

Between Tradition and Globalisation: A Discourse Theoretical Analysis of Identity Negotiation in Puerto Viejo

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Afro-Caribbean identity is discursively constructed and continuously negotiated by residents of Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, in the context of ongoing social and cultural change. It is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in the town, where insights emerged through sustained engagement in the field and narrative interviews with local residents. Rather than starting from fixed categories, the analysis builds from the ways in which identity is articulated, experienced, and made meaningful in everyday life.

Drawing on a discourse theoretical framework informed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the study approaches identity as something that is not given in advance, but produced through contingent articulations that become visible in situated accounts. Afro-Caribbean identity thus emerges from the empirical material as something that is actively made and remade through different and interconnected ways of negotiating identity, including adaptive inclusion, boundary-making, moral and spiritual grounding, intergenerational continuity, and situational negotiation.

Across the fieldwork material, concepts such as ‘community’, ‘respect’, and ‘knowledge’ appear as recurring reference points that partially stabilise meaning, while remaining open to re-articulation in different contexts. These meanings do not pre-exist the fieldwork, but become visible through the ways in which residents speak about, position, and make sense of their social world. While residents position themselves differently in relation to social change, these differences unfold within a shared effort to sustain and negotiate identity in a shifting social landscape. The thesis contributes to discourse theoretical approaches to identity by showing how Afro-Caribbean identity in Puerto Viejo persists not through fixity, but through continuous re-articulation as it is lived, narrated, and practiced in everyday life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Contemporary societies are increasingly shaped by processes such as tourism and migration, which influence not only economic and political structures, but also everyday social relations and cultural identities (Castles et.al. 2014). As people, ideas, and practices move across borders, questions of belonging and identity become more complex and contested. In such contexts, identity cannot be understood as a fixed or essential category, but rather as something that is continuously constructed and negotiated through discourse and social interaction (Laclau & Mouffe. 2001). This becomes particularly visible in local settings where global and local dynamics intersect. One such setting is Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, a small but dynamic coastal town in Costa Rica, where tourism and globalisation have reshaped the local social landscape. This thesis explores how Afro-Caribbean residents articulate and negotiate their identities within this changing environment.

This thesis contributes both empirically and theoretically to existing research: Empirically, it provides an in-depth, qualitative insight into how Afro-Caribbean residents in Puerto Viejo experience and make sense of ongoing social change — a perspective that has received limited attention in existing literature, which has primarily focused on economic and structural transformations. By centering everyday narratives and lived experiences, the study highlights how identity and belonging are negotiated at the local level. Theoretically, the thesis applies the discourse theory by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) onto an empirical context marked by tourism and migration, demonstrating how identities are constructed and contested through everyday practices and meaning-making. In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of identity as a dynamic and relational process within transforming social environments. This is explored through qualitative fieldwork in Puerto Viejo, including participant observation and narrative interviews with five Afro-Caribbean residents.

Problem field

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca is a small coastal town located between the Caribbean Sea and the rainforest of Costa Rica, and is currently undergoing rapid socio-economic transformation. Once a relatively secluded fishing village, the town has developed into an international tourist destination,

significantly reshaping its local dynamics (Appendix 2, 2026). Historically, Puerto Viejo has been home to Afro-descendant communities, who have coexisted with the indigenous Bribri population from the Talamanca highlands for over a century. Due to its geographic isolation, the town remained relatively disconnected from broader national and global developments until the late 1970s, when increasing tourism initiated significant structural and cultural changes (Quesada, 2014: 20). This transformation has introduced new populations, including tourists, expatriates, and international workers, contributing to an increasingly diverse and complex social environment. While such developments are often associated with economic growth and cultural exchange, they also bring changes that affect everyday life of the local community, social relations, and local ways of understanding community and belonging. As a result, Puerto Viejo today represents a unique setting in which long-standing cultural traditions intersect with new global influences, creating a dynamic and evolving social landscape (Appendix 4, 2026).

In a context such as Puerto Viejo, where social change introduces new cultural influences and ways of life, questions of identity become particularly significant. Rather than approaching identity as a fixed or essential characteristic, this project draws on a discourse analytical perspective, in which identity is understood as contingent and constructed through language, meaning-making, and social interaction. From this perspective, identities are not simply something individuals possess, but are continuously produced and negotiated through the ways in which people articulate meaning of themselves, others, and their surroundings (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). In this sense, the encounter between long-standing local communities and new populations creates a setting in which multiple discourses of Afro-Caribbean identity may emerge, coexist, and potentially come into tension. These processes reflect broader struggles over meaning, belonging, and cultural values, where identities are only ever partially fixed and always open to rearticulation. This raises important questions about how individuals position themselves and their shared cultural identity within a transforming social environment. Against this background, this thesis seeks to explore the following:

Research Question

How are discourses of Afro-Caribbean identity articulated and negotiated by residents of Puerto Viejo?

To explore this, I embarked on a ten-week field study in the Caribbean town. This journey was not driven by a set of pre-defined hypotheses, but by a genuine curiosity and an inductive approach. I placed myself in the town as a participant and observer, spending the first six to eight weeks integrating into the daily rhythms of the community. Through participant observation, informal conversations, and the meticulous recording of field notes, I sought to understand the atmosphere of the town before conducting the final interviews.

This prolonged presence was beneficial as it allowed me to move beyond the surface of the 'tropical paradise' (C&C Travel) and build trust with the locals, which was necessary to hear the residents' narratives. It was through shared meals, cups of tea, and quiet moments in the community that the real discursive struggles began to reveal themselves. Only after this foundational period, once a bridge of mutual respect had been built, did I conduct the formal narrative interviews with the five women who constitute the empirical focus of this study: Grace, Leona, Velma, Celeste, and Rosalind. Only including female participants does not reflect a gendered analytical focus, but is the result of methodological choices, as these interactions provided more stable conditions for obtaining in-depth empirical data.

The thesis is guided by Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (2001), anchored in social constructivist philosophy of science. This framework provides the analytical tools to deconstruct how meaning is temporarily 'fixed' through Nodal Points, chains of equivalence and subject positions. Rather than viewing identity as a fixed or inherited trait, the research explores how it is continuously formed and reshaped through discursive processes in everyday life (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 109). It specifically looks at how the tension between perceptions of how the town 'used to be' and the current changes affect the residents' sense of self and their collective cultural identity. By focusing on residents born and raised in Puerto Viejo with Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, the project seeks to explore patterns of meaning that emerge when traditional heritage meets modern, global influences. Thus, the study investigates how Afro-Caribbean residents in Puerto Viejo navigate and articulate identity within a landscape of rapid change

Chapter 2: Discursive Framework

In this chapter, I present how Discourse Theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) is approached in this thesis. It is used as an integrated framework, practiced by outlining its philosophical assumptions, my methodological choices and reflections, and how Discourse Theory serves as an analytical lense when processing the empirical material. Working with discourse theory is a multiperspectival work, in which philosophy, theory and methodology are intertwined (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 4). Thus, Discourse Theory does not solely impact the philosophical assumptions or methodological choices, but shapes the entirety of the research project: *“In discourse analysis, theory and method are intertwined and researchers must accept the basic philosophical premises in order to use discourse analysis as their method of empirical study”* (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 4). While divided into three sections, they should be understood as three aspects of one whole. The ‘whole’ being the foundational discursive framework for how the project came to life; its structure and which tools and assumptions in which meaning is made from the empirical data.

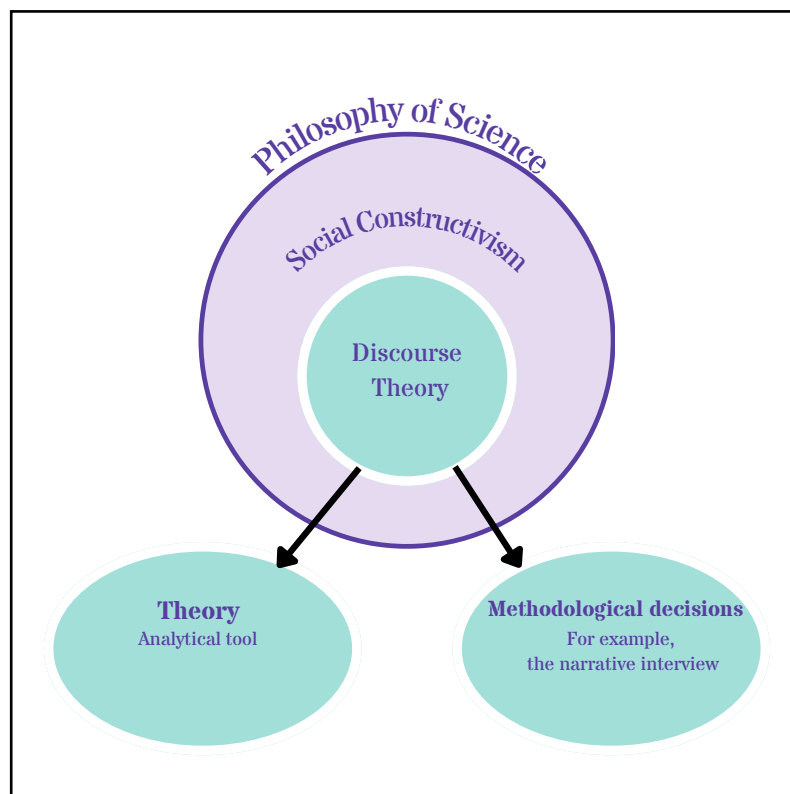


Figure 1: The interconnectedness of philosophy of science, theory, and methodology.

Source: Own creation, inspired by Jørgensen & Phillips (2002).

Figure 1 illustrates the overall analytical and methodological framework of the project. The model visualises how the study is grounded in a social constructivism, within which discourse theory constitutes the central theoretical, analytical and methodological approach. From the Discourse-framework, follow both the analytical tools applied in the analysis and the methodological choices, including the use of narrative interviews. The model does not imply a linear or hierarchical relationship between theory and method, but rather illustrates how epistemological assumptions, theoretical perspective and methodological choices are analytically interrelated.

The goal of this structure is to make it clear, how each stage of the research builds on the previous one, creating a coherent path from fieldwork to interpretation. Against this background, the following section elaborates on the philosophical assumptions of this study, specifying how reality and knowledge are understood within this framework.

Philosophy of Science

Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (2001), the social world is approached as contingent, relational, and constituted through discursive practices. In this section, I outline the ontological and epistemological assumptions that serves as the philosophical foundation of the thesis.

Although Discourse theory focuses on construction of meaning, particular ways of talking and making sense of the world, it should not be reduced to linguistic analysis alone, but rather the "*entire material density of the multifarious institutions, rituals and practices through which a discursive formation is structured*" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 109). Thus, the basic starting point of discourse theory is to acknowledge that our ways of speaking about the world does not neutrally reflect it. Instead, discourses play an active role of creating and changing the norms, identities and social relations in the world. In this sense, a 'discourse' becomes a structure, in which the social world is molded from. This approach roots from the Foucaultian tradition, understanding power as a catalyst for moving the world forward (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002: 37).

