already experienced in their own land, because many of them were already slaves in Europe and even in their own continent.

In this sense, Susan Buck-Morss argues that the political metaphor pointed out by Brion Davis began to take root at a time when the economic practice of slavery, the systematic and highly sophisticated capitalist slavery of non-European peoples as a labor force in the colonies, was increasing quantitatively and intensifying qualitatively. To the point that, in the mid-eighteenth century, the entire Western economic system was based on it, paradoxically facilitating the global spread of the Enlightenment ideals with which it was in open contradiction.

The Africans came to America, naked, without material goods, but they brought their thoughts, their organizational systems, their beliefs, their structures of authority and in general their cultural baggage that was readapted in the Indies to what Nina Friedman calls Africanism (1992:545), which assumed different manifestations throughout the New World, those that endure to the present day, despite the fact that

the repression of the peninsulars was not enough to demolish the anthropological context of those peoples. In this way, when we talk about Africa in America, we point to a series of continental singularities, which include indigenous and African ancestral practices, which make up history and define the cultural roots of the continent. In this sense, the geography of the continent also played an important role, considering the geographical and economic specifications, where black slaves were considered necessary. Such specifications, in turn, represented an analogical character for the Afro-descendant people in America, since they themselves modeled the landscape.

These men and women were forcibly transferred, in the condition of slaves, in particular to the coastal lands of the south and the Caribbean, a scenario that came to represent that analogical and metaphorical character between the landscape of the African lands and the landscape of the Caribbean-coastal geography. From this context, one can appreciate the transcendence not only historical, but also geographical, of Africanism on the continent. In this way, geo-human dynamics make it possible to determine the singularities of ancestral Africa in continental America, from this point of view

Geography is just beginning to examine the African diaspora. For this reason, the topic has yet to emerge as a distinct field of study. There are no methodological aspects that prevent geographers from influencing research on the African diaspora. Indeed, several well-established academic traditions in geography are especially pertinent for contemporary scholarly endeavors to arrive at a full understanding of this long and tragic chapter in human history. (Carney, 2006: 148)

In this way, extensive areas of the geography of the American continent would serve for the development of African identity, as a survival of emigrants, their traditions and their customs. In this historical and geographical framework, the space south of Lake Maracaibo is studied, between the coast of Lake Maracaibo and delimited by the currents of the Pocó River to the north, and Tucaní to the south, it is currently politically divided into two different municipalities; the Sucre governed by the state of Zulia, and by the parish of Palmarito, municipality of Tulio Febres Cordero, state of Mérida, where splendid forests of cocoa were

found, a product native to that area, for which reason since the mid-sixteenth century, haciendas were established for its production, which determined the introduction of the African population, who made that soil as their own and their descendants currently live in it. Depositories of their traditions, especially the religious sphere, in which processes of syncretism were consolidated.

The work is based on the collection of information from oral sources, in interviews collected among the Afro-descendant population, especially in the accounts of qualified witnesses. In this sense, it is considered that orality from all areas addresses an ancestral worldview, both earthly and spiritual, which in its various forms and representations leads to a symbolic syncretism. To an aestheticity in which different groups of individuals are based and transcended. In this way, they can remain, survive, transcend. Therefore, orality serves as an epistemic-anthropological and ancestral safeguard, which derives in the cultural-substantial syncretism of peoples, in their evolution. Thus, permeable in interaction with other cultures, without losing their essence. In this way, orality anchors the episteme of his psyche to the property of the origin of knowledge; to the right to recognition of their ancestral-patrimonial being throughout history.

I. The evolution of Oral History: from the margins to academic legitimacy

Broadly speaking, Oral History is defined as a subbranch of historical science that has as its central axis of study human subjectivity as a determining element of practices and historical work (Pozzi, 2012). According to Pozzi, not every oral question constitutes Oral History *per se*, since there are multiple forms of valid testimonies that cannot necessarily be considered as such. Oral History, in this way, seeks to trigger memory in order to construct a source that allows for a more complete form of understanding of the social process.

Likewise, Oral History is also defined as a research technique that allows the reconstruction of the past from the perspective of social actors, giving voice to those made invisible by traditional historical sources (Ferrer & Carrillo, 2023). According to the authors, this methodology makes it possible to recreate a multiplicity of points of view that enrich historical understanding, allowing a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past. Oral History is characterized by being a communicative system associated with the context that energizes and enhances traditional written sources. As Ferrer and Carrillo (2023) point out, “the spoken word illuminates the written word, relativizing it and giving it the appropriate human perspective and contour” (p. 19). This complementarity between oral and written sources allows us to obtain a more complete and truthful vision of historical events.

Oral History emerged as a formal discipline in the post-World War II period, although its roots can be traced back to oral traditions that have existed since time immemorial. As Thompson (2017) points out, the decisive turning point occurred in 1948 when Allan Nevins established the first Oral History program at Columbia University, thus marking the beginning of its academic institutionalization.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Oral History underwent a significant expansion, driven by technological development that allowed the recording of testimonies and by a growing interest in recovering the voices of groups traditionally marginalized from official historiography. As Portelli (2016) argues, this period was crucial because it represented a paradigmatic shift in the way of understanding and constructing historical knowledge, challenging the absolute supremacy of written sources.

The evolution of Oral History can be understood in three fundamental stages:

Emergency Phase (1948-1970): In this initial stage, Oral History focused mainly on the collection of testimonies of prominent figures and the creation of oral archives. The methodology was relatively simple and was based on structured interviews that sought to complement the existing written documentation. However, as Joutard (2015) points out, already in this period voices began to emerge that advocated expanding the scope of the discipline to popular sectors and subaltern groups.

Consolidation Phase (1970-1990): During this period, Oral History underwent a profound methodological and epistemological transformation. More sophisticated interview techniques were developed, ethical protocols were established for working with informants, and theorizing about the nature of memory and its relationship to history began. The influence of social movements such as feminism and anti-colonialism led to a greater emphasis on the recovery of marginalized voices and the questioning of dominant historical narratives.

Maturity Phase (1990-present): In recent decades, Oral History has reached a high degree of theoretical and methodological sophistication. There has been greater integration with other disciplines and new approaches have been developed that consider aspects such as the performativity of oral testimony, the social construction of memory and intersubjectivity in the interview process.

The academic legitimization of Oral History has been accompanied by important theoretical and methodological debates. One of the most significant has been the discussion on the reliability and nature of memory as a historical source. Oral historians have argued that “distortions” of

memory, far from being an obstacle, are themselves a valuable source of information about how individuals and communities construct meaning from their past experiences.

Digitalization and new technologies have had a profound impact on the practice of Oral History. The possibility of storing, processing and disseminating oral testimonies in digital format has significantly expanded the scope and possibilities of the discipline. However, it has also raised new ethical and methodological challenges related to privacy, informed consent, and the long-term preservation of oral materials.

The audiovisual record is a crucial tool for preserving these oral testimonies, capturing not only the words but also contextual elements such as gestures, emotions and environments that enrich the historical information. As the authors point out, “the audiovisual record is incorporated as a contribution to historical study that enriches the testimonial collection, creating a new source” (Bermúdez & Rodríguez, 2009, p. 328). This technique makes it possible to overcome the limitations of written transcriptions by preserving non-verbal elements that are fundamental for interpreting the testimony.

The integration of Oral History into anthropological methodology

The incorporation of Oral History into anthropological practice has represented a natural and fruitful convergence between both disciplines. This integration has significantly enriched the understanding of cultural and social dynamics, providing a deeper diachronic perspective to anthropological studies.

Since its inception, Anthropology has recognized the importance of oral narratives as a source of cultural information. However, the systematic incorporation of Oral History methodologies has allowed the development of more sophisticated approaches for the analysis of collective memory and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and cultural practices.

This integration can be analyzed at several levels:

- **Methodological level:** Anthropology has adopted and adapted the interview techniques developed by Oral History, incorpora-

ting them into its repertoire of ethnographic methods. This has resulted in mutual enrichment: while Oral History has provided specific techniques for the collection and analysis of testimonies, anthropology has contributed its expertise in participant observation and holistic cultural analysis.

- **Theoretical level:** The confluence between Oral History and anthropology has generated new conceptual frameworks to understand the relationship between memory, identity and culture. As Vansina (2014) points out, this integration has allowed the development of more sophisticated approaches to the analysis of oral tradition and its role in cultural reproduction.
- **Epistemological level:** The combination of perspectives has led to a deeper questioning of the nature of historical and cultural knowledge. A greater awareness has developed about the multiplicity of voices and narratives that constitute collective memory, as well as about the importance of considering power relations in the construction of historical knowledge.

The integration of Oral History into anthropology has been particularly fruitful in several fields of research:

- **Collective memory studies:** The combination of approaches has allowed us to analyze how communities construct and maintain their collective memories, and how these memories influence cultural identity and social cohesion.
- **Research on cultural change:** Oral History has provided valuable tools to document and analyze processes of cultural change from the perspective of the social actors themselves.
- **Studies of resistance and agency:** Methodological integration has been especially useful to investigate how subaltern groups maintain and transmit their memories of resistance and adaptation in the face of dominant power structures.

This disciplinary convergence has had significant implications for contemporary anthropological practice. It has led to a greater emphasis on the temporal dimension of cultural phenomena and to a greater at-

tention to the ways in which communities construct and maintain their historical narratives.

As a result of this integration, new methodological approaches have been developed that combine the ethnographic depth characteristic of anthropology with the attention to temporality and memory of Oral History. These approaches have proven particularly valuable for:

- The study of long-term processes in specific communities
- Documentation of traditional knowledge and its transmission
- The analysis of sociocultural transformations from the perspective of local actors
- Conflict research and reconciliation processes

The integration of Oral History into anthropology continues to evolve, adapting to new contexts and challenges. Digital technologies are opening up new possibilities for the documentation and analysis of oral testimony, while debates on ethics and representation continue to generate important reflections on the practice of both disciplines.

II. Theoretical and epistemic resources around Oral History

The concept of science, *broadly speaking*, has traditionally been framed as a set of intellectual activities aimed at knowing and interpreting. For a long time, science has been understood as a set of intellectual activities aimed at knowing and interpreting reality, as well as studies carried out by research institutions (Brom, 2003). However, this model of science, considered static and constant, is a product of the West and has its origins in Greek philosophy and the European Enlightenment (Delgado & Rist, 2016). This approach was characterized by a mechanistic view of the world, prioritizing positivist and quantitative methods, and organizing itself into specialized disciplines with their own theoretical frameworks. Scientific communities, such as universities and research institutes, accepted and consolidated this model, which justified their knowledge in the face of “non-scientific knowledge” and legitimized the West’s domination over the rest of the world.

Although this paradigm remained dominant until the end of the twentieth century, and even today it is still assumed by the scientific community, a qualitative and constructivist approach emerged that expanded the epistemological and ontological foundations of positivism. This new paradigm prioritizes the subjective and empathic understanding of social processes over their causal explanation (Delgado & Rist, 2016).

This process of reconceptualization of the relationship between modern Western science and society prompted the development of multi, inter, and transdisciplinary approaches. Multidisciplinarity implies the approach to a topic from several disciplines without epistemic integration; interdisciplinarity entails a partial integration of knowledge; and

transdisciplinarity implies complete integration, transcending the disciplines of origin and generating new perspectives.

Thus, interscientific dialogue becomes fundamental to be able to talk about inter and transdisciplinarity, which in turn allows complex problems to be addressed in a more comprehensive way. An example of this dialogue would be historical anthropology or ethnohistory, which emerged from the confluence between history and anthropology, and which has problematized its own epistemological status (Areces, 2008).

The study of time, space and culture as indissoluble categories is fundamental to understanding social reality. Mosonyi (1982) points out that the memory of peoples, their territories and the human relations present in them must be analyzed as dynamics in permanent transformation, interconnected with each other. Human beings develop in changing times-spaces-lives, with logics, values and forms of social organization in constant evolution.

According to Santos (2000), space can be understood as an indissoluble set of systems of objects and systems of actions. This allows us to identify analytical categories such as landscape, territorial configuration, division of labor, productive space, and content-forms. Likewise, the study of space involves debates about problems such as region, place, networks and scales. For his part, Elias (1989) conceives of time as the relationship between positions and periods of factual processes in motion, human perceptions elaborated with certain knowledge.

Vargas-Arenas and Sanoja (2012) argue that every space is social, as it reflects the processes of production and reproduction of social relations, being an active dimension of the history of the societies that inhabit it. Therefore, geohistorical study requires an integrated definition of time and space, where one category constantly subordinates the other, defining human endeavor. Santos (2000) and Elias (1989) agree that time, space and the world are historical realities, mutually convertible.

In this sense, culture emerges as a category inseparable from the study of space and time. According to Tylor (in Kottak, 2007), culture encompasses knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and capacities acquired by human beings as a member of a society. Geertz defines

it as a system of culturally learned symbols and meanings, while Kottak (2007) conceives it as a collective attribute, socially transmitted.

Abric (2001) establishes that social representations reconstruct the object (space, techniques, etc.) in a way that is consistent with the cultural evaluation system of the individual or group. Therefore, the subject-object relationship determines the object itself. Thus, the notion of space is shaped by identity, structure and meaning, forming an indissoluble triad with time and culture that defines human action.

Oral History and Anthropology have maintained a close relationship over time, mutually enriching each other in their research. Oral History emerged as a discipline in the mid-twentieth century, with the aim of rescuing and preserving the voices and memories of individuals and communities that were not recorded in traditional written sources. On the other hand, Anthropology, as a discipline that studies the human being in its entirety, has found in Oral History an invaluable tool to understand cultures and societies in a deeper way.

Key concepts in Oral History and Anthropology

Oral History is, fundamentally, a story. It is the life of people, their imaginaries, their beliefs, their memories, in short, their worldview, which is transformed into a story in which the passage of time is constantly recreated and thought about. It was, in fact, the first way to tell the story. Oral History is a powerful tool that allows us to give voice to those whose experiences and perspectives have been marginalized or ignored in conventional historical narratives. By focusing on personal narratives, Oral History not only collects facts and events, but also captures the richness of everyday life, cultural values, and emotions that shape an individual's or community's identity.

Being a living and dynamic story, Oral History transcends the mere transmission of historical data to enter the subjective world of people, revealing their dreams, fears, joys and struggles. Through these narratives, a bridge is built between the past and the present, allowing future generations to understand not only the historical events, but also the humanity and complexity of those who lived through them.

By rescuing the voices of those who have been silenced or marginalized in official history, Oral History challenges dominant narratives and enriches our understanding of the past. By giving space to multiple perspectives and experiences, diversity and inclusion are promoted in the construction of collective memory.

In Oral History, key concepts include memory, narrative, subjectivity, orality, intergenerational transmission of knowledge, the voice of the individual and the community, among others. In Anthropology, fundamental concepts are culture, identity, diversity, ethnography, participant observation, social interaction, worldview, among others. These concepts are intertwined in the study of human societies and cultures, allowing a more holistic and deeper understanding of them.

The integration of Oral History in anthropological methodology

The incorporation of Oral History into anthropological practice has represented a natural and fruitful convergence between both disciplines. This integration has significantly enriched the understanding of cultural and social dynamics, providing a deeper diachronic perspective to anthropological studies.

Since its inception, Anthropology has recognized the importance of oral narratives as a source of cultural information. However, the systematic incorporation of Oral History methodologies has allowed the development of more sophisticated approaches for the analysis of collective memory and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and cultural practices.

Both disciplines share an interdisciplinary approach in their research methodology, allowing the combination of ethnographic, ethnobotanical and statistical methods for a deeper analysis of oral testimonies (Brown, 2017). The collaboration between Oral History and anthropology is evidenced in studies addressing issues such as the prolonged strike and the formation of mining cooperatives, providing a more complete understanding of historical events by integrating multiple perspectives (Smith & García, 2020).

Both disciplines also face epistemological and critical challenges in their research, with Oral History sometimes being questioned for its oral nature and its supposed unreliability compared to written sources (Jones, 2018). Despite these criticisms, Oral History enriches historical understanding by incorporating the voices and experiences of ordinary individuals into the historical narrative (Brown & García, 2019).

In summary, Oral History and Anthropology maintain a close relationship, sharing research methods, interdisciplinary approaches and facing common epistemological challenges. Oral History excels in gender anthropology by rescuing female voices, while its collaboration with anthropology in historical studies allows for a more holistic understanding of past events. Despite criticism, Oral History brings a unique and valuable perspective to anthropological and historical research.

Contemporary approaches in Oral History and Anthropology

Oral History and Anthropology have evolved towards methodologies that integrate decolonial and critical perspectives. Authors such as Joanne Rappaport (2005) emphasize the importance of indigenous and Afro-descendant narratives as acts of resistance to cultural homogenization. For his part, Alessandro Portelli (1991) redefines Oral History not only as a source of data, but as a space for the negotiation of meanings between the interviewer and the interviewee, where subjectivity is an epistemological value.

In the field of visual anthropology, Sarah Pink (2015) proposes ethnographic methods that combine audiovisual records with oral testimonies, allowing a multidimensional capture of cultural practices. This is key to studying rituals such as the cult of San Benito Agé, where music, dance and symbols require sensory analysis.

Interdisciplinarity and ethnohistory

As a hybrid field, Ethnohistory has incorporated tools from archaeology and linguistics to reconstruct marginalized histories. Serge Gruzinski (2002) analyzes how religious syncretism in Latin America reflects strategies of cultural adaptation and survival. This approach is relevant to understanding the fusion between African Voodoo and Catholicism in the cult studied.

Collective memory and intergenerational transmission

Paul Connerton (1989) points out that bodily practices (such as drum beats in the Chimbánqueles) are vehicles of unwritten memory. This idea is aligned with orality as a tool for identity preservation in Afro-descendant communities, where the ritual acts as a “living archive”.

Time, culture and space

In anthropological and geohistorical studies, the time-culture-space triad is considered fundamental to the understanding of the social and cultural interactions that define the actuation of human beings. These three dimensions —time, culture and space— are not static or independent objects; instead, they constitute a constant relationship of dependence, subordination, and coexistence. Each of them is essential to understanding the social dynamics that are part of the human environment.

According to Mosonyi (1982), the analysis of the collective memory of peoples, their territories and the human interactions that take place in them, should not be understood as a static phenomenon, but as dynamic processes in constant evolution, interrelated with each other. Human beings, immersed in times, spaces and life experiences, continuously transform their logics, values, social and civic codes, as well as their forms of organization to satisfy needs. In this context, some peoples coexist and coexist, while others exercise practices of exploitation, expropriation and exploitation both internally and externally, imposing relations of domination according to their interests.

On the other hand, Santos (2000) argues that, based on the conception of space as an indivisible entity made up of systems of objects and actions, it is possible to identify its internal analytical categories. Among these categories we can find landscape, territorial organization, geographical distribution of work, productive space, structural rigidities and forms that combine content and structure. Likewise, based on this same idea, the issue of spatial delimitation is addressed, promoting discussions on concepts such as region, place, interconnection networks and scales of analysis.

Meanwhile, Elias (1989) uses the term “time” to refer to the dynamic relationship between positions and periods of two or more processes in

constant evolution. In these processes, the unfolding events are perceptible to the extent that human beings interpret them through their prior knowledge. In this way, time is understood as a communicable social symbol that, within a specific society and with the support of sensitive models based on sounds, allows a mnemonic representation to be transmitted from one person to another, experiential, although not directly perceptible by the senses (Elias, 1989:19).

According to Tylor (in Kottak, 2007:42), culture is considered to be the entire complex that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other habits and capacities acquired by man as a member of society. Meanwhile, Geertz defines culture as ideas based on cultural learning and symbols. Likewise, cultures are sets of “control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, constructions, what computer technicians call programs – to govern behavior” (in Kottak, 2007:43). For his part, Kottak argues that culture is an attribute not of individuals per se, but of individuals as members of groups. It is transmitted in society... Shared cultural beliefs, values, memories, hopes, and ways of thinking and acting override the differences between people. Enculturation unifies people by providing us with common experiences (2007:44).

According to Vargas-Arenas and Sanoja (2012), since space is the environment where human beings develop, it can be understood as a social space. These authors argue that the nature of a specific social space reflects the process by which social relations are produced and reproduced, constituting in itself an active dimension of the history of the societies that inhabit it. Likewise, when analyzing the historical production of a social space within historical processes, they seek to determine how the material causal relations of production are generated in that space in interaction with socio-spatial subjects. At the same time, they also explore the way in which social relations are constructed and configured in this space, underlining the dynamic connection between the material and the social in their historical evolution.

We can assume time and space as physical properties or discuss their relevance as such, although the aspect that concerns us in this text is that the understanding of them is inherently a cultural experience, while the

notions, representations and imaginaries around time and space with cultural perceptions and constructions, that are conditioned to human experience and the latter is also determined by these, insofar as they are in a mutual subordination. For example, the linear or cyclical notion of time is a cultural construct that comes largely from the religious notion. The linearity of time is mainly given by the Abrahamic religions, while the cyclical is fundamentally present in the Darmic religions.

For Oral History studies under a cultural approach, we consider fundamental the definition of three categories: time, culture and space; the first as one of the central objects of history, the second, of geography, while the third encompasses the interest of anthropology. The three, from a geohistorical and cultural perspective, are indissoluble, where they are constantly subordinated to each other, in such a way that they remain in equivalent conditions, that define human endeavor.

Santos (2000) states:

Time, space and world are historical realities, which must be mutually convertible, if our epistemological concern is totalizing. At any given moment, the starting point is human society in process, that is, in itself. This realization takes place on a material basis: space and its use, time and its use, materiality and its various forms, actions and their various aspects (p. 47).

For his part, Elias (1989):

The concepts of “time” and “space” belong to the basic means of orientation of our social tradition. We will better understand their relationship, if, once again, we go back to the action that underlies the noun. “Time” and “space” are conceptual symbols of certain types of social activities and institutions; allow men to orient themselves in the face of positions or distances between these positions that events of all kinds take both in their reciprocal relationship within the same process, and with respect to homologous positions within another process, normalized as a measure... Positional relationships in “time” and “space” are the relationships between observable events that remain standing, when all possible links of events within a specific order of magnitudes (e.g., galaxies and grains of sand or whales, men and bacilli) are dispensed with, and then this residue is related or “synthesized”. Both concepts are therefore situated at a very high level of abstraction and synthesis and express merely positional relationships of observable events (p. 111).

Santos, following the lines of Elias on time as a succession of events, the so-called historical time, was for a long time considered as a basis of geographical study. However, the Brazilian geographer raises the question of whether this is the case or, on the contrary, the geographical study is not “much more that other way of seeing time as simultaneity, since there is no space in which the use of time is identical for all men, companies, institutions” (Santos, 2000:134).

If we rescue the ideas of these authors, particularly those of Vargas-Arenas and Sanoja (2012), in which all space is social, due to human presence and its consequent interactions, it is opportune, then, to recognize the symbolic processes that occur in space, which is why we consider the term “culture”, a category broadly defined from anthropology. A space is not neutral, empty, as long as it is created and represented by human communities, whether they inhabit it or not. It is the recreation of spaces in the imaginaries and the representation of these, which are not an arbitrary production of individuals; they are a social construction, social representations.

The time-culture-space triad constitutes a fundamental dimension for understanding human and social dynamics. According to Villasante (cited by Carrero, 2004), space is defined based on three basic properties: identity, structure, and meaning. Identity refers to the degree of distinction of an element in relation to its environment; structure involves the spatial relationships or patterns between an object, the observer, and other elements; and meaning encompasses the emotional or practical value that an element possesses, whether mythical, social, economic, political, ancestral, patrimonial or utilitarian. These properties do not exist in isolation, but are immersed in a dynamic interrelation with time and culture.

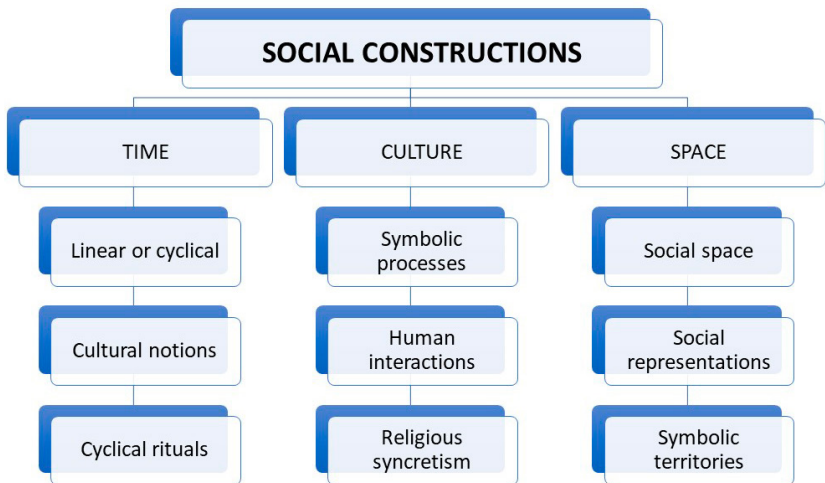
Time —or at least linear time— can be understood as the succession of events that take place in a given space. This space is neither static nor neutral, but is shaped by the social interactions and cultural models that define it. In the words of Di Meo (1998), territory emerges as a result of the interaction between socio-spatial structures and relations, which allows it to be interpreted as a cultural product. Thus, geographical space is not only a physical setting, but also a socialized environment where multidimensional aspects converge: the position of the individual in so-

ciety, cultural models, collective memory and the various social relations that make up a particular way of conceiving and inhabiting the territory.

Social geography plays a key role in this analysis, as it seeks to decipher how social actors construct their daily itineraries and paths within this complex framework. From this perspective, territory is not simply a physical place, but a space loaded with meanings that reflect the culture and historical experiences of those who inhabit it. As Di Meo (1998) points out, human beings, both in their individuality and in their belonging to social groups, are influenced by multiple geographical references that shape their perception and use of space.

In this framework, the time-culture-space triad cannot be understood as a sum of independent elements, but as an integrated system where each component subordinates and influences the others. Time gives meaning to the actions that occur in a defined space, while culture shapes the ways in which these spaces are perceived, lived, interpreted, and transformed. This interdependence highlights the importance of considering space as a dynamic and cultural construct, whose significance varies according to historical and social contexts.

Figure 1. Diagram of conceptual relations around the categories Time-Culture-Space



Source: Vidovic and García, 2025.

Therefore, analyzing this triad from a relational perspective allows for a better understanding of how human beings interact with their environment, creating territories that reflect both their material needs and their symbolic and cultural values. This underscores the relevance of multidisciplinary approaches to study the complex relationships between time, culture, and space in the shaping of human societies.

The constructed semantic network (see Figure 1) highlights the interactions between time, culture, and space as social constructs. The central node, *Social Constructions*, links these three axes, showing how time is perceived culturally, space is charged with symbolic meanings, and culture mediates human experiences. This approach facilitates the analysis of phenomena such as religious rituals, where syncretism and orality connect past, present and future in a symbolic territory. The network highlights the multidimensionality and dynamism of these categories.

Triad of time, culture and space from Latin American perspectives

The triad of time, culture and space is articulated in Latin America as a field of struggle and reexistence. Authors such as García Canclini, Dussel and Segato provide keys to decolonize these categories, while practices such as Chimbángueles demonstrate that orality is not a vestige of the past, but a political act that redefines the present. This theoretical corpus invites us to rethink anthropological research from a decolonial ethic, where circular time, lived space, and embodied culture dialogue on equal terms.

Néstor García Canclini (Mexico/Argentina): In *Hybrid Cultures* (1990), he argues that time and space are reconfigured in contexts of globalization, generating “deterritorialized cultures” that challenge physical and symbolic borders. His approach is crucial to analyze rituals such as the cult of San Benito Agé, where the ancestral and the colonial coexist in the same space.