Ontology and epistemology

Both reality and knowledge, as well as interpretations of it, are understood as socially constructed. In this way, what may be perceived as objective truth reveals more about how interpretations of reality are produced through social interaction, rather than constituting truth itself. Ontologically, this project therefore adopts a perspectivist understanding of reality (Pedersen, 2012: 188). Epistemologically, knowledge is understood as contingent, historically situated, and produced through discursive and social practices (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002: 5). The ontological and epistemological assumptions guide how the social world, identities, and power relations are understood and analysed in this study.

Relying on Laclau and Mouffe, discourse theory has its foundation in the philosophy of science of social constructivism. When it comes to the ontological and epistemological premises, it is regarding the role of language, rituals and practices play in shaping discursive structure in the social world (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 109).

Ontological assumptions

Reality does exist: Meanings and representations exist, and so do physical objects. However, language itself is not a direct reflection of a pre-existing reality, instead it contributes to construct it. In this way, language creates representations of reality which contributes to its construction. Meaning does not exist prior to discourse; rather, it is produced through discursive practices. For example, in this research an informant mentions how weather changes are a sign from God (Appendix 3, 2026: 3). Now, the unpredictable weather in the Caribbean is a material fact, however, speaking about it as a sign from God contributes to creating a social reality where weather changes are perceived as divine interventions. In this case, meaning occurs through discursive practices around the material fact (Jørgensen & Philip, 2002: 9). Humans are not viewed as having natural, fixed or essential characteristics. Instead, they are perceived as subjects in relation to the social world. The same goes for identity, social structures and norms, as they are constantly being produced and reproduced through discursive practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107).

Epistemology

What is perceived as ‘taken for granted knowledge’ is put under a curious, critical lense. The analytical object of this project is not to decide whether or not something is ‘true’, but rather how informants produce and reproduce discourses. Thus, ‘taken for granted knowledge’ are products of categorising the world — namely, products of discourse (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002: 10). Knowledge is seen as socially produced through historically and culturally situated interactions between people. This means, that knowledge is not developed in isolation, but continuously shaped through social processes: It is produced, negotiated and maintained between people. Here, shared understanding is formed and different intepretations of reality may compete. The outcome of these social processes is established meanings or intepretations as being viewed more legitimate than others (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Because knowledge is historically and culturally situated, it must be understood in relation to the specific contexts in which it is produced (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 17). Discourses emerge within particular social, political, and historical conditions, and these conditions shape what can be said, thought, and understood at a given moment. These socially produced understandings of the world are closely connected to social action: Within a given worldview, some actions appear natural, reasonable, or even necessary, while others become difficult to imagine or justify. Different ways of understanding reality thus enable different forms of social practice. Consequently, the social construction of knowledge and truth is not without consequences, as it shapes how individuals act, interact, and relate to one another within specific social contexts (Burr & Dick, 2017).

This epistemological position is anti-foundationalist, as it rejects the idea that knowledge can be grounded in a single, stable foundation that transcends human practices, since there is no “*distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices*”, (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 107). Instead, knowledge is viewed as provisional and relational, produced and maintained through ongoing discursive practices. Accordingly, this study approaches knowledge as something that is continuously constructed, negotiated, and potentially contested within the social world (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002: 2).

Implications of the research

Taken together, these ontological and epistemological assumptions position discourse as constitutive of the social world. This has direct implications for the research design: The empirical material is approached as situated articulations, where participants' narratives serve as entry points into broader processes of meaning-making. This shifts the focus from what identity is to how identity is constructed and negotiated within specific social contexts. In this sense, discourse theory operates as an integrated framework that guides both the production and interpretation of data. This informs the methodological choices of the study, including the use of participant observation and narrative interviews, as well as an inductive approach to data collection and analysis. The following section therefore outlines how these methodological strategies are employed to capture the discursive construction of Afro-Caribbean identity in Puerto Viejo.

Methodological Approach

This chapter outlines the methodological framework used to generate the primary empirical data for this study. Adopting an inductive, qualitative design, it combines participant observation and narrative interviews to produce rich empirical material for exploring how discourses of Afro-Caribbean identity are articulated and negotiated in Puerto Viejo.

Research Design

In an attempt to provide methodological transparency, I will borrow the metaphor of the 'traveller' from Kvale (1994). The term bears a double meaning, as I quite literally travelled from Copenhagen, Denmark to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, Costa Rica. Additionally, I entered the field as the metaphorical traveller, which points to the interviewers' role and how knowledge is formed. This qualitative field study aims to explore the multiple dimensions of the field as they are discursively constituted and negotiated through interactions, narratives, and situated experiences (Kvale, 1994: 5).

Inductive research design

The metaphor of the traveller (Kvale, 1994) aligns with the qualitative and inductive orientation of the project, as this research unfolded in a similar manner in the field, through conversations and unexpected situations that arose in the everyday life in Puerto Viejo.

The inductive research design focuses on exploring the empirical data to identify recurring patterns and themes. Rather than testing a pre-defined hypothesis, this approach allows for a gradual progression from specific observations to broader conceptual insights and understandings (Haque, 2022: 61) In this project, my knowledge of the Afro-Caribbean culture in Puerto Viejo was purposely limited, upon flying to Costa Rica. The intention was to allow the field to show itself to me, rather than me going into the field with a certain point of view, looking for specific patterns to emerge. In inductive research, the analytic movement typically goes from concrete, situated observations toward more abstract conceptualisations (Haque, 2022: 61). In this process, it is acknowledged that what the researcher discovers is inherently connected to how it is discovered (Emerson et.al., 1995: 11). This highlights the reflexive nature of the study, where the findings are shaped by the specific interactions and methods used during the fieldwork in Puerto Viejo.

In the early stages of fieldwork, I worked deliberately as a ‘sponge’, absorbing impressions, stories, interactions, and everyday rhythms without trying to categorise them too early in the process. As the weeks progressed, certain themes and recurring dynamics began to appear, slowly guiding my attention and shaping the direction of my conversations and observations. Rather than starting with predefined hypotheses or analytical categories, I allowed meaning and focus to emerge through my interactions in Puerto Viejo. Thus, the inductive research started with comprehensive observations of the field and progressed to more abstract generalisations of patterns and concepts (Haque, 2022: 69). My main aim has been to explore how people talk about identity, belonging, and community life, and to remain open to the narratives, expressions, and social dynamics which appeared meaningful.

Data Collection Procedures

When I collected data in Puerto Viejo, I exercised different procedures. Aiming to explore how identity is articulated by the subjects living in the town, I practiced a mix of participatory observation, writing fieldnotes and conducting narrative interviews.

Participatory Field-observation

Traditionally, ‘participant observation’ refers to a researcher immersing in a social field in which they are initially unfamiliar with, while keeping a written record of observations and experiences (Emersen et.al. 1995: 1). Thus, upon flying to Costa Rica, I had very limited knowledge of the Afro-Caribbean people in Puerto Viejo. Participant observation entails prolonged presence within the local area of the research setting and engagement in everyday social life (Mørck, 2019: 178–179) and is:

“Aimed at the attempt to get a "feel" for a whole, to discern major and general patterns of relationships, activities, life styles, values, traditions, goals, and aspirations, and to identify and understand details within the whole” (Fellman, 1970: 124).

In line with this approach, I resided in Puerto Viejo for ten weeks, engaging in everyday life alongside local residents. As a part of the data collection process, I engaged in two interrelated activities: First, I entered the social setting of Puerto Viejo, as I developed relations with the people in it and participated in daily routines, cultural practices and everyday encounters — All while observing what is happening around me. Simultaneously, I practiced the second activity of writing Fieldnotes. Here, I systematically wrote down my observations and reflections (Emersen et.al. 1995: 1). Throughout the thesis I will draw upon findings from the fieldnotes, however, since they were handwritten, they will not have an appendix and therefore be of explicit reference.

The aim was not to ‘uncover hidden truth’ but rather explore the different experiences of ‘truth’ among the Afro-Caribbean people living in Puerto Viejo. While I did not experience being fully immersed as a member of the field, I did experience some form of resocialisation (Emersen et.al. 1995: 3). For example, I learned that my usual ways of approaching possible informants were seen as rude, as my communication was far more direct than the culture I was trying to understand. Although I was generally met with warmth and friendliness, something shifted whenever I mentioned my research. Eye contact broke, bodies turned slightly away, and the conversation stopped abruptly. By observing both my own behaviour and the Afro-Caribbean ways of communicating, it became apparent that I needed to be less direct. Or, in their view, more polite. This meant investing in small talk, allowing conversations to unfold at a slower pace, and letting relational trust develop before revealing my purpose, or at least before conducting the interview.

Such resocialisation allowed me to get closer to the informants, creating mutual trust as well as gaining more insight to their rhythms and norms.

There is a significant difference between observing as ‘a fly on the wall’ and immerse oneself in the field. My intention was to practice the latter: To gain access to the lived experiences and meaning-making of the people in the field. Such access came with limitations, which is elaborated further in ‘Field Access and Researcher Positionality’. However, through participating actively in the field, I was able to observe some degree of the ordinary routines and conditions in which the every-day lives of the locals took form (Emersen et.al. 1995: 2). I observed the rhythms and the patterns by physically placing myself on the cultural ‘hotspots’, such as Caribbean events, specific beaches, cafés, busstops and even certain streetcorners. Here, I both allowed myself to be approached as well as actively starting conversations with the locals. Sometimes it would result in getting free coconuts, sometimes the interaction would shift into a sexual undertone, resulting in me leaving the conversation. I learned that certain hours of the day I would be more exposed to catcalling and unwanted attention. Often, I would avoid certain streetcorners, change into more modest clothing once the sun has set, and dismiss attempted approaches by local men. These were measures of personal safety, however, they may have limited my access to the field. It shows how the presence of the researcher will never be neutral, even if the observed populations are not aware of the research. The people I did form relationships with were situated in their favour, and mutual trust unfolded gradually.

Narrative Interviews

The primary data the research was generated through narrative interviews. These interviews focused on the residents of Puerto Viejo lived experiences, everyday narratives, and meaning-making practices. The purpose was not only to access personal accounts, but to explore how these situated stories reflect and reproduce broader social, cultural, and historical structures (Warming, 2019: 117).

Narrative interviews are based on the assumption that meaning is created through storytelling. In narrating a story, meaning is produced by foregrounding certain experiences and giving them particular weight, allowing them to emerge as central or as a guiding thread, while other aspects remain in the background or are left untold. At the same time, stories establish connections between events that influence how experiences are understood (Warming, 2019: 117-118). Therefore,

narratives shape how people understand their experiences, actions, and interactions, which makes them central to explore how the identity of Afro-Caribbean living in Puerto Viejo is articulated.