Darcy Ribeiro (Brazil): In *The Civilizing Process* (1968) he links culture to long-term historical processes, highlighting how indigenous and African temporalities resist Eurocentric homogenization. For Ribeiro,

the American space is a “civilizational laboratory” where multiple temporalities are intertwined.

Arturo Escobar (Colombia): in *Territories of Difference* (2008) he proposes a “political ecology of space” that integrates cultural and temporal dimensions. Her concept of place as a node of biocultural relations is key to understanding how Afro-descendant communities resignify territories through ritual practices.

Enrique Dussel (Argentina/Mexico): in *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977) he criticizes Western linear time as a tool of domination. He proposes a “dialectical temporality” where past, present and future interpellate, relevant to the study of rituals that re-actualize ancestral myths (such as the myth of Agé).

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (Bolivia): with the *Sociology of the Image* (2015), she explores how Andean communities articulate cyclical time (ayllu) and collective memory. His idea of the “continuous present” applies to Afro-descendant orality, where the mythical past is lived in each drum beat.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Portugal/Brazil): in *Epistemologies of the South* (2014) he defends “non-linear temporalities” that include subaltern knowledge. He proposes Walter Benjamin’s time-now as a framework for analyzing cultural resistances.

Walter D Mignolo (Argentina): in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2003), he introduces the “coloniality of being”, which links culture, race and space. His critique of the “geopolitics of knowledge” helps to unravel how religious syncretism (voodoo/Catholicism) is a form of cultural agency.

Gloria Anzaldúa (Mexico/USA): in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) she defines the border as a liminal space where times and cultures collapse. His concept of miscegenation explains Afro-descendant orality as an act of “cultural translation”.

Catherine Walsh (USA/Ecuador): *From Critical Interculturality* (2009), analyzes how Afro-indigenous cultural practices construct “other spaces” (heterotopias) that challenge colonial modernity.

The construction of a theoretical framework to analyze the triad of time, culture, and space in Latin American contexts requires an interdisciplinary approach. Authors from the region have provided conceptual tools that challenge Eurocentric paradigms, highlighting the agency of historically marginalized communities. It then delves into the contributions of key thinkers and their approaches to this triad.

Time: decolonization of temporalities

The linear conception of time, imposed by colonial modernity, has been questioned from Latin America. Enrique Dussel, in *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977), argues that European historical time was constructed as a single narrative that made indigenous and Afro-descendant temporalities invisible. He proposes a “dialectical temporality” where past and present coexist, allowing ancestral myths (such as that of Agé) to be re-actualized in contemporary rituals. For example, in the cult of San Benito Agé, the founding myth of Agé (a divinity linked to the waters) is not an event of the past, but a living reality that is recreated in each drum beat.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, from Andean sociology, introduces the concept of “continuous present” (2015), where time is not a straight line, but a cyclical flow. In Aymara communities, the past (nayra) and the future (qhipa) are intertwined in practices such as ayni (reciprocity). This idea applies to Afro-descendant orality: the “touches of obligation” in Chimbángueles not only commemorate seventeenth-century disasters (earthquakes, floods), but also activate a collective memory that prevents future cataclysms. Thus, time becomes an act of resistance against colonial oblivion.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in *Epistemologies of the South* (2014), expands this debate by proposing “non-linear temporalities” that include subaltern knowledge. For example, in the Caribbean, the time of the African diaspora is experienced as a “time-now” (Benjaminian concept), where slavery is not a concluded event, but a wound that is reopened in current racism. This explains why rituals such as the Chimbángueles are spaces where historical trauma is exorcised.

Culture: hybridization as a strategy of resistance

Néstor García Canclini, in *Hybrid Cultures* (1990), redefines Latin American culture as a process of “recombination” between local and global traditions. For example, the religious syncretism in the cult of San Benito Agé (where the Catholic saint embodies the African deity Agé) is not a mere mixture, but a tactic to preserve identities under colonial repression. Canclini argues that these hybridizations blur the boundaries between the “authentic” and the “impure,” challenging the essentialist categories of classical anthropology.

Walter D. Mignolo, in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2003), introduces the “coloniality of being,” which links race, culture and space. For Mignolo, syncretism is not a passive phenomenon, but an act of “reverse epistemicide”: enslaved Africans used Catholic symbols to hide and perpetuate their worldviews. In the case of San Benito Agé, the image of the saint is a “cultural palimpsest” where indigenous, African and European meanings are superimposed.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), explores how border cultures (physical and symbolic) generate mestizo identities. His concept of “border awareness” helps to understand Afro-descendant orality as a liminal space where languages (Spanish, African languages), religions (voodoo, Catholicism) and traditions (drums, processions) coexist. Anzaldúa stresses that this liminality is not a deficit, but a source of creative power.

Space: territory as a living archive

Milton Santos, a Brazilian geographer, in *A natureza do espaço* (1996), defines space as a “system of objects and actions”. For him, the cacahuales (cocoa plantations) in the south of Lake Maracaibo are not mere economic scenarios, but nodes of a symbolic system where colonial exploitation and cultural resistance are intertwined. The cocoa plantations, now abandoned, are “living archives” that keep memories of slavery and rebellion.

Rita Segato, in *The Critique of Coloniality in Eight Essays* (2015), links territory, body and memory. According to her, the body of the Chimbángueles cultists is a “map” where stories of violence and resil-

ience are inscribed. Drums, for example, not only produce sounds, but also “geolocate” emotions: certain touches (such as the Chimbangalero) are associated with specific places (rivers, mountains), reactivating links with ancestral Africa.

Arturo Escobar, in *Territories of Difference* (2008), proposes a “political ecology of space” that integrates cultural and environmental dimensions. For Escobar, Lake Maracaibo is not a natural resource, but a “place” built by biocultural relationships. The rituals of Agé-Benito, which invoke soil fertility and protection from flooding, exemplify how black communities have turned a space of exploitation into a sacred territory.

Orality in Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America

The historical reconstruction of peoples is in process, always unfinished that accounts for their presence-persistence over time. In this process of rewriting the past, it is of singular importance to collect and analyze the ways in which the men and women of ancestral Africa managed to make for themselves, through thought, in a new landscape, with the creation of a historical-geographical and ethnographic narrative, containing their traditions and customs. This would continue to determine them as socio-anthropological groups. That the slave mode of production and exploitation would not determine them merely as slaves, but that they would be combined as ethnic social groups in this analogical and metaphorical appropriation of the landscape. This, without a doubt, enters into the continental singularities as part of non-recognition and recognition. To what extent each of the historical, geographical and cultural singularities serves the individual or the collective to define, build their identity. The fact that each individual or group recognizes itself, takes what it wants or is interested in from the historical-ancestral narrative. And, in this case, of the colonial narrative as historical. In this way, what could be called the phenomenon of colonial deconstruction occurs in the face of a neo-historical heritage that singles out the elements; not only of his own history, but also of his own creed. This process can be referred to as an anthropological consciousness, in which there is a process of disalienation of the being as a slave.

The historical context of the Afro and Amerindian peoples in Latin America overflows in their ancestral consciousness; constituting as its main elements: orality and tradition. Elements that point to the cultural-symbolic in the preservation of the identity of the group or people. The being of the individual, of the group, is made of a system of codes to be able to express itself, communicate and at the same time preserve itself as a group. A system, whose codes allow socio-cultural insertion over time, with each of the elements that distinguish them. Elements from the spiritual-religious, among others:

The orality of African peoples and their contents were decisive for the survival of their forms of culture, both within their territories and in foreign spaces. It was thanks to orality that they managed to survive in a scenario of social subordination that prevented their eventual participation in social construction, as individuals and also as a collective. When we affirm that orality was the main vehicle through which these peoples affirmed their culture, we are directly alluding to the intrinsic nature of orality, which allows the conveyance of content not sanctioned by the dominant layers of society. Among these fundamental characteristics of orality we find its features of informality, irregularity, the non-existence of obligatory channels for the transmission of content, plasticity, sender/receiver interactivity, the potential marginality in the face of the dominant content in the *mainstream*, the capacity for individual and collective appropriation of the transmitted materials, which results in the freedom of forms and contents, despite the fact that these are due to certain factors that must be met. (Costa, 2009: 15)

In the previous sense, the community, sustained by oral codes, establishes a historical-ancestral agreement that becomes its historical consciousness and its identity. The tradition is maintained over time, through consensus as a group, which implies a shared agreement in the community. In this way, orality as a tradition becomes an essential element in the identity and continuity of peoples and social groups. Its permanence allows it to last over time and remain at the forefront in each generation, thus strengthening the historical awareness and identity of the group.

III. Methodology

To structure the analysis of the cult of San Benito Agé, the following analytical categories have been defined:

- **Time-culture-space:** this triad constitutes the conceptual core of the study. Time is understood as cyclical and mythical, linked to ancestral narratives and cyclical rituals. Culture is analyzed as a symbolic system that includes syncretistic elements, mythologies, and oral practices. The space is interpreted as a symbolic territory loaded with cultural and spiritual meanings, where the physical and the metaphysical converge.
- **Embodied memory:** Inspired by the reflections of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), this category explores how oral narratives, testimonies, and bodily practices (such as drumming) act as vehicles of collective memory that transcend linear time.
- **Symbolic territory:** following Arturo Escobar (2008), territory is defined as a “fabric of meanings” constructed by communities based on their cultural practices. In this case, the physical spaces associated with worship (lakes, forests, lake towns) are resignified as places of cultural resistance and historical memory.
- **Religious syncretism:** This category addresses how the cult of San Benito Agé combines elements of Catholicism with African traditions, creating a unique cultural identity that acts as a strategy of resistance against colonization and exploitation.
- **Geopoetics and affective cartographies:** Inspired by Suely Rolnik (2004) and Jesús Martín-Barbero (2002), these categories allow us to analyze how artistic-ritual practices (such as the saya dance) and collective emotions transform space-time into a sphere of cultural reexistence.

Methodological resources

Oral History and testimonies

Oral History is one of the methodological pillars of the study. Following the reflections of Paul Thompson (1988), in-depth interviews and life stories were used to capture the oral narratives associated with the cult of San Benito Agé. These testimonies made it possible to reconstruct the collective memory and understand how the participants interpret and signify their relationship with the saint. In addition, audiovisual recordings were incorporated, following the recommendations of Nora Bermúdez and Rodríguez (2009), to capture not only the verbal content but also the gestures, emotions and contexts of the narratives.

Participant observation

Participant observation was key to understanding the ritual dynamics of the Chimbangeles. Inspired by Clifford Geertz (1988), ceremonies, processions, and drum beats were documented, paying particular attention to how these events articulate time, space, and culture. This technique made it possible to capture the performative dimension of worship, where the corporal and the spiritual are intertwined.

Hermeneutical analysis

Hermeneutical analysis, based on the ideas of Ronald Fraser (1993), was used to interpret the meanings that participants attribute to rituals. Rather than focusing solely on historical facts, this approach prioritized understanding how social actors construct meaning and meaning from their experiences.

Theory of social representations

Following Moscovici (1979), it was analyzed how the cult of San Benito Agé functions as a social representation that mediates between objective reality and the subjective interpretations of the participants. This theory allowed us to explore how values, social roles and cultural needs influence the construction of this religious practice.

Affective mapping

To understand the emotional bond between the participants and the spaces associated with worship, the notion of affective cartographies proposed by Martín-Barbero (2002) was applied. Through emotional maps, the places of greatest symbolic relevance were identified, such as cocoa forests and procession routes, which act as nodes of collective memory.

Bibliographic documentation and archives

An exhaustive review of bibliographic sources, historical archives and previous studies on the cult of San Benito Agé was carried out. Following the methodological design of Palella and Martins (2006), this phase allowed the study to be contextualized within the broader theoretical and epistemological framework of Oral History and cultural anthropology.

This methodological compendium reflects a comprehensive approach that combines qualitative techniques, interpretative theories, and conceptual tools to approach the cult of San Benito Agé as a dynamic and meaningful cultural practice. The methodological springs described guarantee a deep understanding of how this ritual practice articulates time, culture and space in a context of resistance and social transformation. Oral History as content, discourse and method

Oral History manifests itself in three interrelated dimensions:

- *As content:* It is the collection of testimonies about facts, experiences or personal and collective memories.
- *As discourse:* It is the analysis of how subjects construct and transmit their history, considering language, narrative structure, and rhetorical strategies.
- *As a method:* It is the set of techniques and procedures to record, analyze and interpret oral stories.

These three dimensions are then developed within the framework of the methodology.

Oral History as content

Oral History, as a discipline and practice, has acquired a fundamental role in the reconstruction of collective and subjective memories. As

content, it focuses on the testimony of individuals and communities who have lived or inherited significant historical experiences. This approach allows not only to recover events from the past, but also to understand how they have been narrated, interpreted and resignified over time.

Since the pioneering work of Paul Thompson (1988), Alessandro Portelli (1991), and Elizabeth Jelin (2002), Oral History has been valued as a tool that challenges official narratives and recovers marginalized voices. In this section, we will explore Oral History as content based on its relationship with memory, subjectivity and the diversity of human experiences. Likewise, case studies in indigenous, rural and urban communities in Latin America will be presented, with special emphasis on Venezuela.

Oral History and memory

One of the main values of Oral History as content lies in its link with memory. Memory, according to Maurice Halbwachs (1950), is not an isolated individual act, but a collective construction influenced by the social environment. Through Oral History, it is possible to identify how subjects remember certain events, which elements stand out and which they omit.

Elizabeth Jelin (2002) has pointed out that collective memory is not uniform or static, but a space of dispute where different versions of the past compete for legitimacy. In Venezuela, for example, the testimonies of survivors of the Cantaura Massacre (1982) show how memories of political repression have been shaped by the contemporary political context. While some emphasize the role of the state as repressor, others reinterpret the facts in light of changes in official memory.

Oral History and subjectivity

Oral History also allows us to capture the subjectivity of those who narrate their experiences. Unlike official written sources, which usually present an institutionalized vision of the past, oral testimonies reveal emotions, contradictions and processes of personal reconstruction of history.

Alessandro Portelli (1991) emphasizes that Oral History is not only valuable for its factual information, but for the way it is narrated. According to Portelli, the subjectivity of testimonies is not a limitation, but

a source of knowledge about how individuals interpret their own history. In this sense, the accounts of those displaced by the Vargas tragedy (1999) in Venezuela not only document the natural disaster, but also the ways in which those affected reconstruct their identities and fight for the memory of their lost communities.

Diversity of experiences: Indigenous, rural and urban communities

To better understand the richness of Oral History as content, it is useful to analyze its application in different sociocultural contexts. Below are three case studies that illustrate the diversity of approaches in indigenous, rural, and urban communities in Latin America and Venezuela.

Oral History in indigenous communities: The case of the Pemón in Venezuela

Indigenous communities have used Oral History as a fundamental means for the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. In the case of the Pemón, located in the state of Bolívar, oral tradition is key to preserving myths, genealogies and ancestral ecological knowledge.

A study by Rodolfo Quintero (1984) documents how the Pemón elders' narrative of their relationship with the jungle and spiritual beings not only conveys history, but also values about respect for nature. Today, the Oral History of the Pemón has also been used to denounce the expansion of illegal mining in the region, evidencing the transformation of collective memory into a resource for political and ecological resistance.

Oral History in rural areas: peasants of the state of Lara

In rural areas of Venezuela, Oral History has made it possible to reconstruct processes of peasant organization and struggles for land. A study by Germán Carrera Damas (1993) on peasant movements in Lara state reveals how the testimonies of older farmers narrate the struggle for agrarian reform from a perspective that differs from official records.

Peasant accounts not only document historical events, but also convey a sense of identity based on resistance and relationship with the land. This approach contrasts with the official history of the state, which

tends to emphasize agrarian policies without delving into the lived experience of peasants.

Oral History in urban environments: Caracas neighborhoods and the memory of the Caracazo

Cities are also scenarios where Oral History plays a key role in the construction of collective memory. An emblematic case is the memory of the Caracazo (1989), an event of massive repression in Caracas after the social outbreak due to neoliberal economic policies.

The testimonies collected by Edgardo Lander (1999) show how the memory of the Caracazo varies according to the experience of the witnesses: while some emphasize state violence, others recall community solidarity in the neighborhoods during the crisis. These stories have been fundamental in demanding justice and recognizing structural violence in Venezuela's recent history.

Oral History as content allows us to recover stories that challenge, complement and enrich official history. Through the analysis of memory, subjectivity and the diversity of experiences in indigenous, rural and urban communities, it is possible to build a broader and more complex vision of the past.

Authors such as Paul Thompson, Alessandro Portelli and Elizabeth Jelin have shown that Oral History not only records events, but also reveals the processes of memory construction and conflicts over the legitimacy of stories. In the case of Venezuela, studies on the Pemón, the peasants of Lara state, and the survivors of the Caracazo show how Oral History becomes a vital tool for preserving and resignifying collective memory.

Oral History as discourse

Oral History is a fundamental tool for the construction of discourses about the past. Through stories and testimonies, not only individual and collective memories are rescued, but also meanings are established, power relations are articulated and identities are redefined. Oral History is, therefore, an act of enunciation that shapes the perception of the past and the present. From Erving Goffman's (1959) approaches to symbolic

interactionism and Michel Foucault's (1972) theory of discourses, we can understand that language and orality not only reflect social realities, but also create and transform them. Likewise, Paul Ricoeur (1983) highlights that narrative discourse configures memory and identity in a dynamic way, functioning both as a mechanism of resistance and as a legitimization of marginalized experiences. In this context, Oral History is not a simple record of voices, but a space for dispute and negotiation of meanings. Alessandro Portelli (1991) also emphasizes that Oral History not only recovers facts, but also provides interpretations and subjectivities that allow us to understand the past in a deeper way.

The construction of discourse in Oral History

Discourse in Oral History is not a passive reflection of the past, but an active construction in which subjects interpret, reinterpret and give meaning to their experiences. This characteristic is linked to the idea that language is not neutral; instead, it is a field of meaning in which ideologies, values and power structures are inscribed.

From symbolic interactionism, Goffman (1959) argues that individuals construct their identity in relation to others through everyday interaction and the use of language. In the case of Oral History, this means that narratives are not mere individual stories, but expressions of shared cultural frameworks. Likewise, Foucault (1972) argues that discourse is a control mechanism that regulates what can be said and how it is said, thus determining which histories are validated and which are marginalized. Jacques Derrida (1976) adds that orality and writing interact in the construction of historical knowledge, challenging the primacy of written texts.

Oral History also allows the past to be resignified from an alternative perspective to official history, by giving voice to sectors traditionally excluded from hegemonic narratives. In this sense, it functions as a mechanism of resistance, in which social actors can challenge imposed narratives and vindicate their experiences. Elizabeth Jelin (2002) highlights the importance of memory in the reconstruction of historical accounts, arguing that oral testimony is a crucial tool in the processes of justice and historical reparation.

Examples in Venezuela

Memories of Afro-descendant women in Barlovento

Barlovento, a region of Miranda state with a strong Afro-descendant presence, has historically been a space where orality has played a crucial role in the preservation of collective memory. Through stories passed down from generation to generation, the women of Barlovento have reconstructed the history of slavery, maroon resistance, and the formation of Afro-Venezuelan communities.

Oral narratives in this region show how the memory of slavery is not only an evocation of the past, but also a discursive resource to resignify the Afro-descendant cultural identity in the present. These stories highlight the importance of music, dance, and rituals in the transmission of African heritage, and how orality has been a form of resistance in the face of discrimination and historical oblivion. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that cultural identity is a process in constant construction, which is reflected in the way in which these communities reconfigure their history through orality.

Testimonies of oil workers in Zulia

Oil development in Venezuela has been one of the most significant historical processes of the twentieth century, and orality has been a fundamental way to document the experiences of workers in the sector. In Zulia, the stories of oil workers reveal the complexities of the region's economic and social transformation, as well as the tensions between progress and labor exploitation.

The workers' accounts highlight how the arrival of foreign companies modified their ways of life, generating both economic opportunities and social inequalities. The Oral History of oil workers has also been key to documenting the industry's union struggles, working conditions, and environmental impacts. In this context, Oral History not only allows us to reconstruct the memory of the workers, but also offers a critical vision of the dynamics of oil capitalism in Venezuela. Karl Polanyi (1944) explains how industrialization and economic development can generate profound inequalities, an idea that is reflected in these testimonies.

Stories of the Pemón indigenous communities in the Gran Sabana

Indigenous communities have traditionally resorted to orality as a way of transmitting knowledge, values and traditions. In the case of the Pemón, inhabitants of the Gran Sabana, Oral History has been a fundamental mechanism to preserve their worldview and their relationship with the territory.

The Pemón stories include narratives about the creation of the world, the importance of the tepuis, and the relationship with the spiritual beings of nature. These stories not only fulfill a mythological function, but also constitute discourses of resistance in the face of the expansion of illegal mining and the threats to their ancestral territory. In this case, Oral History becomes a tool of struggle, in which the narratives vindicate the territorial rights and cultural identity of the Pemón in the face of the imposition of extractivist logics. Walter Mignolo (2011) argues that indigenous epistemologies offer alternative forms of knowledge that challenge the Western view of development and progress.

Oral History, understood as discourse, goes beyond the simple collection of testimonies. It is a process of active construction of meanings, in which memory, identity and power relations are articulated and reconfigured. From symbolic interactionism to Foucault's theory of discourse, we can understand that orality not only accounts for the past, but also intervenes in the configuration of the present and the future.

The examples in Venezuela, such as the stories of Afro-descendant women in Barlovento, the testimonies of oil workers in Zulia and the narratives of the Pemón communities in the Gran Sabana, show how Oral History makes it possible to make visible and resignify experiences that have been excluded from official history. In this sense, Oral History not only documents, but also empowers, offering a platform for the vindication of identities and social struggles. Orality, then, is more than a resource of memory: it is a form of political and cultural action in the construction of meanings and the dispute for historical recognition.

Oral History as a method

From a methodological perspective, Oral History involves a series of techniques and procedures for collecting and analyzing testimonies. In this research, a process structured in several phases will be followed:

Data collection techniques

Various methodological strategies will be used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied:

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews allow for detailed accounts of personal and collective experiences. A semi-structured guide will be used to facilitate the exploration of key issues without limiting the spontaneity of the interviewee (Spradley, 1979). In Venezuela, this technique has been used to document the memory of the exiles of the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, as well as the testimonies of the oil workers who lived through the nationalization of the industry in 1976.

Oral testimonies

Oral testimonies are open stories where the subjects reconstruct their history with greater narrative freedom. This technique has been used in various Venezuelan communities, such as the inhabitants of Barlovento, who have transmitted their Afro-descendant history and resistance from generation to generation, or the Wayúu and Pemón indigenous peoples, who have recounted the changes in their territories due to mining exploitation.

Participant observation

Participant observation will allow the researcher to immerse themselves in the contexts where the phenomenon under study occurs, recording practices, interactions and behaviors. This approach has been useful in studies of Venezuelan migration, documenting the lives of Venezuelans in border cities such as Cúcuta and Boa Vista.

Supplemental document analysis

Historical archives, newspaper articles and written records will be reviewed to contextualize the testimonies. In Venezuela, the National

Library and the General Archive of the Nation have been essential for research on the Federal War, independence, and other key events.

Sample selection

The selection criteria will be intentional, seeking diversity in perspectives. Snowball sampling will be used, in which the first interviewees will recommend other participants (Noy, 2008). People from indigenous, rural and urban communities, such as the Pemón in the south of the country and the inhabitants of the Caracas neighborhoods, will be interviewed.

The following inclusion criteria will be considered:

- To have lived or have direct knowledge of the phenomenon studied.
- Belonging to different sectors or generations to enrich the diversity of stories.
- Show willingness to share their testimony voluntarily and consciously.

Procedures for data analysis

The analysis of the testimonies will be carried out in several stages:

- Transcription and thematic coding: The stories will be transcribed and coded following a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This will allow us to identify patterns and structures within the testimonies.
- Narrative analysis: The structure of the story, linguistic resources and emotional emphases will be studied (Riessman, 2008). In the Venezuelan case, this will be key to understanding how exile, the economic crisis and political changes have been narrated by different generations.
- Data interpretation and triangulation: Findings will be connected to concepts of memory, identity, and discourse. The testimonies will be compared with documentary sources to assess their coherence and complementarity. Software-assisted qualitative analysis tools, such as Atlas.ti or NVivo, will be used to organize and classify emerging categories.

Towards an anthropology of oral memory

This research seeks to understand how memory is constructed, transmitted, and resignified, articulating past, present, and future in Venezuela. By giving voice to the protagonists of history, Oral History allows us to challenge official narratives and build a more plural and inclusive narrative.

The relationship between Oral History and anthropology is strengthened to the extent that both disciplines allow us to explore the symbolic dimension of stories and analyze how memory shapes collective identities. The anthropology of memory is not only a matter of “saving” stories from the past, but of understanding how subjects construct their present from those narratives.

In this way, this research will contribute to understanding not only what is remembered, but also why and how it is remembered in the Venezuelan context.

Oral History and anthropology share a common interest in understanding the experiences, narratives, and worldviews of human groups from an emic perspective, that is, from the perspective of the social actors themselves. Both disciplines seek to capture collective voices and memories, as well as the meanings and symbolisms present in cultural manifestations.

A key intersection lies in the interpretive approach and the valuation of accounts and testimonies as primary sources of knowledge. Both Oral History and Anthropology recognize the importance of giving voice to marginalized or silenced sectors, broadening the understanding of cultural diversity and social dynamics.

In addition, both disciplines share a commitment to contextualized and situated research, where they seek to understand phenomena in their specific historical, social, and cultural context.

Oral History makes valuable contributions to anthropological research, enriching and complementing traditional approaches to the discipline. First, the Oral History methodology allows access to the experiential narratives of the social actors, which provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the cultural practices, beliefs, and worldviews of the groups studied.

In addition, Oral History contributes to broadening the perspectives and voices represented in anthropological research, by accommodating the experiences of marginalized or underrepresented groups, whose narratives have often been silenced or made invisible.

Likewise, Oral History provides tools to explore the subjective and experiential dimensions of cultural phenomena, complementing the more objective and external approaches of traditional participant observation.

On the other hand, Oral History allows us to understand cultural transformations and processes of social change from a dynamic and situated perspective, by capturing the memories and testimonies of the actors who have lived and experienced these changes.

In summary, the integration of Oral History into anthropological research enriches knowledge about human realities, by providing access to the voices and narratives of the social actors themselves, allowing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of cultural practices, world-views, and processes of social change.

IV. Origin of the cult of San Benito Agé

The rapid and early establishment of cocoa farms in the south of Lake Maracaibo led to the forced transfer of Africans, who were destined to carry out agricultural work, in particular, the expansion of peanuts. The production of these peanuts was destined for export with optimal profits. In this context, the enslaved population formed a differentiated subaltern sector, identified by blood ties and kinship. In this sense, these peoples were rooted in traditions that go back to distant and immediate ancestors, and in the same way, in their individual and group experiences from childhood to acceptance in adulthood; these experiences defined their acculturation process (Bastide, 2005).

The formation of these kinship ties among African Americans was essential to establish these distinctions and also to underscore the complexities involved in tracing the growth of any African-American institution, on which the system of authority was structured (Mintz & Prince, 2014). For this reason, the enslaved, in creating a new order, had to reinvent the rules that governed their social life; different from the traditional system, because no group can survive if it does not invent rules of operation. They had to configure new institutions and prescriptive systems (Flores Dávila, 2006).

For this reason, the immediate manifestation of the coexistence of enslaved people of the same origin had as an essential motivation the possibility of maintaining their traditions in their new reality and restructuring their worldview in a new soil, which in Nina Friedemann's opinion, would represent the beginning of a process of ethnic reintegration, because they were "...people of the same or similar origin who found themselves again in scenarios different from those of their daily African life. These processes of ethnic reintegration would be the frameworks for the genesis of new Afro-American cultural systems" (1992:545).