When conducting narrative interviews, the aim is to explore how the informants articulate meaning through narration. Thus, when exploring how the subjects articulate the discourses around their identity, the narratives might be different from each informant (Warming, 2019: 120). This is not considered a limitation, but as valuable information of the various competing discourses, articulated through their narratives.

Although narrative interviews are characterised by their conversational and participant-led nature, I developed a flexible interview guide. Inspired by the interviewguide traditionally used when conducting semi-structured interviews, I created a tool more suitable for narrative interviews (Poulsen, 2019: 104). Similar to the semi-structured interviewguide, this guide functioned as a supportive tool to ensure that key topics relevant to the research were addressed, when appropriate. The topics included values, local traditions and everyday practices. In difference to the semi-structured interviewguide, I asked open questions in alignment to the topics, but kept follow-up questions to a minimum. Instead, I allowed silence to occur. When I did ask follow-up questions, the intention was to keep them neutral and to influence the narrative of the informant as little as possible (Warming, 2019: 121). Throughout the interviews, I aimed to let participants take the lead, allowing them to speak in their own rhythm and to prioritise aspects of their lived experience which they considered most meaningful. This approach often resulted in dialogues rather than question–answer sequences, creating space for shared reflection and richer narrative data (Warming, 2019: 120).

This methodological choice offers significant strengths, but also presents certain challenges. Narrative interviews rely heavily on participants' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences, which means the quality of the data is shaped by their comfort level and communicative style. At the same time, the flexible structure can lead to moments where the conversation stalls or becomes diffuse. The interviewer must therefore navigate a delicate balance: providing enough guidance to sustain the interview, while stepping back to allow participants' narratives to unfold organically. Creating an emotionally safe, responsive, and adaptable interview environment was thus essential for enabling meaningful and analytically valuable narratives to emerge.

Sampling and Access to the Field

This section documents the relational, spatial, and practical circumstances that shaped each interview encounter, and therefore the form and depth of the narratives that emerged. Here, I show how I came into contact with the informants, my access to the field and my sampling strategies. Furthermore, I introduce the interview-situation and the specific relation between interviewer and each informant, in order to secure transparency throughout the research.

Sampling Strategies

Access to participants developed through a hybrid sampling strategy combining inductive field immersion with emergent and increasingly purposive selection. The initial phase of fieldwork was characterised by broad, exploratory engagement, where interactions were driven by an attempt to gain a general understanding of social dynamics in Puerto Viejo. This phase functioned as an open-ended mapping of the field, where observations and informal encounters gradually informed a more focused research direction.

As the analytical focus narrowed towards the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women, my sampling became more specific. At this stage, access was primarily facilitated through existing field relations and referrals, whereas I utilised a snowball sampling technique, where my social connections in the field helped me find new informants. Some participants were identified through repeated local recommendations, while others emerged through sustained presence in specific settings, such as the tourism sector (Atkinson, 2001). This process was particularly beneficial considering the close-knit community in the field. This allowed me to somewhat overcome initial suspicion, which can be a challenge when researching groups that have been subject to previous studies (Atkinson, 2001). Rather than a fully predefined sampling frame, the final sample thus reflects a transition from exploratory observation to targeted selection via snowball sampling, where early field experiences actively shaped both the research focus and the pathways of access.

Interview Context and Participant Access

The degree of familiarity, formality, or ongoing contact between researcher and participant can influence how stories are told, what is emphasised, and what is appropriate to share (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2014: 39). The aim is not to ascribe meaning to particular interactions, but to document them as part of the empirical conditions under which the interview took place. Such transparency seeks to strengthen the methodological rigour of the study by making clear the interpersonal and situational dynamics that framed the production of the data.

Informant 1, Leona: I stayed at the same hostel intermittently for two months, which is where I met Leona, who works in the reception. Our relationship was friendly but primarily professional; she often used a nickname for me that she had created herself, reflecting our regular interactions at the hostel. The interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and took place in the reception area during her lunch break, a setting shaped by her work environment and the flow of guests around us.

Informant 2, Grace: My access to the second informant, Grace, was in similar fashion. She works at a different hostel where I only stayed for one week. I had known her for only a few days before the interview took place. Our interaction was cordial but remained professional, as our contact was limited to the period of my stay. The interview was conducted at her workplace, in the common area of the hostel reception and lasted approximately thirty minutes.

Informant 3, Velma: While walking around town, I engaged in informal conversations with residents about my research, during which Velma was repeatedly mentioned, particularly in relation to her restaurant. This contributed to her visibility as a potential informant, and I subsequently approached her at her workplace, where I introduced the project in a less direct manner in accordance with local communicative norms. She agreed to participate on the condition that the interview would not be recorded. Over the course of the interview, initial distance gradually diminished. At the end, she offered homemade tea and food items to take with me. Although these gestures took place in a commercial setting, they were not framed as standard service provision. This interaction lasted approximately an hour and a half, including interruptions and small-talk before and after the interview.

Informant 4, Celeste: While staying at the hostel where Leona worked, I was given a flyer for a backyard sale hosted by Celeste. At the event, I initiated a conversation with her and gradually introduced the research project, after which she agreed to participate. We stayed in contact via WhatsApp and met once prior to the interview, during which I assisted with photography and

content creation. The interview took place at her residence in a more rural area outside Puerto Viejo, where she had invited me for a traditional Caribbean breakfast shared with her household before the interview began, which lasted for approximately one hour.

Informant 5, Rosalind: Access to Rosalind was based on prolonged residential proximity and repeated everyday interaction. I rented an apartment on the property she shares with her sister and brother-in-law, which resulted in frequent informal contact in shared outdoor spaces. Initial interaction occurred when I sought assistance after cutting my finger while cooking, after which she and her relatives helped treat the wound and later supported me with practical tasks during recovery. Over the following weeks, I engaged in repeated informal conversations with her and her sister, which contributed to an emerging familiarity. The interview was conducted after this period of sustained contact and lasted approximately one hour, and took place in her home which she shares with her sister and brother in law, who were also present at the interview.

Field Access and Research Positionality

While the research project was my primary focus, my personal safety remained a central consideration and directly shaped my sampling in the field. Although including both men and women would have been possible, my interactions with women consistently provided more reliable conditions for developing open, trusting, and undistorted research relationships. These interactions enabled me to engage with the field without simultaneously managing concerns about personal risk or misread intentions, which would have compromised both access and data quality. Although ‘full immersion’ was my initiate goal, certain boundaries presented themselves. It became clear to me that being accepted as a member of the group, I had to share both cultural and ethnic similarities (Emersen et.al. 1995: 3). My interactions with local men and local women were quite different. Some men appeared less willing to engage in conversation when I was accompanied by another man — a situation that occurred frequently when I attempted to approach potential male participants. I want to avoid generalising men in Puerto Viejo; these impressions stemmed from brief interactions and from my limited understanding of local gendered norms. What I interpreted as discomfort or potential risk may not have carried the same meaning within local cultural frameworks.

However, because I did experience occasional episodes of unwanted sexual attention, it became difficult at times to distinguish between interactions that were genuinely unsafe and those that were simply unfamiliar to me. This ambiguity influenced how I navigated the field and whom I felt able to approach with confidence. Consequently, I made a conscious decision to prioritise engagement with women. This choice supported both my personal safety and the integrity of the research, as conversations with women tended to unfold with greater openness.

My positionality as a foreign woman, a temporary visitor, and as someone unfamiliar with local gendered norms, became an active part of the research context. Instead of treating this as a limitation, I view it as an important analytical lens: my embodied experiences shaped the routes I could take, the relationships I could form, and ultimately the perspectives that became represented in the thesis.

Data Processing

The processing of the empirical material was an iterative process from spoken narrative to analytical construction. This phase involved both the technical systematisation of the interviews and a reflexive coding process.

Transcribing interviews

All five interviews were conducted face-to-face. Four were captured via smartphone recordings and subsequently underwent a systematic transcription process. In converting oral exchange into written documentation, a balance was struck between readability and authenticity. While minor grammatical corrections were made to ensure flow, the original cadence and linguistic nuances were preserved to uphold the integrity of the narratives (Poulsen, 2019: 110). One of the The interviews (Appendix 3) was not recorded due to the participant's preference, and was processed through expanded field notes. This involved a meticulous reconstruction of the dialogue immediately following the encounter, incorporating verbatim quotes noted during the session along with contextual observations of the interactional dynamics. The transcripts are attached as appendices. Each of the five informants has their respective appendix: Leona is in Appendix 1, Grace is in

Appendix 2, Velma is in Appendix 3, Celeste is in Appendix 4, and Rosalind is in Appendix 5. In the appendices, each informant is marked by I1 in Appendix 1, I2 in Appendix 2 and so on.

Discursive Coding

The coding process was characterised by a transition from an initial attempt at thematic categorisation toward a more relational, discursive approach. Initially, I sought to organise the material through a traditional thematic coding strategy, aiming to isolate specific topics within the transcripts (Poulsen, 2019: 111). However, it quickly became apparent that a rigid categorisation was insufficient for capturing the complexity of the data. The narratives did not exist as isolated themes; rather, they functioned through what can be understood as chains of equivalence, where the meaning of one element was fundamentally dependent on its relation to others.

Through this ‘trial and error’ with thematic boxes, a clear narrative structure emerged across the interviews (Warming, 2019: 122). While the individual stories were diverse, the participants consistently navigated a similar trajectory: They articulated their upbringing and cultural roots, described their current interactions within the community, and finally reflected on the socio-economic transformations of Puerto Viejo. By attempting to separate these elements, the interconnectedness of the discourse became more visible. For instance, the participants' descriptions of ‘traditional culture’ were not merely nostalgic accounts but were actively constructed in opposition to the perceived threats of modernisation and tourism. Consequently, the coding shifted from a search for themes to an exploration of how these narratives are tied together to form a coherent articulation of identity. This relational approach allowed for an analysis that respects the fluidity of the discourse, focusing on how meaning is produced in the tension between the personal past and the changing social landscape of the field.

Ethical Considerations

Consideration of ethical issues when conducting primary data during fieldwork was a top priority in this study, which involves “*Morality, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness and they are of the utmost importance in social studies so that our research is not harmful*” (Ghimire, 2021: 79). Accordingly,

ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process in order to minimise potential harm to both the individuals involved and the broader population under study.

Anonymity was ensured for all parties involved in the research, including both interview participants and individuals referred to in field notes. The intention was to safeguard participants' privacy and to minimise the risk of potential harm (Ghimire, 2021: 89). This was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, whereby real names were replaced with invented ones. In addition, references to participants' workplaces and family members were omitted.

The academic purpose of the thesis was explicitly communicated along with the expectations of the informants. I emphasised that their consent could be withdrawn at any time, highlighting the voluntary character of their participation (Juul Kristensen, 2019: 85). Thus, flexibility was required of the interviewer to accommodate the needs of the informants, exemplified with Velma's discomfort with being recorded. However, informed consent and voluntary participation were not always feasible in the context of observational fieldwork. In such cases, these principles were weighed against the purpose of the study, namely to observe individuals' natural interactions in public settings (Juul Kristensen, 2019: 85).