In this way, the enslaved population was settled in a new soil that progressively became familiar to them and in their daily lives the migrants learned to speak Spanish and were forced to profess the Catholic religion. Although during colonial rule, the Crown prohibited African cults, because the Christian-Catholic foundations of the Hispano-Creole culture prevented the slave from being supposed to be an “animal-thing,” in his condition as a human being, but unlike that consideration, the Afro-descendant culture was denied by judging it as idolatrous, pagan and brutal. provoking a rejection, as categorical or more categorical than that opposed to aboriginal cultures (Carrera Damas, 1988:129). In response to this repression, Africans kept their culture in their memory and progressively transmitted it to their descendants, thereby guaranteeing the survival of their traditions, especially with emphasis on atavistic religious beliefs, specifically the myth of Agé or Ajé (Izard, 2004).

In that myth it refers to the son of one of the kings of Abomey, who raped a beautiful maiden, in whose relationship Agé was conceived, after his birth his mother abandoned him, and when he reaches adulthood, Agé looks for her and during that process he does “good” to his fellow men, the myth concludes with the encounter with his mother. When Ajé or Agé died, the people turned him into a divinity, who dominates over the serene waters, purity, the arrival of rains and the fertility of the soil (Mora Queipo *et al*, 2014:94-95). Certainly, in this myth one can appreciate the cult of the dead and the veneration of the ancestors, as an indisputable vision of the cosmogony of the African population that settled in the area under study, but something very important to highlight is the relationship with the waters and the fertility of the soil, which in the geographical space of the south of Lake Maracaibo and especially of the valleys under study is of fundamental importance, due to the special geomorphological characteristics of the area.

Initially, the prohibition imposed on traditional African cults by the Spanish-Creole authorities determined that this system of authority, which also functioned for the celebration of ancestral rites, was secret, so that they were carried out underground within the Afro-descendant society, their insignia were not displayed, nor were their rituals performed in public. essentially the dances (Vargas Arana, 2006)² that were accompa-

2 “This witness knows, from having been for twenty-five years the chief clerical tribunal of the ecclesiastical court, that Father Claver made a great effort and commitment with the bishops and

nied by heritage music, mainly with the beating of the drums that caused scandal and was expressly forbidden by the bishops (García de León, 2001; Vargas Arana, 2006).³ In addition, the clothing was not externalized either, which included clothing made with palm and ceremonial masks⁴, which were considered witchcraft and sorcery by the Hispano-criollos, therefore feared and forbidden especially in the dogma of the Catholic Church and in religious discourses (Roselló Soberón, 2014; Martín, 1986).

These censorship and prohibitions underwent a transcendental modification during the seventeenth century. That innovation was due to the rapid expansion of the cult of San Benito. Although the death of the Franciscan occurred in 1586, preceded by a reputation for holiness, in fact, it is related that even in life the friar performed miracles. After his

ordinaries of this bishopric in order to suppress a certain meeting held by the already indoctrinated blacks, at night, which they call weeping, or as they say, dawning. In them, a large number of black men and women gather to dance all night according to the custom of their tribes with drums"

- 3 In this regard, the Bishop of Mérida, Santiago Hernández y Milanés, expressed the following: "...In the same way they have allowed themselves to be introduced by an unworthy condescension into the processions of certain dances of the negroes, now in their own costume and in a different one, as alien to the Spirit of the Church as they are unbecoming to the religious functions that are carried out in the houses of widows and widowers, under the pretext of praying the Rosary, and to entrust the deceased to God, the devil has been introduced because we know that with the motive they gather from both councils, drink, tell impure stories, provocative relationships are murmured without fear, and even the function is usually sawn off...". AAM. Section 45B Miscellaneous Books. Book of superior orders and decrees of the Illustrious Bishops Santiago Hernández Milanés and Rafael Lasso de la Vega. Years 1807-1828, Message of Bishop Santiago Hernández y Milanés to the faithful. Mérida, December 16, 1810. Ff. 35r-40r. Likewise, St. Peter Claver considered the beating of the drum as one of the vices that deserved punishment. Vargas Arana Paola, "Pedro Claver and evangelization in Cartagena: pillar of the encounter between Africans and in the New World, Seventeenth Century" ... p. 318. It is also referred to: García de León, Antonio, "The Royal Company of England and the Slave Trade in Veracruz 1713-1748". In Cáceres, Rina (Comp.), *Rutas de esclavitud en África y América Latina*. San José (Costa Rica) University of Costa Rica Press, 2001. p. 140.

- 4 "When the conditions are met for the cult of Ajé to be repeated in America, one of the most significant elements that appears is this charge, where men with masks on their faces and sticks in their hands, dressed with banana macoyas, demarcated the territory where the cult was held. Whoever entered that area was not allowed to leave, but so much [sic] did not rest the sacred drums to honor Ajé with their magic songs. The followers of the cult who violated the rules demanded by the cult were punished by these Barbúas or Taraqueros. (...) The Taraqueros fulfilling the same functions as three centuries ago, with their masks, their quirky clothes and their canes, to punish those who violate the rules in the chimbánguele. (...) The Mandador maintains the repressive function of the Barbúas or Taraqueros but controlled by an official who has the responsibility of directing them, so that they do not commit the madness and instill terror and dread in the women and children of the population where the chimbánguele is executed". Suárez Carlos, *Los Chimbángueles de San Benito*... p. 20.

death, he was proclaimed as the patron saint of blacks and mulattos, and was worshipped, as evidenced in 1599, when a brotherhood was established in Mexico City for his praise (Roselló Soberón, 1998).

Similarly, in Veracruz, where Africans destined for New Spain were received, whose population was estimated in 1650, at approximately 6,000 inhabitants, of which about 5,000 were of African origin. Therefore, the significant importance of the establishment of the brotherhood in honor of San Benito de Palermo, located in the Church of Loreto, inside the Franciscan Convent of that city, in which Afro-descendants, slaves or free, muzzles or ladinos, mulattos, men and women were grouped, which was founded around 1636 (Roselló Soberón, 1998), originated with the resources from the growing commercial traffic of cocoa that was sent from the south of Lake Maracaibo (García de León, 2001:140).

Certainly, the shipment of the cocoa production that was cultivated in the lake plain in San Antonio de Gibraltar to Veracruz and from there the shipment of silver and slaves determined that the cult of San Benito was known early among the Afro-descendants of Surlaguenses, especially motivated by the entry of Africans, who moved from that port, as was the case of Francisco Hernández, a free black of Congo nation, a native of Guinea, who declared that he had no news of his father, at least he had it of his mother, named Phelipa, from whom he had separated 16 years before, that is, in 1645, because his will was dated 1661, who was also free and served a canon in Veracruz (AGEM. *Protocols*. T. XXV. Letter of testament. Mérida, February 21, 1661. ff.14v-16v.).

The introduction of the cult of San Benito made possible its syncretism with Agé or Ajé and the relative acceptance of the Catholic Church of the rituals associated with devotion to the saint of Palermo, especially accompanied by drum music (Laviña, 1998:143).⁵ In the same way, the hierarchical

5 "For the animist African, it was relatively easy to identify the Catholic saints with the African divinities. The material attributes of the saints of the Catholic Church served to hide the African divinities and the national council was able, without great difficulty, to place itself under the invocation of a patron saint" (Laviña, 1998). In the province of Caracas, the syncretism of the African divinities occurred with Saint John the Baptist, who was called "Saint John Guaricongo", in whose veneration with "the tolerance that they benefit from with the ecclesiastics... In the case of the festivities, the unusual reason for this representation is constant that in these provinces all the slaves have the glorious Saint John the Baptist as their patron, and that on this day the Masters allow them complete

system of authority that had been secretly established by the Abakua was made public by forming a brotherhood to honor and celebrate the feast of San Benito, in which these African codes of authority were validated (Klein, 2016).⁶ In this way, religious syncretism was the key factor in regrouping Afro-descendants, which became an element of convergence and collective connection, because the reproduction in America of European brotherhoods, as associative forms linked to an advocacy, made it possible to structure corporate entities where, under the initiative and spiritual direction of the different religious orders, the ethnic, labor and socioeconomic segments of the population were grouped (Valenzuela Márquez, 2005:264).

Additionally, it should be noted that the veneration of San Benito expanded notably in the valleys of Bobures, Santa María, San Pedro, Castro and Tucaní, during the course of the second half of the seventeenth century. This remarkable diffusion was due to the fact that during the seventh and eighth decades of that century the terrible events caused by the repeated assaults of pirates and percussionists occurred on December 8, 1673, the 12 and the earthquake of January 16, 1674, the subsequent landslides that caused the ruin of the productive process and the death of the settlers with special incidence in the valleys of Bobures, Santa María, San Pedro, Castro and Tucaní were experienced.

In this sense, religious syncretism determined the belief among the Afro-descendant population through which they implored the protection of San Benito, in his personification of Agé or Ajé, who dominated the turbulent waters and reduced them to serenity, for which reason constant supplications were raised to the divinity to prevent the terrible floods that periodically overflowed and affected territory with their tragic effects.

freedom, so that they can enjoy themselves in dances and reciprocal banquets”.

- 6 “Where the Church had the greatest impact was among the group of free people of color. It was they who organized all the famous religious brotherhoods and even succeeded in building their own churches, as can be seen in many towns and cities in Brazil. Each city had its own brotherhood of the Rosary and many had African origins. Recent studies have even indicated that a significant minority of slaves were members of these freedman-dominated brotherhoods. These brotherhoods also served as effective funerary societies. This is not to say that religious activity was not important in Protestant societies, but the autonomy of the brotherhoods was officially recognized by the priesthood as a fundamental part of both free and colored society. As in the military, brotherhoods were also important spaces for the upward mobility of free people of color in their way of finding expression and recognition.” (Klein, 2016:322).

The request for divine protection was also raised before the ancestral deities to prevent the occurrence of earthquakes, for that reason, from that time and until the present, the drum beats known as the “obligations” are performed, which begin in october and end on the 7th, until the eve of december 8 (Suárez, 2010:12),⁷ precisely the day on which the first precursor of 1674 occurred, and they last until the month of January. This is explained by the fact that in popular belief, it is maintained that Agé or Ajé suspends the search for his mother in the month of October to protect the Afro-descendants of the valleys of Bobures, Santa María, San Pedro, Castro and Tucaní from the devastating effects of flooding of the waters, earthquakes or any possible disaster. for this reason, the drums are beaten in request for mercy, in a certain way similar to what is done in the Catholic ritual when there is an earthquake (Musset, 1996; Valenzuela Márquez, 2005).⁸ The syncretism of the Agé cult, although geographically

7 In this sense, it is stated that, in colonial Central America, “after a cataclysm, each religious order proposed to the helpless crowd the divine protection best adapted to their needs, but also to the interests of the Church. Competition was fierce among the monks, because popular piety concealed fundamental political and economic implications: the chosen patron saint saw donations and offerings flow that enriched the patrimony of the religious and enhanced the prestige of his convent. Conversely, the abandonment of a protector considered by the population to be incompetent led to a loss of the monks’ audience, followed by a notable decrease in their income. The earthquakes that afflicted Santiago de Guatemala in 1575 induced the inhabitants to abandon Saint James and find another patron saint, Saint Sebastian, since the earthquakes calmed down on January 20, a day consecrated to this martyr.” Musset Alain, “Moving or disappearing, transfer of Hispano-American cities and disasters of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries”. In, García Acosta Virginia (Coord.), *History and Disasters in Latin America. Network of Social Studies in Disaster Prevention in Latin America*. Vol. I pp. 15-16. Available from: <http://www.desenredando.org> p. 35; Similarly, in Peru where the “popular imagination, natural phenomena have had and have a space, particularly those that end up becoming disasters. Peru is a traditionally Catholic country, in which there are particular invocations for earthquakes: the Lord of the earthquakes in Cusco and the Lord of the Miracles in Lima. The cult of the latter is much more widespread, and its feast, “coincidentally”, is in the month of October: the first departure of the purple Christ is around October 18 or 20, while the central date of the procession is the 28th of the same month. In reality, the dates of the two earthquakes that destroyed Lima are remembered, without knowing it”. Aldana Rivera Susana, *¿Ocurrencias del tiempo? Natural phenomena and society in Colonial Peru*. In, García Acosta Virginia (Coord.), *History and Disasters in Latin America. Network of Social Studies in Disaster Prevention in Latin America*. Vol. I, p. 139. Available from: <http://www.desenredando.org> This phenomenon of colonial spirituality associated with disasters is widely analyzed in New Granada by: Jurado Jurado, Juan Carlos: “Terremotos, pestes y calamities. From punishment to the mercy of God in New Granada. XVIII-XIX Centuries”. In, *Historical Processes*. Vol. III. No. 5, 2004.

8 On the night following the earthquake of May 13, 1647, in Santiago de Chile, the bishop organized a large procession that left the Convent of San Agustín “...taking out a holy crucifix that

alien, was able to appropriate the space in its own time-origin, maintaining its rootedness and spirit through the different generations.

Image 1. Chimbángueles at a priestly ordination in Caja Seca. December 2008.

Source: García Delgado, 2008.



In this context, the sonority of the Agé-Benito cult with its characteristic percussion; it is an outstanding manifestation of ethnographic orality. The testimonies and oral records of the different cultists, validated by their survival, demonstrate the strength and importance of orality in the preservation of this religious tradition, even in the face of pressure from the church. Therefore, orality plays a fundamental role in the transmission and preservation of the culture, spirituality and identity of Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America. Through orality, ancestral traditions survive and remain relevant in the present.

amazed and frightened with its sight [...] the procession arrived in the square, an innumerable audience gathered and, the tumult calming, his lordship began a sermon with such a double spirit that, at the strength and effectiveness of his words, the listeners could not contain themselves, they cried out to heaven asking for mercy...". (Valenzuela Márquez, 2005:132)

Image 2. Chimbángueles at a priestly ordination in Caja Seca. December 2008.



Source: García Delgado, 2008.

Image 3. Vassals during Three Kings Day in Gibraltar. January 6, 2012.



Source: García Delgado, 2012.

Orality in the cult of San Benito-Agé in the south of Maracaibo Lake

As mentioned; orality as a tradition, in relation to the cultural and scientific aspect, reflects and reinforces the historical process of peoples and social groups according to their geographical settlement, in this case, the southern coast of Lake Maracaibo. The historical-oral narrative, with its specific categories, has made it possible to maintain the essence of the Agé-Benito tradition over time, with all its geographical implications. Therefore, the immanence of oral tradition lies in its ability to transcend also in the everyday, the anecdotal, as well as in the geographical, since it is based on the non-disappearance of it. Oral tradition becomes avant-garde in each generation, and each generation claims the ancestral legacy in different forms.

In the context of historical reconstruction through orality, on the southern shore of Lake Maracaibo, Evelyn Canaán's work *Spirituality on the South Lake Coast of Maracaibo* is of fundamental importance. The work of Canaán stands out for being a kind of oral compendium, which collects the worldview and tradition of the Agé-Benito cult. All this, through interviews with participants and promoters of this cult. Canaán, as a photographer and storyteller, has been able to capture the essence of this religious tradition, not only through photographic work. If not, through the recording of the voices and testimonies of the cultists, who become oral-generational sources. These cultists are bearers of the wisdom and knowledge transmitted generation after generation, which makes their testimonies a valuable source for understanding and preserving this form of ancestral spirituality (Canaán, 2020).

Among the testimonies presented by Canaán (2020), that of the cultist Isabel Segunda Andrade Tovila (San José, 07/04/1911-28/01/2015), who described her devotion to San Benito and recalled that her father, Natividad Andrade, was serving as director for thirty years. Andrade clarifies that before there were five blows that they played when they took the saint out in the street. With Agé's blow, they took the saint out of the church to parade him around the town, then they changed the blow; they played Chimbangalero, after Chimbangalero it was San-

gorongome, after Sangorongome, it was Misericordia. After the Misericordia it was the, which they played again, to put the Santo and the Agé. With the saint in the street, they did not play Cantica, Andrade points out. Well, as long as they are with the saint in the street, they do not play the Cantica blow. Andrade also mentioned, The Drums: The Drum Major, two Second Drums, the one they call the Singer and the Half Beat.

Image 4. Isabel Segunda Andrade Tovila



Source: Canaán, 2023.

Meanwhile, that Olympiades “Pía” Pulgar cultor (El Parral-Bobures, 17/10/1903-10/02 /1987), not only represents an oral testimony, but

that he himself was a material institution of the Agé-Benito cult. Among one of his labors and contributions: the so-called Chimbángueles Children's School, which he established for the training of cultists. Whose participants, having received oral transmission from motherhood-paternity, strengthened their learning in that school. This is how part of the testimony compiled by Ángel Segundo Rangel Pulgar, a cultist of the Chimbángueles and the Bagpipes of Tambora, grandson of Olympiades Pulgar himself, in the work of Canaán, puts it:

Image 5. Olympiades “Pia” Thumb. Photo by Benito Gutierrez



Source: Canaán, 2023.

Olympiades “Pia” Pulgar: “During his stay in this earthly world, he was a man dedicated primarily to his family, fulfilling that role of husband, father and grandfather. At the same time, he was a person closely

linked to the Catholic religion with a dedication and passion that no other being had in the community of Bobures. Bobures, his hometown, saw him grow as a person, as a cultist, as a botanist, among others. As a teenager, he developed as an altar boy in the church of Bobures.

Pia was always involved in cultural, social and religious activities. For the month of January of each year, as First Captain of the Plaza del Vasallo de San Benito, he prepared with his son Escolástico, the drums, helped to sacrifice the cattle for the food of the Vassals, including Bobures as host. On January 5, the eve of the Three Kings, he organized the Gaita de Tambora, he was part of the body of singers and unique in his style, he played the instruments of the Bagpipes such as the Tambora and the Tamborito. In this type of musical genre. Olympiades Pulgar was highly respected and was considered the best of his time. About the Chimbángueles; He cut the wood on the mountain, cured it and built the drums. As Captain of Plaza de San Benito, he sang the litanies and prayers to the Saint in Latin. He trained many people who today are Captains of the Plaza in their communities.

For the Holy Week season, Pia organized the procession in the company of other people and the Catholic Church as well as organized the Stations of the Cross that were carried out at the time. For the cycle of the Chimbángueles de Obligación, together with the Capitanes del Vasallo, they organized what would be, the First Rehearsal of the year to sing Gloria, in front of the church at 6 in the morning and thus begin those traditional dates such as 1st saturday of october, All Saints and the Immaculate Conception.

In the same months of october, november and december, in his own house, he organized a group of girls, called the Pastoras, who were dedicated to singing verses alluding to the Child Jesus for the month of December until the day of Candlemas, that is, on February 2, which in turn were accompanied by a Tamborito and a traditional furro. in addition to the maracas that each shepherdess carried. Pía received visits in her house from all kinds of people who came from different parts of Venezuela including the municipality of Sucre, only with the purpose of getting Pia to do work for them, because it was said that he “was a sorcerer”, but in

reality, I don't even know, if that was true, I am sure that he was a botanist, he was the healer of the town, it cured stingray bites, snake bites, shingles, evil eye, measles, mumps, scrambled worms, lechina, among others. But, most of the people who visited him at his home went to have another type of work done for them, because they confused botany with witchcraft and thus, the word spread everywhere" (Canaán, 2020: 218).

"Olympiades Pulgar, a mystical man, of the people with a taste for dancing and singing, a spiritual man, knowledgeable of the secrets of life, fair, silent and intelligent, that was Pia. " Pia always Pia" ..." (Canaán, 2020: 219).

Image 6. Ángel Segundo Rangel Pulgar



Source: Canaán, 2023.

Through these interviews, Canaán has managed to capture in his work the cultural and spiritual richness of the Agé-Benito cult in the southern lake area of Maracaibo. Orality, as a means of transmitting knowledge, allows tradition to survive and transcend time. Thus preserving the identity of the group and its connection with the ancestral. In this sense, the oral compendium made by Canaán; it becomes an important tool for anthropological research, for the study of the history and culture of the region.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Testimonies on Orality in the Cult of San Benito-Agé

Cultist	Role and contribution	Key Testimonials	Cultural and historical relevance
Isabel Segunda Andrade Tovila	She was devoted and bearer of generational knowledge about the Agé-Benito cult.	“During his stay in this earthly world, he was a man dedicated to his family, to the Catholic religion and to cultural and social activities. He organized processions, taught drumming and healed with medicinal plants.”	Their testimony reveals the ritualistic structure of worship, highlighting the importance of rhythms and their relationship with physical and spiritual space.
Olympiades “Pia” Thumb	Spiritual leader, drum builder, tradition teacher, and local botanist.	He narrates how his grandfather organized rehearsals, processions and activities related to worship, in addition to his role as a healer and drum maker.	He represents a central figure in the oral and practical transmission of worship. His educational and cultural work ensured the survival of the Agé-Benito tradition.
Ángel Segundo Rangel Pulgar	Grandson of Olympiades Pulgar and worshipper of the Chimbángueles and the Gaita de Tambora.	“Orality becomes avant-garde in each generation, vindicating the ancestral legacy in different forms.”	It provides an intergenerational perspective on how ritual and musical practices have been preserved through orality and direct teaching.
Collective Voices (Canaán, 2020)	She was devoted and bearer of generational knowledge about the Age-Benito cult.	“During his stay in this earthly world, he was a man dedicated to his family, to the Catholic religion and to cultural and social activities. He organized processions, taught drumming and healed with medicinal plants.”	They reflect the cultural resistance to colonial imposition and the capacity of orality to keep alive ancestral practices linked to the territory.

Source: Vidovic and García, 2025.

Table 1 summarizes the testimonies of the cultists of the cult of San Benito-Agé in the south of Lake Maracaibo, highlighting their importance as oral sources for understanding the ancestral tradition. Through voices such as those of Isabel Segunda Andrade Tovila and Olympiades “Pía” Pulgar, it is evident how orality has preserved ritual practices, knowledge and cultural values for generations. These testimonies not only reflect the ritualistic structure of the cult, but also its spiritual, social and cultural dimension.

Isabel Andrade describes in detail the rhythms of the drums and their relationship with the key moments of the rite, such as the procession of the saint. Her testimony underlines the connection between music, space and time, elements that make up collective identity. On the other hand, Olympiades Pulgar emerges as a central figure in the transmission of knowledge, not only as a spiritual leader but also as an educator and drum builder. Their work included the training of new cultists and the organization of religious and cultural events, which ensured the continuity of the tradition.

These stories, compiled by Evelyn Canaán, highlight the capacity of orality to keep ancestral practices alive in the face of colonial imposition. Orality acts as a means of cultural resistance, allowing the African worldview to be reinterpreted and adapted under externally accepted forms, such as syncretism with Catholicism. In addition, the testimonies reveal how collective memory is activated through gestures, sounds and narratives, connecting past, present and future in a shared symbolic space.

Epistemologically, this analysis is inscribed in Moscovici’s theory of social representations (1979), which emphasizes how communities construct shared meanings about their reality. From this perspective, testimonies are not mere descriptions, but tools to interpret and reconstruct the past in a fairer and more realistic way, giving voice to those who have been historically invisible.

Finally, the table highlights the methodological relevance of Oral History as a research practice. Following Thompson (1988) and Fraser (1993), orality allows access to multiple points of view, enriching the understanding of complex social processes. The testimonies analyzed con-

stitute an invaluable source for studying the interaction between time, space, and culture in contexts of resistance and social transformation.

Testimonies of the oral-lacustrine tradition in the south of Lake Maracaibo

Every tradition becomes history when it survives and persists through orality from the ancestral. Therefore; every voice, every word exposes the whole essence of Agé-Benito. Such an essence, in the voice of each cultist who is a poet and a witness of the dance, of the blow and of all the visual charm, which in the first instance has been sustained with the word since its oral enunciation. The same, which is constituted as an ancestral codex: historical, spiritual and aesthetic in the work of Canaán. Codices that become earth, flesh, in the visual and ethnographic charm of the Agé-Benito rite.

The ritual, which not only allows us to extol a religious aspect or context, but also extols the origin of life, of the group, of blackness as a historical thread of identity-cosmogony; which, being geographically alien, strange. This, as an analogy, made possible the appropriation of space in the group's own time-origin. The ancestral roots in the spirit of the Afro people, the metaphysical aspect of such appropriation. Well, as enslaved bodies-objects, transferred, but not uprooted.

Because the roots, more than territorial, were ancestral, which is contemplated in the oral presentation of the different cultists that Canaán exposes. Every voice, every generational testimony is present. Well, it has been orality, which has allowed us to maintain the roots, the spirit of Agé. An oral record, through the different generations. Validated by its strength, survival; even when the church forced them to beatify their rite, their culture, through San Benito. The same, in its essence, alien to the entire ethno-religious and anthropological context of Agé spirit of the waters.

In this way, Agé, both in its ethnographic and religious context, reveals the transition from orality to sonority, since the ethnographic approach provides a broader vision of tradition, especially by highlighting the sonority of worship through percussion and music. The chim-

bángueles, the long drum and the gaita tambora, stand out as fundamental elements in the expression of tradition and cultural identity.

Cult of San Benito Agé through his ancestral codes from orality and rites in the towns of Gibraltar, Bobures, Palmarito, San José, Santa María and San Antonio: the gaze of Evelyn Canaán

In the following section we summarize the way in which the cult of San Benito Agé is currently developed and some particularities in relation to the rites that are described by the researcher Evelyn Canaán in attention to her experience through photographs and interviews carried out with the cultists of the peoples of Gibraltar, Bobures, Palmarito, San José, Santa María and San Antonio in the south of Lake Maracaibo. In this sense; what is proposed are his paraphrased words to present his vision of the phenomenon under study⁹.

The ancestry of the peoples of the South Lake Coast of Maracaibo: Gibraltar, Bobures, Palmarito, San Antonio, Santa María and San José, preserve the African symbols or divinities to whom they worshipped, mainly the Ewe Fon who practiced voodoo or worship of spirits. These symbols have been appropriated by the Catholic Church to make invisible the passage of this African religion (voodoo) through these lands of Sucre. When you arrive at these villages you can see the Cross, the Three Crosses, the Heart, the color blue. These have been seen in the image of the Franciscan friar, who carries in his right hand the Cross of the divinity Legba; Legba is the messenger of the other deities. He is invoked before any ceremony begins¹⁰. In the same way, you can see the white flag with the cross is Legba, who cleans and purifies the road, using it when the image is stored in the church.

9 This approach can be consulted in the book *Africanity on the southern lake coast of Maracaibo. African Codes from Orality and the Photographic Record in the Ancestral Peoples of Gibraltar, Bobures, Palmarito*. Publication of the Ediciones Clio Foundation. Maracaibo, Venezuela 2023. Source: <https://www.edicionesclio.com/>
St. Joseph, St. Mary, and St. Anthony

10 Pollak-Eltz Angelina. "Afro-American Cults" 1977, p. 67).

Image 7. Ritual of the Hat. Gibraltar, 06 January 2014



Source: Canaán, 2023.

When you raise the image from the Altar, you reach the three doors; making with this action a Cross, a ritual not belonging to Catholic practice. The image carries a heart in her left hand (Erzuli: symbol of goodness and purity). The Franciscan image has the cassock painted blue by the divinity Agé of the Voodoo Pantheon. In the same way, the Directors of Chimbángueles use the color blue in the stripe of the straw hat they use, in the clothing, in the drums, in the baton of command. The flag that brings out the Afro-Catholic image is blue by Agé with the painting or design of a cross (Legba) embedded in the heart (Erzuli) to the beat of the sound of the drums: Agé. In each of these Towns we find a Cross (In San José de Heras they do not have one). In the Essays of Obligation, when they arrive at the doors of the church (closed), the cross-shaped canes or the flag and the cane cross.