In some cases, concerns about research fatigue and extractive research practices were only articulated after trust had been established. Several participants expressed, or implied, a sense that outsiders may 'take' knowledge without giving anything back. This raises the possibility that some interactions were experienced as intrusive, despite ethical intentions. Overall, this demonstrates how access, trust, and positionality are not external limitations, but central to how the empirical material is produced.

Another key ethical principle in this study is cultural sensitivity. This principle informed both the conduct of the fieldwork and the subsequent processing and analysis of the data. Cultural sensitivity entails an awareness of historical context as well as the cultural experiences, norms, values, beliefs, and practices of the population under study (Ghimire, 2021: 85). Given that the study focuses on Afro-Caribbean communities in Puerto Viejo, Costa Rica, particular attention was paid to conducting the research in a culturally sensitive manner, in the light of race, history and social positioning (Juul Kristensen, 2019: 84).

Methodological Reflections

The empirical material is limited by a small sample of five Afro-Caribbean women across different generations, which narrows the scope of the analysis. It also excludes male perspectives, resulting in a gendered and partial account of identity articulation. In addition, the relationships between researcher and participants were uneven, meaning that some interviews were more detailed and open than others, which affects both comparability and interpretation. One interview was not recorded, further reducing analytical consistency and complicating systematic comparison.

Additionally, the empirical material is a result of a contextual and intersubjective process of meaning-making, where narratives are co-constructed rather than simply collected (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014: 39). Consequently, I occupy a co-constructive position in relation to the empirical material (Warming, 2019: 118–120). Thus, that the interviews do not provide access to how Afro-Caribbean identity is articulated independently of the research context, but rather to how it is expressed within the specific interview situation. What is captured, then, is not the version discourse that becomes available in interaction with me as a researcher.

As a Danish researcher entering a context shaped by a different historical, cultural, and social background, I inevitably approach the material through categories that are not native to the setting, shaped by my own socio-cultural background. This creates a risk of misalignment between participants' meanings and the analytical categories used to interpret them. In addition, participants may rely on taken-for-granted knowledge and implicit references that are not shared in the interview situation, particularly in narrative interviews where I aimed to minimise interruption. Taken together, this highlights how both the production and interpretation of the empirical material are shaped by differences in frames of reference between researcher and participants.

Additionally, all interviews were conducted in English, which was not the first language of either the participants or myself. This likely affected the nuance and precision of participants' expressions, while also shaping my own ability to fully grasp subtle meanings, cultural references. Language therefore functioned as a filter through which identity was both expressed and interpreted. Taken together, these considerations mean that the findings should not be understood as representative of

Afro-Caribbean identity as a whole, but instead reflect a limited and relationally produced set of articulations within specific interview encounters.

Summary of Methodology

Taken together, the methodological approach combines immersive fieldwork with narrative data production in order to capture how identity is lived and articulated in situated contexts. Participant observation enabled engagement with everyday practices and social relations in Puerto Viejo, documented with fieldnotes. Narrative interviews provided the primary empirical basis for the analysis. These accounts are treated as situated narratives through which discursive formations become visible. Ultimately, these procedures were employed to generate rich empirical data, providing a solid foundation for in-depth discourse-analysis of how Afro-Caribbean identity is continuously produced and negotiated in everyday practice.

Theoretical framework

This section elaborate the theoretical framework of the thesis, based on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (2001). It introduces the central concepts that guide the analysis of how informants produce and reproduce discourse in a context of rapid change, and how this informs the negotiation of their cultural identity.

Constructing Discourse in Puerto Viejo

Through the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), this research understands discourse as a system of meaning. This means that discourse should not be reduced to a single utterance or a purely linguistic phenomenon, but rather understood as a broader network of ideas, practices, and relations that only acquire meaning in relation to one another. A discourse functions as a temporary organisation of meaning, although always in motion (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 109). Analysing discourse therefore involves tracing how articulations reproduce, challenge, or transform these structures over time.

Discourses are not closed entities, but are constantly shaped and reshaped through their interaction with other discourses. As Laclau and Mouffe emphasise, “*no discursive formation is a sutured totality and the transformation of elements into moments is never complete*” (2001: 107). This highlights how meanings are never fully fixed, but remain open to negotiation, contestation, and change. The objective of applying this theoretical framework is to explore how meaning, identity, and subjectivity are produced within the discursive field. In this sense, analysing discourse involves examining how particular meanings are articulated through the accounts of the informants (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 7). Thus, this study analyses how Afro-Caribbean identity is negotiated within the discursive field of Puerto Viejo, where ongoing social change and strong cultural attachments give rise to competing articulations of meaning.

The structure of discourse and analytical tools

In order to explore the discursive framework, one must become familiar with certain analytical tools. Although Laclau and Mouffe present an entire ‘toolbox’, I have chosen the specific tool’ which are deemed most relevant for interpreting the empirical data in this research.

Positions of signs within Discourse

Fundamentally, a discourse is composed of signs: words, concepts, or symbols which do not possess any natural meaning on their own. A sign becomes meaningful only through the relations it enters into within a specific discourse: “*The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated*” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105). In other words, some signs remain open, ambiguous, or contested, which are referred to as ‘elements’. These are signs whose meaning has not yet been stabilised and can therefore be interpreted in multiple ways. Concepts such as ‘culture’, ‘community’, or ‘respect’ may appear as elements if different actors try to pull them in different directions. When a sign becomes more stabilised within a discourse and takes on a recognisable meaning, it becomes a ‘moment’. A sign can be a moment in one discourse and an element in another, depending on how successfully a discourse manages to stabilise it. However, this stabilisation is never complete, which means moments always retain a residue of openness (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 28).

When a sign becomes especially central within a discourse, it is referred to as a ‘nodal point’. These are privileged signs within the discourse which function as organising centres through which other signs are structured. Nodal points do not possess inherent meaning; they are empty in the sense that their significance depends entirely on the discursive relations that surround them (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112). For example, ‘Pura Vida’ may operate as a nodal point if signs such as ‘community’, ‘tradition’, ‘respect’ draw their meaning in relation to it. Furthermore, a sign that functions as a nodal point in one discourse may operate merely as an element in another, because all signs circulate within the broader discursive field — the space of competing attempts to fix their meaning. This is also where ‘floating signifiers’ emerge: Signs whose meaning is highly contested because multiple discourses attempt to claim them (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 27–28).

Articulation and the Structuring of Meaning

‘Articulation’ is the process that structures the relations between signs. As Laclau and Mouffe express it, articulation is understood as:

“[A]ny practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105).

Thus, ‘articulation’ refers to any practice that links signs together in ways that shape meaning. They operate within an open and unpredictable terrain, since discourses are never closed structures. While discourse temporarily stabilises meaning through articulation, this stabilisation always remains partial open to change (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 29). This makes articulation central to analysing how individuals construct meaning: it draws attention not only to what people say, but to how they actively link concepts, experiences, and values together. Additionally, a type of articulatory links are especially relevant for this study, named ‘Chains of equivalence’. This link signs together by emphasising what they share, creating a sense of unity or common identity (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 50). Taken together, a discourse is thus a network of signs in which some remain open (elements), some become relatively stabilised (moments), and some operate as organising hubs (nodal points). But these positions are never permanent. They reflect ongoing articulatory practices that seek to stop the movement of meaning and create a provisional unity, ultimately resulting in the understanding discourses being a reduction of possibilities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 26–27).

Subject position: The Discursive Constitution of the Individual

Within this framework, the subject is not understood as a stable, autonomous entity with a fixed essence. Instead, Laclau and Mouffe argue that subjects are constituted through the discourses in which they participate. They employ the term 'subject positions' to explain how individuals are positioned within a discursive structure (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 109). A subject is never complete but occupies temporary positions (like 'mother', 'worker', or 'Afro-descendant') offered by the discourse. Identity thus emerges through a process of identification with these positions. Because discourses are always open and in competition, an individual will often occupy multiple, and sometimes even contradictory, subject positions simultaneously.

The connection between articulation, nodal points, and the subject is central to understanding identity formation within this framework. While articulations are the discursive practices that establish a relation among elements such that their identity is modified (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 105), nodal points function as the privileged points of fixation that attempt to halt the flow of meaning and create a partial structure (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112). This fixation of meaning extends to the individual's self-perception. It is through the articulation of specific nodal points that a discourse 'offers' various subject positions. Consequently, the subject does not emerge from an internal essence but is positioned within a discursive structure: "*Since the affirmation of the discursive character of every subject position was linked to the rejection of the notion of subject as an originative and founding totality*" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 114). In practice, this means that an informant's identity is the result of how they position themselves in relation to the nodal points.

Building on this, identity is understood as fundamentally relational (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112). In this way, identity does not exist in isolation, but is always constructed through difference; through what it is not, as much as what it is. Identities are therefore not fixed or self-contained, but emerge through ongoing relations within a discursive field. This also implies that identity is never simply reproduced over time. Rather than being the repetition, identity "*always consist in the construction of new differences*" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112). In other words, even when practices appear stable or habitual, they are continuously being rearticulated in slightly new ways.

Critical Reflection and Delimitation

This study applies a selective use of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, focusing on concepts that are directly useful for analysing identity construction in the empirical material, in particular articulation, nodal points, chains of equivalence and difference, and subject positions. This also means that key parts of the theory are deliberately left out, especially concepts such as hegemony and antagonism, which are not developed in a systematic way in this analysis. While these concepts are central to understanding broader power relations and structural discursive struggles (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), including them would require a more extensive analysis of institutional and political dynamics beyond the scope of this study. As a consequence, the analysis does not aim to explain how discourses become dominant or how power operates at a structural level in Puerto Viejo. Instead, it focuses on how identity is constructed and negotiated within the interview material itself. This means that the findings should be read as insights into micro-level processes of meaning-making, rather than as an account of wider hegemonic formations in the discursive field.

Operationalising the Framework

In the analytical process, Laclau and Mouffe's concepts are used as an analytical framework for examining how meaning is constructed in the informants' narratives. The analysis begins by identifying key signifiers in the empirical material that function as nodal points or floating signifiers, such as 'Pura Vida' or 'community', which organise and structure other meanings in the informants' accounts. By tracing how these nodal points are articulated in relation to other signifiers, the analysis explores how meaning is temporarily stabilised within the discourse. The analysis further draws on the concept of subject positions to examine how the informants position themselves within these discursive structures. This way, identity is viewed as something that emerges through ongoing discursive positioning within the specific interview context.

In the context of this study, it is particularly relevant in understanding how identity is shaped through ongoing social and cultural change. The transformations taking place in Puerto Viejo can be seen as introducing new differences into the discursive field, which in turn affect how identities are negotiated. At the same time, the repetition of everyday practices can be understood as articulatory

practices that partially stabilise meaning. Identity thus emerges in the tension between repetition and change, as it is continuously reproduced, but never in exactly the same way (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001: 112).