In these towns, we also find the Three Crosses, which are not observed in any Catholic church in the region and the country. In the Voodoo Pantheon they represent Los Guédés or genies of death, masters of the Cemeteries. They are a triad of Barons: Baron Samedi (the Cross in the center), Baron La Croix (on the right) and Baron Cimetière (on the left) (Canaán, 2020).

On the other hand, Catholic elements are observed in the cultural

manifestation: The Church, who guards the image. Each Pueblo one night in the month of December takes the image in procession, from eight o'clock with percussion or wind instruments, also some ancestral peoples take a quarter of a Procession to the image before the Chimbán-gueles (drums) such as Bobures (first of January), with its golden heart and diadem. The Antiphons, Ave Maria and joys to the Franciscan Friar are of Catholic origin (Canaán, 2020).

Image 8. Agé-Benito, Santa María, June 2008



Source: Canaán, 2023

As Eward Ysea tells me, “My grandfather, Olympiades Pulgar, used to tell me: “there is a mixture of Latin with certain African words and Spanish like a song in gibberish” (Canaán, 2020:27). It should be clarified that the cultist was referring to the way in which the prayers were previously intoned. The Franciscan image is Catholic in its essence, but

it is invested with the divinities of the African voodoo pantheon: The color blue for the divinity of the sea Agé, the Cross, protector of doors and crossroads is Legba and the heart representing goodness and purity.

We have seen in photos and videos the image of the Santo Benedetto di Palermo/Italia who walk in Procession dressed in a brown cassock and a baby Jesus in their arms, different from the image that on the South Lake Coast of Maracaibo they wear dressed in blue, with a cross in the right hand and a heart in the left hand. In this sense, the fusion of cultures that the image suffered when it was brought to the South Coast of Lake Maracaibo where they enslaved and indoctrinated Africans in the Catholic religion to exploit them mainly in the planting of porcelain cocoa in such productive lands. The parish priest of the church together with the Mayordomo del Chimbángueles are the ones who give permission for the departure of the Afro-Catholic divinity.

Image 9. Fermín Rivero Herrera, (1920-2009) first captain of the square, Enoemia Chourio, butler, Alexander Márquez, parish priest of Bobures. Bobures, January 1, 2008.



Source: Canaán, 2023

Another African contribution is the Saya, with which they dance to their African divinities; skirt made with palm from the African palm; Its

use has been minimized, clarifying the ignorance of many for its use and elaboration. The cultist of the Chimbángueles and the Gaita de Tambora, Ángel Segundo Rangel Pulgar, grandson of one of the most important cultists of Sucre, Olimpiades Pulgar, (1903-1987), with whom he learned the secrets of its elaboration, is known. Other elements of the Chimbángueles are the baton of command and the stick attached to a leather, used by the so-called Mandadores or Mandador to move the assistants away from the path of the image, when in reality the Conqueror used it to force the slave to work tirelessly. This instrument, as well as the cane, he used to demonstrate his authority in front of the oppressed enslaved African.

Image 10. Toilets; Fraidys Velásquez, Lorenzo García, Yorbis “Checa” Velásquez and Rafael Castillo. Gibraltar, January 6, 2009.



Source: Canaán, 2023

The Chimbángueles or the descendants of the African have assumed these positions over time. The Standard-bearer, symbolizing the divinity Legba with the flag, clears the way until he reaches the houses of each worshipper. The flag, we can see it in a Rehearsal or Chimbángueles de Obligación, guiding the group of Players to the house of the director, who must keep the Drums in perfect condition, which serve as communicating conduits with the African divinities: Legba, Agé, Damballab,

Erzuli, some visible, others invisible for fear of being discovered had to hide them and at the same time, not to be surprised, by honoring their African ancestors.

In the ancestral peoples, when a Chimbángueles cultist dies, they say goodbye to him by reciting Litany by the Captains of the square to the beat of and Misericordia. The Captains and Stewards during the walk of the funeral procession, cross the batons of command (Legba) and the standard-bearers, also do so preceding the procession. If it is a Bagpiper who has died, they outline verses with their refrain. “The cult of the Ancestors is widespread throughout West and Central Africa, when they are really funeral rites that require the deceased to be buried with many ceremonies so that he or she leaves in peace” (Pollak-Eltz, 1994:48).

Image 11. Santa María try: Beiker Solarte, Alí Soto, Robis Solarte, Jhoeny Calvo, Kender Herrera and Néstor Cedeño. Ritual of the Hat with Bobures. Bobures, January 1, 2014.



Source: Canaán, 2023.

The ancestral peoples of the South Coast of Lake Maracaibo, in addition to celebrating the Afro-Catholic divinity on December 27 and January 6, celebrate three Essays or Chimbángueles de Obligación: 1st, the eve of the first Sunday of October, the eve of the first day of Novem-

ber and the eve of the eighth day of December¹¹. Eward Ysea comments on it in his Oral History, when he says that “people lowered the drums or came down from the conucos to chimbangalear, at the beginning of October the first rains”. (Canaán Evelyn: Ob. cit. p. 200). The church names those days as follows: 1st Sunday of October, All Saints’ Day and the Immaculate Conception.

Image 12. The Ensayo de Santa María, a blow by, arrives kneeling at the doors of the church. Promise by Liberny “Gollo” Soto, butler of Santa María, September 14, 2013.



Source: Canaán, 2023.

We have attended these Trials in the six ancestral Towns: Gibraltar, Palmarito, Bobures, San José, Santa María and San Antonio. They start at nine o'clock at night and continue their work until the afternoon of the next day, guided by the standard-bearer to the beat of and Cantíca who waves a white flag with the Cross going to the House of the director, the Captains of the Band, Mayordomo, to the House of the current directors of Chimbángueles. It is worth noting the difference of worship in San José de Heras, who always visit the house of Máxi-

¹¹ These celebrations have their origin during the colonial period because for the aforementioned dates the colonizers allowed them to celebrate good harvests to the beat of the Drum and incidentally the enslaved worshipped their Ancestors.

mo Andrade, now deceased who was director for 30 years; attended by their relatives. In addition, on that day they visit the Three Crosses, the church, the main Cross. Wherever they arrive they invoke Obelesse, the Gloria, gozos and Antifonas, they toast with rum, usually cocuy or whiskey. The Bosses prevent the Dressers from entering the Directors' house, while they drink two fingers of rum in each toast.

Likewise, the devotees, promeseros or believers of the Agé-Benito divinity pay favors received and celebrate it like any Chimbángueles of celebration, December 27 or January 6 with the six beats of the drum: Cantica, Agé, Chimbangalero Vaya, Misericordia and Sangorongome. According to Publio Antúnez, a cultist of the Chimbángueles, the Gaita de Tambora and the Tambor Largo, "and Sangorongome were maximum African kings, the opposite with Chimbangalero vaya and Misericordia clearly Catholic blows".

Image 13. Bobures rehearsal: Jhonny Pereira, Jhon Willian Martínez, Orlando Chourio, Norka Rojas, saya dancer, the chimbangalito of San Timoteo and the standard-bearer, Alexander Chourio



Source: Canaán, 2023.

Publio Antúnez, a cultist of San José de Heras, continues: “Before, each drum represented with its beat, the divinity of each family”. Ángel Segundo Rangel Pulgar, cultivator of the Chimbángueles, the Tambo-ra Bagpipe, the Long Drum and drum maker: “The Drums used in the Chimbángueles, the Tambor Mayor, the Tambor Segundo which is the same Respondón, the Singer and the Half Beat and Tres Requintas; 1st, 2nd and 3rd, they are very sharp”. “The Drum is the tangible form of divinity”. “The conjunction with the dance, calls for the presence of the spirits in harmony with the divinities” (González M. Jenny: Ob. Cit. p. 53-55).

Image 14. Meeting of Chimbangalitos. María Rosario, August 22, 2010.



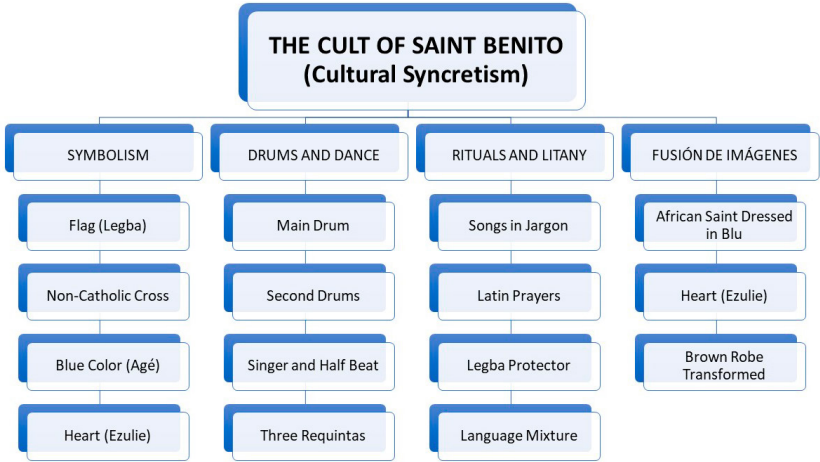
Source: Canaán, 2023.

Néstor Cedeño, dancer of Saya, tells us in his Oral History: “I learned to dance Saya with Melquíades Herrera, father of “Guamo”; she dances it slowly and wants to take me to her land and I want to take her to my land. Sometimes, her voice is the father’s voice” (Canaán, 2020:217). Some cultists believe that family spirits or acquaintances are incorporated into other people. “All Africans believe in ancestors, who are immortal and always watch over their descendants” (Parrinder, 1980:32).

These six named Towns: Gibraltar, Palmarito, Bobures, San José, Santa María and San Antonio, are the first to start the Chimbángueles because it can be confirmed by seeing the symbols already described, not seen in other communities. They left the town of San Pedro and from there they were divided according to their origin. Robis Solarte, captain of Santa María, recounts: “Those images came from the Ruins of San Pedro and from there, they passed to Santa Isabel” (Canaán Evelyn: Ob. Cit. p. 83).

In this way, it is once again exposed how orality has been the fundamental pillar to keep alive the spirituality-tradition of the Agé-Benito cult in the southern lake area of Lake Maracaibo. Through orality, the identity, history, cultural and spiritual heritage of the community is preserved in all its transcendental character.

Figure 2. The Cult of San Benito Agé: Syncretism, Symbolism and Tradition in the Chimbángueles



Source: Vidovic and García, 2025.

The cult of San Benito Agé on the South Shore of Lake Maracaibo is a cultural expression deeply rooted in religious syncretism, where elements of European Catholicism and the African divinities of the voodoo pantheon converge in a unique ritual. This cultural phenomenon reflects not only the adaptation of enslaved Africans to the colonial context, but also their ability to preserve and reclaim their ancestral traditions through symbolic practices.

Symbolism plays a central role in this cult. The flag that guides the chimbanguelles represents the divinity Legba, who clears the way to the houses of the cultists. The color blue, ubiquitous in drums, hats, and vestments, is associated with Agé, the divinity of the sea, while the heart symbolizes the goodness and purity of Erzuli. These symbols are key to the conjunction between the visible and the invisible, allowing communication with the spirits.

Drumming and dancing are essential vehicles for this spiritual connection. Each drum has a specific role: the Drum Major leads, the Seconds respond, and the requintas add high tonalities. These instruments not only accompany music, but act as tangible conduits for African divinities. The dance, in harmony with the drums, invokes the presence of the spirits, creating a sacred space where the human and the divine coexist.

The rituals and litanies combine Latin prayers with gibberish chants, evidencing the fusion of languages and traditions. This linguistic mixture reinforces the duality of worship, which honors both the Catholic saint and the African divinities. In addition, the rituals include gestures such as the non-Catholic cross, which marks the three doors, an act charged with spiritual significance.

Finally, image fusion is another highlight. The image of San Benito Agé, dressed in blue and carrying a heart, contrasts with the traditional Italian representation of Benedetto di Palermo. This visual change reflects the cultural adaptation of the African-Catholic saint, whose essence is redefined in the Venezuelan lake context. Thus, the cult of San Benito Agé becomes a living testimony of syncretism, cultural resistance and ancestral memory.

V. Analysis of the Chimbanguelles of San Benito de Palermo from the triad: Time-Culture-Space

The cult of San Benito Agé, particularly the ritual of the Chimbanguelles in the south of Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela, can be analyzed from a perspective that integrates time, culture, and space. This triad, inspired by the ideas of Bakhtin, Sulkin, Escobar, Nora and Martín-Barbero, allows us to unravel how this religious practice becomes a space of cultural resistance, historical memory and social transformation.

Dynamic interactions

Time-Space (Ritual as a chronotope)

Bakhtin's proposed concept of chronotope is central to understanding how ritual acts as a merged space-time. According to Bakhtin, the chronotope is "the intrinsic relationship between time and space in literary and cultural representation" (Bakhtin, 1981). In the case of the Chimbanguelles, the mythical time associated with San Benito Agé – an African ancestral figure linked to resistance and spirituality – is intertwined with the physical space of Lake Maracaibo and its lake communities. This territory is not simply a stage where ceremonies take place; It is a space loaded with symbolic meanings that connects the divine with the human, the ancestral with the contemporary. Drums, dances and processions recreate a cyclical time that defies the linear time imposed by colonization. Thus, the ritualistic chronotope becomes a place where multiple temporalities coexist: the African past, the colonial and post-colonial present, and an imagined future of cultural liberation.

Culture-Time (Embodied Memory)

Orality in the cult of San Benito Agé can be interpreted as an “embodied memory”, following the reflections of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010). For Rivera Cusicanqui, embodied memory is that which transcends linear time and is expressed through bodily, musical and narrative practices. In this case, the drums of the chimbanguelles are not mere musical instruments; they are bearers of historical narratives and ancestral memories. Each drumbeat “weaves” temporalities that connect African descendants to their cultural and spiritual roots. In addition, these oral practices make it possible to preserve stories that are not recorded in official documents, as Pozzi (2012) points out, who highlights that Oral History challenges traditional power structures by giving voice to those who have been made invisible. Orality, then, acts as a mechanism of resistance against the imposition of calendars and external temporalities.