Chapter 3: Contextualisation

This chapter establishes the contextual foundation for the analysis. By tracing the historical and social transformation of Puerto Viejo and introducing the five informants, the following sections map the discursive landscape in which Afro-Caribbean identity is negotiated, providing the necessary framework for understanding the struggles over meaning explored in this study..

The Discursive Landscape of Wolaba

This section maps the discursive shift of Puerto Viejo, from its origins as the isolated settlement of 'Wolaba' to its current reality as a global tourism hub. This transition illustrates the changing landscape in which Afro-Caribbean identity is currently negotiated.

From Legal Exclusion to a Closed System of Meaning

The roots of contemporary Puerto Viejo, originally known as Wolaba, are found in the waves of Jamaican immigrants who arrived at the end of the 19th century. However, the Afro-Caribbean population faced significant legal barriers until the 1949 constitution, which finally granted them the right to travel freely throughout the country (Putnam, 2002: 73). In the perspective of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), this enforced isolation allowed for the articulation of a distinct Caribbean discourse. Geographically and legally separated from the national Costa Rican state, Puerto Viejo functioned as a space where specific cultural practices could be fixed as moments in a shared understanding of life, relatively undisturbed by the outside field of discursivity.

‘Old Puerto Viejo’: Stability through Shared Articulations

In the narratives of the older generation, the ‘old Puerto Viejo’ is remembered as a time of stability and shared understanding. Everyday life was rooted in communal practices and local traditions that

defined the social fabric of the town. Land ownership, for example, was not governed by formal state laws or legal documents, but by local customs and mutual recognition within the community: *“And then, to get a piece of property, you didn't have to ask nobody. The plant with your red leaf, you would just cut it and you want from here to there, you put the plant”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 25). The ‘red leaf’ serves as a signifier of a discursive order where the community relied on collective rituals and local knowledge for the boundaries of land ownership. Whether it was the women cooking together or the men crafting caskets (Appendix 5, 2026), the identities of a the afro-caribbean residents were stabilised through these articulations of solidarity and self-sufficiency.

The Shift From Cacao to Tourism

The late 20th century brought significant changes that challenged the existing discourse. The monilia fungus in 1978 destroyed the cacao plantations, which had served as a central marker for the community’s social and economic organisation. As cacao production failed, tourism became the main source of economic income in the town (Andersson et.al., 2014: 20). For example, Velma describes how the area has transformed from a place with limited infrastructure, without supermarkets, banks, or established roads, into a more developed town with increased access to services and employment opportunities, particularly in relation to tourism (Appendix 3, 2026). Thus, the arrival of infrastructure and a large foreign population opened the previously closed discourse to a vast field of discursivity, where global and local meanings collide. The Afro-Caribbean identity, once a stable set of moments, is now being challenged by a dominant tourism discourse that seeks to redefine the town’s essence.

The Many Meanings of ‘Pura Vida’

The transformation of Puerto Viejo is reflected in the diverse and often conflicting ways the phrase ‘Pura Vida’ is used. On a national level, the phrase has been articulated as a defining element of Costa Rican identity and a powerful cultural export. ‘Pura Vida’ is often presented as a uniquely positive outlook on life, synonymous with resilience, gratitude, and a simplified approach to existence. In this broader media discourse, it functions as a symbol of national character: A ‘pure life’ that prioritises social connection and peace over material stress (Rosch 2024). However, as will be explored in the analysis, the local use of the term in Puerto Viejo reveals a far more contested landscape. Here, ‘Pura Vida’ is continuously rearticulated to reflect a variety of social, moral, and cultural positions that both challenges and add layers of complexity to this idealised national image.

The Wolaba Parade

A prominent cultural expression in the current landscape of Puerto Viejo is the annual Wolaba Parade. Established in 2013, the parade emerged as a community-led initiative to celebrate Afro-descendant heritage through music, dance, and gastronomy. Named after the town's original Creole designation, the event takes place during Afro-Descendant Historical Month and relies on the collective efforts of local volunteers and businesses. By transforming the public streets into a space for Calypso music and traditional clothing, the parade serves as a visible manifestation of Caribbean pride and community unity. This annual event has quickly become a central reference point in the town, where the community's historical roots are brought into the present social sphere (The Costa Rica News, 2025).

Introducing the Five Caribbean Women

The following section provides brief social profiles of the informants, focusing on their life histories, social positions, and everyday contexts in Puerto Viejo. The purpose is to situate each participant within the social and cultural settings that frame their experiences and the subsequent analysis. These profiles therefore function as analytical context, offering background for understanding how different positionalities shape the articulations explored in the analysis.

Grace is a forty-eight-year-old woman, born and raised in Puerto Viejo. She grew up in the town and lived there until she finished her primary schooling, after which she moved briefly to Limón to complete her further studies and then returned to Puerto Viejo. For the past twenty-six years, she has worked as a hotel receptionist, a job she describes with significant enthusiasm, as it allows her to interact with people and cultures from all over the world on a daily basis. Today, Grace is a single mother, living in a multi-generational household with her son and mother. Her mother takes care of her son while Grace is at work, which allows her to remain dedicated to her career in the tourism industry (Appendix 2, 2026).

Leona is a thirty-eight-year-old woman, born and raised in Puerto Viejo, where she has lived her entire life. She is the mother of three children and currently works as a receptionist at a hostel in the

town, where she occasionally brings her youngest children. Her family is widely known in the area, particularly through her grandmother, who played a central role in the local community. According to Leona, her grandmother was among the few early residents in parts of the town and was known for caring for others in the community, which contributed to the family's local recognition (Appendix 1, 2026).

Celeste is a sixty-eight-year-old woman who lives with her husband on a farm in a more secluded area in the jungle, located approximately a ten-minute drive from Puerto Viejo. They have been married for forty-eight years and raised five children, who are now adults. While their children no longer live at home, Celeste describes the family as remaining closely connected through what she refers to as their 'ministry' (Appendix 4, 2026: 1). This is a family-based initiative which combines multiple functions: It operates partly as a small-scale accommodation for visitors, partly as a farm producing food, and partly as a space where guests can engage with alternative health practices and teachings. The ministry is oriented towards a traditional way of living which emphasises self-sufficiency, including growing food, maintaining the land, and relying on natural resources as part of everyday life. It is closely tied to her family, both as a shared livelihood and as a continuation of values and practices passed down through previous generations. Celeste grew up in a rural village further in the jungle, but moved to Puerto Viejo to raise her children. Here, the family lived for approximately forty years and she refers to herself as part of "the founders" of the town (Appendix 4, 2026: 10).

Rosalind is a seventy-six year old woman, born and raised in Puerto Viejo. She grew up with a family of four, consisting of her parents, a younger sister and herself (Appendix 5, 2026: 1). At a certain point, her sister moved to the United States of America, where Rosalind followed along with her husband and child (Appendix 5, 2026: 4). They lived there for a couple of years, until her father became deadly ill and Rosalind returned to Puerto Viejo to take care of him until he passed away. She came back to the town twenty-two years ago, and have lived in there ever since (Appendix 5, 2026: 5;13). Today, Rosalind lives with her sister and her sisters husband in the same house, on a premise passed down to the sisters from their grandparents. The premise consists of five buildings; one functions as a storage room but used to be the main site for Rosalinds' cooking classes, three buildings are rented out and the last building all three live in. Most of the outdoor area functions as

a garden, where flora, fauna and animal life thrive. Among other, a sloth lives in one of the trees, and a family of rodents live between the bushes.

Deeper insights: Velma

This informant is treated differently than the other participants as the interview was not recorded, resulting in less extensive empirical data. However, her discourse remains highly valuable to the overall research, which is why she has been retained in the study. Consequently, she will not be the subject of a dedicated sub-analysis; instead, her perspectives will serve as a supplementary resource to the other analytical sections. Because she does not have her own individual analysis, this section provides a more detailed presentation of her views, which will subsequently be elaborated upon and integrated in connection with the findings from the other informants.

Velma is a woman in her late sixties, born and raised in Puerto Viejo, who expresses a clear connection to her land and local heritage (Appendix 3, 2026). As a restaurant and property owner, she states a firm intention to retain her land, explaining that she will not sell it and that it is to be inherited by her children. Her daily life is centered around driving the restaurant, spending time with her family and a social group of local women of similar age, whom she meet four times a week for exercise and gather for birthdays and private dinners (Appendix 3, 2026: 1).

Velma describes her life and worldview as being guided by her faith. She explains that she speaks with Jesus every morning, a practice she identifies as the source of a stable sense of self that remains unaffected by the opinions of others. This religious framework informs her relationship with the natural environment: In a region such as South Caribbean, weather conditions can be extreme, characterised by sudden shifts between intense heat and heavy tropical rainstorms. Velma describes the changes of weather as a divine decision, rather than a personal inconvenience (Appendix 3, 2026: 3). She expresses a willingness to keep a positive mindset focused on daily divine interactions, stating that her internal state does not depend on the sun or the rain, since it is outside of her control. However, she experiences tourists to arrive to the town with a certain audacity, expecting the weather to adjust to their needs. She continues elaborating the importance of patience and acceptance of the environment through the local phrase ‘pura Vida’. According to Velma, this is an expression which can be used either as a greeting or an uplifting phrase when being met with obstacles, similar to the English ‘keep going’ (Appendix 3, 2026: 3).

Furthermore, she describes the changes of Puerto Viejo through her observations of government actions and social interactions. Velma points out that the government denounces traditional wooden houses which are residents have always had, while newcomers are not being met with such restrictions and are free to build according to their own desires (Appendix 3, 2026: 1). She relates experiences of being looked down upon by some tourists, whom she describes as viewing the afro-caribbean population as "*pieces of trash*" (Appendix 3, 2026: 1). However, immediately after this statement, she continues: "*But I love my home, I treat my people right. Because i give respect and get respect in return*" (Appendix 3, 2026: 1). By articulating her deep affection to her 'home' Puerto Viejo, alongside her commitment to 'treating people right', Velma reclaims the definition of her own social space. Despite the perceived marginalisation from outsiders, she establishes 'respect' as a reciprocal moment that remains central to her world. Through this, she refuses to occupy the subject position of a 'victim' of tourism; instead, she articulates her identity in the Afro-Caribbean values of communal dignity and a deep-rooted belonging to the land.

From Context to Contested Identities

The five women presented above represent different generations and positions within the social fabric of Puerto Viejo. While each of their narratives are unique, they all navigate a shared field of discursivity characterised by the transition from the 'old Puerto Viejo' to a globalised tourist hub.

In the following analysis, these personal narratives will be examined not merely as life stories, but as active articulations of identity. Each section will explore how the informants draw on different nodal points to articulate their sense of self in a landscape of change. Together, these accounts will explore the complex struggle to maintain and re-articulate Afro-Caribbean identity, when traditional moments of life are challenged by new, global influences.

Chapter 4: Analysis

The following analysis explores how Afro-Caribbean identity is articulated and negotiated through the narratives of five women from Puerto Viejo, by applying Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (2001). The analysis is structured into five main parts, focusing on the individual discourses of the informants, except of Velma whose perspective will be integrated throughout these sections as a supplementary resource for discursive exploration.

Part one explores how Grace uses 'Pura Vida' as an inclusive nodal point to integrate tourism and new knowledge into her sense of self. Part two examines Leona, who also centers on 'Pura Vida' but as a strategy of preservation to protect traditional values against external pressures. Part three focuses on Celeste, where 'God' acts as the ultimate organising principle for her spiritual practice and her farm as a sanctuary against social change. Part four analyses Rosalind, whose identity is stabilised through the nodal point of 'community' and expressed through the daily practices of labor and communal cooking. Part five concludes the chapter with a comparative discussion that identifies the shared signs, such as respect and community, that hold the broader Afro-Caribbean discourse together.

Analysis part 1: Grace

In this first part of the analysis, I examine the discourse of Grace. This narrative is particularly interesting because it offers a perspective on Afro-Caribbean identity that emphasises adaptability and inclusion, exploring how this affects her specific subject position and cultural identity

Caribbean Culture: Articulating a Unified Identity

Grace expresses Caribbean Culture not as an isolated entity, but as a shared identity characterised by a certain 'energy' and 'spirit'. In Grace's narrative, Caribbean culture is not merely a background setting; it is a primary site for the construction of identity, partially fixed by the nodal point of 'Pura Vida'. Through her articulations, the culture is expressed as a shared 'spirit' and a sense of collective ownership that binds different peoples together in a chain of equivalence:

Our culture is like the music, the the vibe, the energy. We have our own languages, we have our own food, we have our own spirit, everything is like pretty much ours. So we try like to inject a little to others but we still try to maintain it ours. It's like colourful. Yes, very spiritual (Appendix 2, 2026: 2).

The signifiers: 'vibe', 'energy', 'spirit', all relate to the sign 'our culture'. The relations between these signs show the discourse in Grace's narrative contributes to create how the Caribbean Culture is identified by these immaterial signifiers. These signifiers are paired with 'the', giving it a more fixed meaning. It is not a random 'vibe', it is 'the' vibe; the Caribbean vibe. Furthermore, she connects the signifiers 'music', 'food', 'language' and 'colourful', to 'our culture'. These are signifiers which refer to material practices. For example, articulating the relationship between 'food' and 'our culture' adds meaning to both signs: 'Food' being related to 'our culture' adds meaning to the sign as being something 'more' than only a physical object, and 'our culture' gains a physical, tangible meaning. 'Our culture' now possesses both immaterial and material dimensions, meaning it is not only something to be felt, but also seen and tasted. This way, the relations between these signifiers add meaning of multiple sensory and emotional experiences to the sign 'our culture'.

Grace articulates a certain ownership of the culture, when she expresses "*everything is like pretty much ours*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 2). Here, she refers to 'everything' that relates to 'our culture', including the signifiers such as music and energy. In this articulation, Caribbean culture does not belong to everyone: It belongs to 'us', making it 'our' culture. This way, Grace's discourse is characterised by a tension between inclusivity and preservation. When she expresses a desire to 'inject' her culture into others while simultaneously wanting to "*maintain it ours*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 2), she manages her chain of equivalence. She articulates 'Caribbean culture' as an expansive chain that can include outsiders through shared experiences like music and food. However, by insisting on 'maintaining' the culture, she ensures that her identity remain anchored in her own community's history and values, preventing the discourse from being fully co-opted by the tourism industry.

I love the Caribbean, like Afro-descent, we are unique and pretty similar. And the ones of Trinidad and Tobago, the ones from Jamaica, the ones from Costa Rica, one part from Nicaragua — all of the ones that live in the Caribbean, we are pretty similar (Appendix 2, 2026: 2).

When Grace states her affection to the Afro-descent, the signifier ‘love’ functions as an articulation that connects her personal attachment to the collective identity of the Afro-descendant, Caribbean community. Through this articulation, ‘love’ is not merely a feeling, but a link in the chain of equivalence that reinforces her subject position. Additionally, Grace articulates a collective ‘we’ that spans multiple national contexts. Through this chain of equivalence, she constructs a shared identity among Caribbean Afro-descendants, linking them across borders and emphasising their cultural similarity. The repeated use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ signals a sense of inclusion within the group, while simultaneously implying that Caribbean culture is not equally accessible to outsiders. In this way, the discourse both constructs a collective identity and establishes a boundary between those who belong and those who do not.

Chains of Equivalence: Caribbean community and shared values

While the previous section focused on the spiritual and material expressions of culture, this section turns to the role of community in the articulation of Afro-Caribbean identity. For Grace, the Wolaba Parade emerges as a central site where cultural meaning is not only expressed but collectively practiced and reinforced:

Groups get together to make the parade to have the essence of our culture [...] When you just see it, you say, ‘wow, that’s beautiful’. You have that relaxing energy, like that exploding color into you. Like, everything changes — you feel so proud to be in it (Appendix 2, 2026: 2).

Here, Grace describes the parade as “*the essence of our culture*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 2), indicating that the parade functions as a stabilised sign, or a moment, in her discourse. At the same time, the

parade is articulated through a strong affective dimension. When she states “*you feel so proud to be in it*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 2), she emphasises how participation generates positive feelings. These emotional expressions are not secondary, but central to how meaning is constructed. Through articulation, signs such as ‘pride’, ‘beauty’, and ‘relaxing energy’ are linked to the parade, thereby reinforcing its role as a meaningful cultural practice. Cultural identity, in this case, is not an abstract category but something that is lived and embodied through shared experiences.

Furthermore, the Wolaba Parade is not articulated as an exclusive space. Grace explicitly emphasises inclusivity: “*It doesn't matter if you're white, Chinese, black, Italian. You're part of the community [...] We make everyone feel welcome*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 3). Here, she constructs a chain of equivalence in which differences in ethnicity and nationality are downplayed in favour of a shared participation in the community. Through this articulation, the meaning of ‘community’ is expanded to include a wide range of individuals, all unified through engagement in local cultural practices. However, this inclusivity does not erase the specificity of Afro-Caribbean identity. Rather, it coexists with it. The parade celebrates Afro-descendant culture, yet others are invited to participate. This suggests that ‘community’ operates as a sign whose meaning is negotiated between openness and cultural specificity.

Community Across Generations: Knowledge, Respect, and Continuity

Grace’s discourse further articulates community through intergenerational relations. She repeatedly emphasises respect for elders and the importance of shared values, such as greeting others politely and sharing resources: “*They always taught us to share. Even if you have just one biscuit, you have to part it in four to share with everyone*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 5). These practices are not framed as optional values but as forms of knowledge. By using the sign ‘knowledge’ rather than ‘values’, Grace positions them as objective and unquestionable, thereby stabilising their meaning within her discourse. This way, she articulates signs such as ‘respect’, ‘sharing’, and ‘care’ as linked together in a chain of equivalence, constructing a coherent understanding of what it means to take part of the community.

These signs are further stabilised in the articulation to her grandparents, who play a central role in transmitting this knowledge: “[that is] *our culture from when we was small growing up*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 6). The repeated emphasis on grandparents indicates that they function as a key reference

point within the discourse, stabilising how cultural continuity is understood. This intergenerational structure is also narrated through personal experience. Grace describes how her grandparents enabled her educational opportunities, which she frames in highly positive terms:

When I started to live with my grandparents, they helped me to have my school opportunity. And it was amazing because they did that effort to give me everything so I have that chance to study. I'm so proud and so happy that I have them (Appendix 2, 2026: 6).

Here, the the chain of equivalence links 'family', 'sacrifice', and 'opportunity' into a meaningful narrative about social mobility and care. Thus, this structure is not presented as a one-time event but as a cycle that continues across generations. Grace explains how her mother later took care of her child, thereby reproducing the same pattern (Appendix 2, 2026: 6). This articulation constructs 'community' as a continuous cycle of giving and receiving, where each generation both benefits from and contributes to the collective. Through this, Grace occupies a subject position as part of an ongoing intergenerational chain. Her identity is constructed as embedded within a broader social structure, where she is simultaneously a 'daughter', 'mother', and 'community member'; positions that are unified through the discourse of shared knowledge and responsibility.

Furthermore, Grace shifts from a personal narrative to a broader cultural articulation when she states: "*Most people of our culture, we always grew up with grandparents*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 6). Thus, the presence of grandparents is not described as a family-specific arrangement, but as a generalised feature of 'our culture'. In this way, what could otherwise appear as an individual experience is stabilised as a moment within the discourse, representing a shared aspect of Afro-Caribbean community. Through this articulation, grandparents become closely linked to signs such as 'knowledge', 'care', and 'upbringing', forming a chain of equivalence that constructs them as central to cultural continuity. Their role is not only practical in terms of childcare, but also symbolic, as carriers of cultural knowledge across generations. This positions intergenerational living as a key element in the reproduction of both community and identity.

Changes in the Town: Tourism as New Knowledge

Grace's narrative also engages with broader social changes, particularly the growth of tourism in Puerto Viejo. She describes how the community "*started pretty small, it was just a few groups of families being around*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 1), to a place where people "*decide to stay*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 1). While such changes could potentially be articulated as a loss of tradition, Grace constructs them differently.

Through her articulation, tourism becomes associated with learning, exchange, and new perspectives. She describes her work as a receptionist as a source of personal growth: "*love my job [...] get to know people every day, experience culture, vibe fill me up, like new knowledge, new perspective*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 1). Just like her grandparents provide 'knowledge', so does her encounters with new people. Here, tourism is integrated into her discourse as a positive aspect, rather than something that disrupts cultural identity. This is further reinforced in her description of social experiences, such as celebrating her birthday with "*all kinds of people*" (Appendix 2, 2026: 4). Here, diversity itself becomes part of the meaning of community. Thus, a chain of equivalence is constructed, linking 'new' with 'knowledge', 'celebration', and 'perspective'. She also expresses linguistic flexibility, where she switches between Creole, Spanish, and English depending on context, which further reflects this adaptability. Rather than indicating fragmentation, this suggests an ability to navigate in the landscape of change while maintaining a cultural identity.

By linking the 'change' in the town to experiences which she 'loves', Grace avoids a discourse of loss. Instead, the changes are seen as a moment that reinforces the 'Pura Vida' lifestyle of meeting the world with an open mind. Thus, these articulations are organised around the nodal point 'Pura Vida'. By linking social change to positive experiences such as 'joy', 'connection', 'new knowledge' and 'openness', Grace incorporates change into an existing discourse rather than opposing it. As a result, tourism becomes a moment that reinforces, rather than destabilises, her broader understanding of life and community.