Space-Culture (Symbolic Territory)

From Arturo Escobar’s perspective, territory should be understood as a “fabric of meanings” collectively constructed by communities. In the case of the Chimbanguelles, the lake territory south of Lake Maracaibo is not simply a geographical space; it is a symbolic system that resists colonial and neoliberal exploitation. Cocoa forests, procession routes and historic plantations are resignified as places of memory, a concept developed by Pierre Nora (1989). For Nora, places of memory are spaces where communities deposit their collective identity and cultural heritage. In this sense, every tree, road, or building is imbued with cultural and spiritual meanings. For example, cocoa plantations, which were historically spaces of exploitation, are transformed into sites of celebration and cultural resistance thanks to the oral narratives and rituals associated with the cult of San Benito Agé.

Conceptual tools

Geopoetics (Suely Rolnik)

Geopoetics, according to Suely Rolnik, allow us to analyze how artistic-ritual practices reconfigure space-time. In the case of the Chimbanguelles, the dance of the saya during the ceremonies of San Benito

Agé is not only an aesthetic act, but a way of reexisting culturally. Through music, movement, and orality, participants create a space where historical oppressions are reinterpreted as acts of liberation. Rolnik (2004) describes this practice as a “decolonization of the body”, where the corporal and the spiritual are intertwined to reconstruct cultural identities fragmented by colonial violence. The *saya*, as a geopoetic practice, redefines territory and time by connecting the individual with the collective, the material with the symbolic.

Affective cartographies (Jesús Martín-Barbero)

Affective cartographies, as conceived by Jesús Martín-Barbero, help to understand how places linked to worship (such as lake towns) are charged with collective emotions. Martín-Barbero (2002) argues that emotional maps emerge from the oral narratives, songs, and testimonies of the elderly, who act as guardians of collective memory. These affective cartographies are not static; rather, they are constantly rebuilt across generations. In the case of the Chimbangeles, the emotions associated with resistance, spirituality and community are projected onto the territory, transforming it into a lived and felt space. For example, the processions of San Benito Agé are not only religious acts; They are emotional journeys that connect participants with their ancestors and with the historical struggles of their communities.

Transmodernity (Enrique Dussel)

Transmodernity, proposed by Enrique Dussel, seeks to establish dialogues between dissimilar temporalities without subordination. In the case of the cult of San Benito Agé, we see how African myth is intertwined with elements of Catholicism and, potentially, with modern technologies (such as audiovisual recordings of rituals). This intertemporal dialogue allows the community to maintain its cultural identity while adapting to contemporary contexts. Dussel (2007) emphasizes that transmodernity does not imply a break with the past, but an active reinterpretation that validates multiple forms of existence and knowledge. Religious syncretism in the cult of San Benito Agé is not a loss, but a cultural survival strategy that challenges hegemonic power structures.

Case of study: The Cult of San Benito Agé

Time

The cult of San Benito Agé defies colonial linear time through its ritual cyclicity. The drum beats that occur between October and January not only follow a festive calendar, but also recreate a mythical time that connects participants to their African ancestors. This cyclical time contrasts with the Catholic calendar imposed during colonization, becoming an act of temporary resistance.

Culture

Religious syncretism is a key strategy of cultural resistance. The figure of San Benito Agé encapsulates both African spirituality and adaptation to the colonial context. This syncretism is not a simple fusion, but an active reinterpretation that allows the community to maintain its cultural identity while interacting with other influences. Orality plays a crucial role here, as stories about San Benito are transmitted verbally, ensuring their preservation and adaptation to new generations.

Space

The physical spaces associated with worship, such as cocoa forests and lake villages, are transformed into places of memory. These territories are not simply the scenes of ceremonies; they are nodes of a symbolic system that resists colonial exploitation. Through orality, these spaces acquire new cultural and spiritual meanings, becoming symbols of resistance and community.

This analysis integrates conceptual tools and the time-culture-space triad to offer a holistic view of the cult of San Benito Agé, highlighting its importance as a cultural and ritualistic practice that challenges historically imposed temporal, spatial, and cultural structures.

The notion of time and space in the analysis of rites: the case of the Cult of San Benito Agé

The analysis of rites, such as the cult of San Benito Agé on the southern shore of Lake Maracaibo, requires a deep understanding of notions of time and space, as these elements not only act as contextual

frameworks, but as active components that shape meaning and ritual experience. From an anthropological and historical perspective, time and space are dynamic categories that interact with culture to shape ritual practices and their interpretation.

Time: chronotopy and cyclical temporality

The concept of chronotopia, developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), is fundamental to understanding how rituals function as fused space-times where the mythical, the historical, and the everyday converge. In the case of the cult of San Benito Agé, time is not experienced as linear, but as cyclical and multidimensional. The drum beats, held between October and January, recreate a mythical time that connects participants with their African ancestors. This ritualistic time not only revives the past, but also projects an imagined future of cultural and spiritual liberation.

The cyclical temporality of rituals is deeply rooted in the collective memory. According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), orality acts as an “embodied memory” that defies the linear time imposed by colonial structures. Drums, litanies and dances are not mere artistic expressions; They are vehicles that weave ancestral temporalities, allowing participants to reconnect with their cultural and spiritual roots. Each drumbeat or dance step evokes a specific moment in history, but also transcends that moment to create a lived present that bridges multiple temporal layers.

In addition, ritualistic time has a symbolic dimension that goes beyond chronology. As Mercedes Vilanova (2012) points out, in life stories and oral narratives, the construction of time is neither chronological nor linear. The rituals of San Benito Agé, for example, operate in a subjective time where memories, emotions, and personal experiences are intertwined with myth and collective history. This subjective time allows participants not only to relive the past, but also to reinterpret and resignify it based on their present needs and aspirations.

Space: symbolic territory and places of memory

Space, on the other hand, is not simply a physical stage where rituals occur; it is a territory loaded with cultural and spiritual meanings. Fo-

llowing Arturo Escobar (2008), territory should be understood as a “fabric of meanings” collectively constructed by communities. In the case of the cult of San Benito Agé, Lake Maracaibo, cocoa forests and procession routes are transformed into nodes of a symbolic system that resists colonial and neoliberal exploitation. These physical spaces acquire new cultural meanings thanks to the oral narratives and ritual practices associated with worship.

The concept of places of memory, developed by Pierre Nora (1989), is particularly useful for analysing how the spaces associated with worship become repositories of collective identity. For example, cocoa plantations, which historically were spaces of exploitation, are resignified as sites of resistance and cultural celebration. Through orality, these places are transformed into symbols of historical memory and spirituality, where collective experiences of resistance and solidarity are projected onto the landscape.

In addition, the ritualistic space has a performative dimension that makes it a place of cultural reexistence. According to Suely Rolnik (2004), artistic-ritual practices, such as the dance of the saya in the cult of San Benito Agé, reconfigure space-time by connecting the corporal with the spiritual. The percussion of drums, dance movements and processions not only occupy a physical space, but also transform it into a realm where historical oppressions are reinterpreted as acts of cultural liberation. This process of spatial reconfiguration allows Afro-descendant communities to affirm their cultural and spiritual identity in the face of hegemonic power structures.

Interaction between time and space: the rite as a chronotope

The interplay between time and space in the analysis of rites is crucial to understanding how these ritual practices articulate the physical with the metaphysical. The cult of San Benito Agé functions as a chronotope where mythical time and physical space merge to create a unique ritualistic experience. This chronotope not only connects participants to their ancestors and traditions, but also projects them into an imagined future of cultural and spiritual liberation.

In this sense, the rite is not simply a reproduction of ancestral practices, but an active reinterpretation that validates multiple forms of existence and knowledge. Following Enrique Dussel (2007), the religious syncretism present in the cult of San Benito Agé is not a loss, but a cultural survival strategy that challenges hegemonic power structures. This intertemporal dialogue allows the community to maintain its cultural identity while adapting to contemporary contexts.

Table 2: Dynamic interactions between time, culture and space in the analysis of rites

Category	Time	Culture	Space
Central definition	Cyclical and multidimensional time that connects past, present and future through rituals.	Cultural syncretism that combines African and Catholic elements as a strategy of resistance.	Symbolic territory loaded with cultural and spiritual meanings (places of memory).
Main function	A ritualistic chronotope that defies colonial linear time and recreates ancestral temporalities.	A means of preserving identity, collective memory and traditions through orality and practices.	Resignification of physical spaces as nodes of cultural and spiritual resistance.
KeyTools	Orality, drums, litanies and dances as vehicles of temporal transmission.	Religious syncretism, music, dance, and oral narratives as living cultural expressions.	Cocoa forests, procession routes and lake landscapes as symbols of collective memory.
Related theories	Bakhtin (chronotope), Rivera Cusicanqui (embodied memory).	Dussel (transmodernity), Escobar (weaving of meanings).	Nora (places of memory), Escobar (symbolic territory).
Practical example	The drum beats between October and January recreate a mythical time linked to ancestors.	The cult of San Benito Agé as a syncretism between African and Catholic spirituality.	Cacao plantations transformed into sites of cultural resistance and celebration.
Social impact	Desafío al tiempo lineal colonial; creation of an imagined future of cultural liberation.	Validation of multiple forms of existence and knowledge in the face of hegemonic structures.	Spaces of cultural re-existence that affirm identity in the face of historical oppressions.

Source: Vidovic and García, 2025.

Conclusions

The context of spirituality on the southern shore of Maracaibo Lake is configured as a deeply mixed environment, where ethnographic and ethno-musical elements converge under the influence of both African and Catholic religiosity. The cult-ritual of Agé-Benito not only represents a socio-cultural-hierarchical structure that reflects the idiosyncrasies and spirituality of the Afro-descendant people in this region, but also embodies a dynamic expression of the time-culture-space triad.

From the perspective of time, the cult of San Benito Agé defies the linear temporalities imposed by colonization through its cyclical and ritualistic nature. The drum beats, held between October and January, recreate a mythical time that connects participants with their African ancestors. This ritualistic chronotope, inspired by Bakhtin (1981), fuses the mythical with the physical, transforming the lake space into a place where multiple temporalities coexist: the African past, the colonial and postcolonial present, and an imagined future of cultural liberation.

In terms of culture, religious syncretism acts as a strategy of resistance against hegemonic power structures. The figure of San Benito Agé encapsulates both African spirituality and adaptation to the colonial context, creating a unique cultural identity that validates multiple forms of existence and knowledge, as proposed by Dussel (2007). Orality, understood as “embodied memory” according to Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), allows us to preserve historical narratives and ancestral memories that transcend linear time. Every drumbeat, litany, and dance are vehicles of cultural transmission that connect African descendants to their spiritual roots and ancestral heritage.

With respect to space, the lake territory south of Lake Maracaibo is resignified as a symbolic system loaded with cultural and spiritual

meanings. Following Escobar (2008), this territory becomes a “fabric of meanings” constructed by communities through ritual practices and oral narratives. According to Nora (1989), cocoa forests, procession routes, and historic plantations are transformed into places of memory, where collective experiences of resistance and spirituality are projected onto the landscape. These physical spaces acquire new cultural meanings thanks to orality and the rituals associated with the cult of San Benito Agé.

The findings derived from the analysis under the time-culture-space triad reveal that the persistence of the cult of Agé-Benito for more than 300 years is a living testimony of how orality and ancestral tradition have been fundamental to preserve historical-aesthetic-cultural and religious objects. Oral storytelling has allowed Afro-descendant communities to reconstruct their spiritual and cultural identity, using the drum as a central instrument that sustains and transmits the ethno-musicality and ethno-orality of Dahomey-Benin spirituality. The percussion of each drumbeat, litanies and rituals denote not only the connection with the ancestor, but also the resistance in the face of external influences that have tried to dilute this cultural heritage.

African religiosity represented by the divinity of Agé has a transcendental role in the formation of the sound narrative of the spiritual tradition in the area. Although the cultists declare themselves devotees of the Catholic divinity of San Benito, in practice an ancestral tradition of African spirituality survives that resists and adapts to contemporary contexts. This phenomenon underscores the importance of preserving the legacy of African ancestors, who left their mark on the road to the construction of a mestizo identity on the Latin American continent.

In short, the cult of San Benito Agé is not only a spiritual manifestation, but also a dynamic process that articulates time, culture, and space in a context of resistance, memory, and social transformation. Their persistence is a clear example of how orality and ancestral tradition have been fundamental pillars to keep alive the dance and musical spirituality of the Afro-descendant people on the southern shore of Maracaibo Lake.

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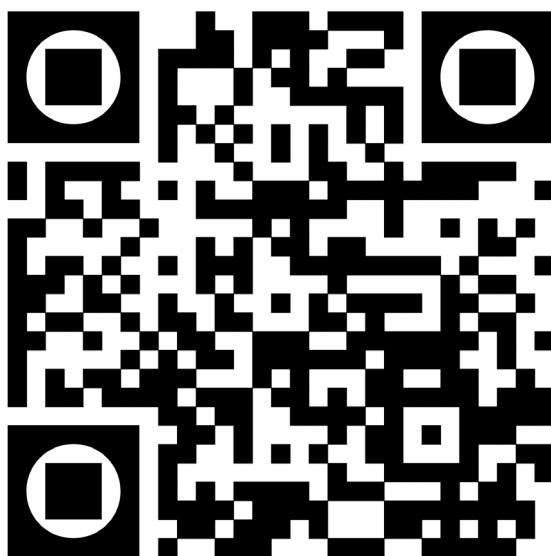
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In "The Oral Legacy of the Cult of San Benito Agé: Identity, Time and Space in the South of Lake Maracaibo," the cultural and spiritual richness of the cult of San Benito Agé in southern Lake Maracaibo is explored, highlighting orality as a key tool to preserve its ancestral memory. Through testimonies of practitioners, the traditions, rituals, and symbols that connect African with Catholic elements are analyzed, revealing a unique syncretism. The research addresses how orality, music, and geographical spaces shape collective identities and cultural resistance. With an interdisciplinary approach, history, anthropology, and geography are interwoven to understand this cultural expression as an act of re-existence in the face of coloniality.