Subject Position and ‘Pura Vida’

Across these articulations, ‘Pura Vida’ emerges as a central nodal point that organises Grace’s discourse: “*Pura Vida is ... Everything*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 10). It links together signs such as ‘relaxed’, ‘proud’, ‘community’, and ‘openness’, creating a relatively stabilised structure of meaning. Grace explicitly identifies with this nodal point, stating: “*I am Pura Vida*” (Appendix 2, 2026: 4). This marks a shift from describing a cultural concept to occupying a subject position within the discourse. Her identity is thus constructed through her identification with the meanings attached to ‘Pura Vida’. Although Grace occupies multiple subject positions (such as ‘mother’, ‘worker’, ‘daughter’, and ‘friend’), these are not experienced as contradictory. Instead, they are unified through the nodal point, which functions as an anchor across different social contexts. Taken together, Grace’s discourse demonstrates how a strong nodal point can provide coherence across changing circumstances. Even as external conditions shift, the underlying structure of meaning remains relatively stable. In this way, her discourse exemplifies how identities are not fixed essences but ongoing constructions that are stabilised (temporarily) through discursive practices.

Analytical Summary and Comparison

Grace’s narrative articulates Afro-Caribbean identity as a dynamic balance between preservation and inclusion. By linking immaterial signifiers like ‘vibe’ and ‘spirit’ with material practices through the nodal point ‘Pura Vida’, she constructs Afro-Caribbean identity as a part of shared cultural practices and values. Her discourse strategically negotiates tourism, framing change as ‘new knowledge’ instead of loss. This enables a subject position that bridges her role in the tourism industry with her intergenerational identity, anchored by the ‘knowledge’ of her grandparents. Ultimately, Grace negotiates identity through ‘inclusive ownership’: maintaining the culture as ‘ours’ while expanding community boundaries to include those who respect the Caribbean culture. Her discourse thus transforms external pressures into internal strengths, creating a proud articulation of a resilient community.

Similarly to Grace, Velma articulates ‘respect’ as a boundary for inclusion in the Afro-Caribbean community (Appendix 3, 2026: 1). As seen in the interaction with the researcher, where initial distance shifts into warmth and care once respect is established, inclusion is not given but emerges

through interaction. In this way, both Grace and Velma articulate Afro-Caribbean identity as something that can be shared, but while Grace includes others from the outset, Velma requires that they first position themselves appropriately within the discourse.

Analysis part 2: Leona

In this section, I explore how Leona articulates her Afro-Caribbean identity through a discourse of preservation and boundaries. While Grace embraces change, Leona utilises 'Pura Vida' as a stabilising nodal point to defend traditional values against the perceived erosion of modern tourism. By delving into her chains of equivalence, I examine how these articulations shape her specific subject position within her discourse.

Caribbean Culture and 'Pura Vida'

In this section, Leona explicitly frames the concept of 'Pura Vida' in the discourse of Afro-Caribbean culture. For example, she articulates a direct link between 'Pura Vida' and 'tradition', 'happiness', 'union' and 'respect': "*Pura Vida means tradition. Pura Vida, for me, means happiness, union, respect*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 1). This way, these signs come to share a common meaning through articulation that links the signs together in a chain of equivalence. 'Pura Vida' organises and stabilises the meaning of the other signs, which might otherwise have been broad and potentially open. Thus, 'Pura Vida' stabilises a relative fixed meaning for them.

This becomes further evident, when Leona elaborates articulates meaning to 'tradition': "*Tradition we have here, what identify us, is like the gastronomy, the foods, also our activities that we do on August, like the parade*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 2). Here, she equates 'tradition' with something that 'identifies us', thereby linking cultural practices, such as gastronomy and the Wolaba Parade, to a collective identity. Thus, she derives meaning for 'us' from 'tradition'. At the same time, these practices derive their meaning from the nodal point, 'Pura Vida', since Leona already articulated 'tradition' as being a part of 'Pura Vida'. In this way, cultural practices such as 'gastronomy' and 'the parade' become established moments in the discourse, with their meaning being momentarily stabilised through their relation to 'Pura Vida'.

When asked to describe Puerto Viejo, Leona's immediate response is: "*Pura Vida*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 2). Here, she showcases the same discursive structure. She elaborates with: "*We have the prettiest beaches. I'd say we are very, very, very friendly people. We have a lot of respect for other cultures*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 2). And the way the community help each other live by the traditions of Pura Vida is through "*that respecting between us ... and helping each other!*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 2). By positioning 'Pura Vida' as the main descriptor of the town, she confirms its role as a nodal point. Here, it is evident that the other signs, 'prettiest beaches', 'friendliest people', 'respect' and 'helpfulness', are moments organised around the nodal point. This way, they derive their meaning through their articulation within the discourse structured by 'Pura Vida'.

In addition, these signs operate on different levels. While 'prettiest beaches' refers to geographic environments, it also carries cultural meaning, as it contributes to the overall representation of the town. At the same time, the signs 'friendly people' and 'respect for other cultures' articulate social values. Despite these differences, they are brought together through a chain of equivalence, constructing a unified image of Puerto Viejo as both a physical place and a community. In this way, the signs such as 'friendliness' and 'respect' act as moments rather than elements, in this particular discourse. Their meanings are not presented as open to negotiation, but rather as taken-for-granted characteristics of the community. In this sense, 'respect' is not articulated as a contested value, but as an inherent and stable feature of the 'Pura Vida' lifestyle.

Similar to Grace, Leona constructs a clear sense of collective identity through the repeated use of 'we' and 'our'. By linking 'tradition' to 'what identifies us', she draws a boundary between those who belong to this cultural community and those who do not take part of traditional practices. Through this, Leona occupies a subject position as a member of the community, articulating what defines it. In her account, the community is constructed as both culturally distinct and outwardly inclusive. This creates a discursive tension, as it is presented as internally cohesive (through shared traditions), while simultaneously remaining externally open through values of friendliness and respect.

Family as Primary Community

To understand how Leona positions herself in the discursive field, it is essential to look at her social life and how the local community participates in shaping her identity. While Grace seeks a broad, inclusive community, Leona's narrative suggests a different focus. When asked what she considers a good life, she responds: "*My family, my kids. They make me feel good*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 3). In this articulation, she equates 'feel good' with 'family', constituting a 'good life. This includes the freedom of her children, as she confirms they are "*free, yes*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 3), when running in the streets. Here, the sign 'freedom' is connected to the family's wellbeing within the town.

Although Leona describes her family as her preferred community, she expands her social circle to include: "*Friends, family. Also my grandmother, she's 98 years old*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 3). She continues by describing the historical role of her grandmother: "*In before times, she was one of the only persons here in Puerto Viejo, so everyone used to come by her, they used to stay with her, she used to take care of everyone, like our kids*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 3). This reveals a similar discursive pattern to Grace's narrative, where the grandmother is positioned as a central character with significant parental and communal responsibilities. By stating that her grandmother used to 'take care' of everyone, Leona articulates 'taking care' as a moment — an attractive quality that grants the grandmother a respected subject position in the discourse. She is not just a relative, but a 'foundational caretaker' of the community. Furthermore, Leona expresses that "*everyone, their mom grandmother, auntie — everyone knew our granny*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 3). Through this, she articulates a specific value: being a known and anchoring figure in the town's history. This deep identification with her family roots is physically manifested through a family tattoo. In a semiotic sense, the tattoo serves as a permanent sign of her belonging to this specific lineage. It underscores her subject position as a descendant of the 'original' Puerto Viejo, linking her individual identity to a collective family history that predates the town's modern transformation.

Navigating changes of the town

Leona initially frames the transformation of Puerto Viejo in a condensed statement: "*The town has changed a lot, Mathi*" (Appendix 1, 2026: 9). As the conversation unfolds, this articulation is specified through her reference to the emergence of 'drug dealers', which introduces a moral

dimension to the notion of change. While she does not attribute this development solely to tourism, she nevertheless links tourists to the reproduction of the problem, as they contribute to sustaining it. In this way, ‘change’ is not articulated as a neutral transformation, but becomes associated with a shift in the social order, where external actors are positioned as contributing to practices that are perceived as misaligned with the values of the community.

When further discussing the changes in Puerto Viejo, Leona’s discourse reveals a tension between material changes and identity. Although she acknowledges the development of the town, she simultaneously distances herself from this. This becomes particularly clear when she is asked whether the changes of the town has affected her life, she responds with a sharp “*No*” (Appendix 1, 2026: 9). At the same time, Leona works as a receptionist at a hostel — a position closely tied to the presence of tourism. From a discursive perspective, this ‘no’ can therefore be understood as a way of maintaining a stable subject position. By rejecting that these changes have affected her, she separates her inner life and identity from the external transformations of the town. In this way, her sense of self remains intact.

A similar dynamic appears when discussing the commercialisation of ‘Pura Vida’. When presented with the idea that the concept is used as a marketing strategy for tourists, she firmly rejects this: “*No! [...] Pura Vida identifies plenty Costa Rica*” (Appendix 1, 2026: 9). Here, Leona articulates ‘Pura Vida’ as something more than a commercial sign. Rather than being a marketing tool, it is constructed as something authentic and grounded national identity. In doing so, she resists an alternative articulation of ‘Pura Vida’ and instead reinforces it as a stable and meaningful part of her shared cultural identification. At the same time, Leona does acknowledge the material benefits of tourism, stating: “*No, maybe after tourists came [...] We have more opportunity for work*” (Appendix 1, 2026: 8). Here, she links ‘tourism’ to ‘employment’ and ‘opportunity’. However, this is kept separate from her understanding of identity. While tourism is associated with work and economic change, it is not allowed to redefine what ‘Pura Vida’ means or who she is. This separation allows her to navigate both realities at once: benefiting from tourism, while maintaining a sense of cultural continuity. This tension becomes more pronounced when discussing tourists themselves. Leona draws a clear distinction between the local community and outsiders:

First of all, when they go out on the street, they don't have any manners. They don't say like, 'hello', 'good morning'. Sometimes you pass and you're like, 'good afternoon', and they don't answer you. We are like, 'wow, no respect' (Appendix 1, 2026: 8).

In this context, 'respect' functions as a relatively fixed sign that defines belonging. Formal greetings, such as saying 'good morning' functions as moments tied to the sign of respect. Everyday practices, such as greeting others on the street, are not merely polite behaviours, but markers of inclusion within the community. By emphasising that tourists lack these behaviours, she further establishes a boundary between 'us' and 'them'.

Finally, Leona's occasional silence also plays a role in her discourse. When asked whether her life has improved due to the job opportunities created by tourism, she does not respond (Appendix 1, 2026: 9). This absence of response is meaningful in itself: Rather than confirming that tourism has improved her life, she avoids engaging with the premise altogether. In doing so, she maintains a position in which her identity is not defined by these changes, but remains rooted in the values associated with 'Pura Vida'. Leona negotiates her identity by drawing a clear line between the local community and the tourists. By articulating 'respect' as a moment that tourists lack, she stabilises her own subject position as a true member of the original Puerto Viejo community. Thus, it is through boundaries of what she does not identify with (tourism, disrespect), that stabilises her identity (traditions, respect, 'Pura Vida').

Identity and Subject Positions: The guardian of tradition

For Leona, Afro-Caribbean identity is directly linked to moments such as 'communal sharing' and 'intergenerational values'. When she describes the act of helping others or the necessity of the morning greeting, she is not merely describing personal habits, but articulating the boundaries of a 'proper' cultural subject. Through this articulation, Leona's sense of self is tied to the preservation of the 'tradition' and 'respect', which she articulates in relation to 'Pura Vida', constituting Afro-Caribbean identity. This position allows her to navigate the town's changes by maintaining a clear distinction between the authentic values of tradition and the current changes of the town.

Ultimately, the differences between Leona and Grace highlight how the Afro-Caribbean identity is continuously negotiated in response to external pressures such as tourism and urban growth. While both informants draw on the nodal point of 'Pura Vida', they perform different discursive negotiations. Grace negotiates social change through inclusion; by broadening her chain of equivalence, she incorporates 'the new' (visitors, modern work) into the 'Pura Vida' framework, thereby neutralising potential threats to her identity. In contrast, Leona negotiates change through preservation. She insists on the stabilised moments of tradition, specifically the practice of 'respect' and generational greetings, as a defense against what she perceives as a discursive erosion. Where Grace sees 'new knowledge', Leona identifies 'lack of traditional values'. This demonstrates that the Afro-Caribbean discourse is not a monolithic structure, but a contested terrain where residents occupy different subject positions.

Analytical Summary and Comparison

Leona articulates Afro-Caribbean identity by temporarily fixing meaning through the nodal point 'Pura Vida'. By establishing a chain of equivalence between 'tradition', 'respect', and 'union', she articulates practices like gastronomy and the parade into stabilised moments that define a collective 'us'. Her negotiation of change relies on a discursive separation; she articulates tourism as a source of labor while refusing to let it redefine her identity. Ultimately, Leona negotiates her identity by drawing clear boundaries: By articulating 'respect' as a sign that outsiders lack, she stabilises her position within a discourse that prioritises cultural continuity over external transformation.

A similar emphasis on 'respect' can be identified in Velma's discourse, particularly in her articulation of encounters with tourists who position the Afro-Caribbean population as inferior (Appendix 3, 2026: 1). Like Leona, Velma constructs 'respect' as central to belonging within the shared cultural framework. However, whereas Leona stabilises a clearer boundary between 'us' and 'them', Velma's articulation allows for movement across this boundary. Outsiders are not excluded, but remain external until they demonstrate respect, making inclusion in Afro-Caribbean community something that can be achieved rather than assumed.

Analysis part 3: Celeste

In this section, I explore how Celeste makes meaning through chains of equivalence rooted in a spiritual understanding of the world. Thus, I delve into her different ways of navigating change in Puerto Viejo, specifically through a discourse of responsibility and divine alignment, and ultimately how this affects her subject position and articulation of her Afro-Caribbean identity.

Faith as the Organising Centre

Celeste's discourse differs from the ones presented previously. While Grace uses 'spirituality' as a moment stabilised by 'Pura Vida', Celeste uses 'spirituality' as the organising center itself. In Celeste's discourse, signs construct meaning through their relation to the nodal point 'God':

We grow up in a Christian home, learning to respect God, the creator of the universe and learning that he is our friend, he's our provider, he's our judge, he's our savior. He is there all the time [...] He's there (Appendix 4, 2026: 3).

Here, Celeste articulates the meaning of 'God' through a series of linked signifiers. First, she describes her childhood home as a 'Christian home'. Then, she adds that she and her siblings 'learned to respect God'. Using the signifier 'learned' implies that to 'respect God' is not a matter of values, but a matter of 'learning' the truth: That to live a good life, one must respect God. Additionally, God is portrayed not as an unreachable divine entity, but as someone who cares about the people, by being their 'friend', 'provider' and 'saviour'. When Celeste repeatedly uses the signifier 'our', she implies that not only does she speak for herself, but as a collective subject position, shared by those who have come to 'know' God in this way. She states twice that 'He is there', implying that there is no 'there' without 'him': The presence of God is constant and unquestionable.

'God' is presented as a nodal point in Celeste's discourse, and its structuring role becomes more evident when examining how she links it to a range of other signs. Through articulation, Celeste constructs a chain of equivalence in which 'family', 'nature', 'health', 'responsibility' are closely interconnected and derive their meaning through their relation to one another: "*We as a family try to*

keep the most close possible. With that need of keeping our family close, we develop a ministry [...] Family, Health and Culture” (Appendix 4, 2026: 1) Here, she connects the aforementioned signs to ‘ministry’, a cultural practice she shares with her family members.

This articulation is further reinforced when Celeste elaborates on what a ‘ministry’ entails: *“It’s something that you give [...] your soul, your all, your life, your energy, your mind is to create, that is to develop, is to make it be. To make it be a reality”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 1). In this way, cultural practices are presented as embodied expressions of a deeper set of values. Now, not only does the ministry serve to ‘keep the family close’, but as a way of participating in the community by giving their ‘all’, pouring their ‘soul’ and ‘energy’ into the practice. Thus, ‘ministry’ gains meaning from its articulation, not only with ‘family’, ‘health’ and ‘culture’, but with ‘soul’, ‘life’ and ‘energy’ as well, which further stabilises it as a moment with a relatively fixed position in Celeste’s discourse.

Celeste expands on the cultural practice of the ministry, expressing that it represents her family’s *“history, our way of our values and our principles”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 1-2). Here, she articulates a connection between the signs ‘history’, ‘our way’, ‘our values’ and ‘our principles’, constituting a chain of equivalence between the signs, revealing identification through this: *“The most important values are to get to know who you are [...] where we came from, who we belong to [...] we have an identity [...] and we have a culture”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 2). In this articulation, ‘values’, ‘history’, and ‘identity’ are stabilised as mutually constitutive moments, all organised around the nodal point ‘God’. Removing one moment would disrupt the chain, as ‘who you are’ is constructed through ‘where you came from’, meaning that identity is constituted through shared history and culture.

She elaborates how her upbringing shaped a specific understanding of what it means to live well: *“You know, history, our way of our values and our principles and all what parents has to transmit to their kids”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 1–2). Here Celeste expresses a similar meaning-making as Leona and Grace. These three informants all articulate an innate value from intergenerational practices, such as receiving knowledge of those who came before them. In this way, the ‘transmission of knowledge’ functions as a moment that is directly connected to identity in a shared heritage. Thus, these values are not presented as abstract ideals, but as something lived, practiced, and passed on.

In this way, ‘values’, ‘identity’, and ‘culture’ are articulated as mutually reinforcing signs. To know who you are is simultaneously to understand where you come from and how to live. These meanings are not individual, but collective and continuous across generations. While ‘God’ functions as the nodal point, it is through these articulations that the structure of her discourse becomes visible in practice.

Chain of Equivalence: Values, nature and Community

Celeste’s discourse constructs a complex chain of equivalence where the signs ‘nature’, ‘health’, ‘family’, and ‘responsibility’ are linked to the nodal point ‘God’. This chain establishes a framework where the ‘right’ way to live is articulated as living with divine intention. To Celeste, faith is not a separate domain but the very fabric that organises her understanding of the world.

Nature as a Divine Responsibility

To Celeste, living in the rainforest and being able to sustain herself and her family through growing their own food is a highly valued practice: *“You know, and in the culture, it’s what we try to conserve so it can identify us. And one of the way is growing our own food [...] cooking our food”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 2). Here, she explicitly identifies ‘us’ with the practices of conserving, growing and cooking their own food. This way, ‘farming’ and ‘cooking’ becomes inseparable from ‘culture’ and their shared identity. ‘Nature’ is not perceived as a neutral or biological phenomenon, but as home for cultural practice; a space where shared identity is enacted and maintained.

Through this, nature is articulated as something humans are fundamentally connected to and responsible for. This introduces another central sign in her discourse: Responsibility. It is not framed as a choice, but as an inherent condition of being human. In Celeste’s discourse, nature is articulated as a gift that necessitates a shared subject position, being ‘caretakers’:

The concept is to use, to create or to preserve nature [...] So we can live off the land [...] When God made the first parents [...] he also include them in the responsibility to take care of it. Because he told Adam, ‘You okay, I gave you all of this, you are a caretaker of all [...] This is a part of the divinity, with the humanity together (Appendix 4, 2026: 7-8).

Here, Celeste uses the signifier ‘caretaker’ to fix the meaning of the relationship between humans and nature. Nature is not a commodity to be exploited, but a divine trust. This articulation links ‘divinity’ and ‘humanity’ through the sign ‘responsibility’. When she discusses the ‘eight natural remedies’ and the necessity of ‘clean water’, she frames them as moments that require active stewardship: *“I also am responsible to keep it clean”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 6). By following these remedies *“as an arrow, as a base for prevention”* (Appendix 4, 2026: 6), health becomes a stabilised moment where physical well-being is proof of spiritual alignment. Thus, nature and the body are articulated as interconnected vessels for God’s purpose.

When we were born, we didn’t bring anything and when we die, we don’t take anything with us. But what we find here is to make. We live with it, interact with it, reproduce it [...] And that’s why we have this farm, where we plant our food (Appendix 4, 2026: 6).

In this passage, Celeste articulates an understanding of existence that can be unfolded into three key dimensions: First, stating that humans ‘didn’t bringing anything’ when we are born or when we die, she expresses a radical de-articulation of ownership. Land and nature are not viewed as resources to be possessed, but as equal entities in which she co-exists with. By expressing that we enter and leave the world empty-handed, she positions ‘humans’ not as owners, but as temporary participants in a world that was created *with* us, rather than *for* us to exploit. Second, Celeste articulates the farm as the site where shared existence with nature is enacted and maintained through daily practice. Through the verbs ‘live’, ‘interact’, ‘reproduce’, she articulates her farm as a space of mutual engagement. She directly links this with ‘identify us’ and ‘the culture’, which implies that the shared cultural identity is not tied to the accumulation of land, but to the harmony of the interaction with it. Third, Celeste finds purpose within the shared creation: There is an existential layer in her statement ‘what we find here is to make’, these are not just tasks, but ways of aligning oneself with the rhythm of the world we find ourselves in, filling the time between birth and death with acts of purposeful ‘reproduction’ of life.

Ultimately, Celeste’s articulation reveal a deep-seated humility. By expressing that we arrive and depart empty-handed, she defines a life where value is found not in what we possess, but in the harmony we maintain while we are here. To her, the farm and the ministry are ways of honoring a

world that was here before us and should remain after we are gone. Yet, this delicate balance of continuity and care is exactly what is at stake today in the midst of change in Puerto Viejo.

Community and the Ministry of Legacy

This spiritual responsibility extends to the social sphere, where ‘family’ and ‘community’ are articulated through their shared ministry. For Celeste, the family unit is a stabilised moment that must be protected and transmitted as a cultural practice:

It's part of our culture to emphasise our family relation. So we learned [...] to convert it in a ministry, to transmit it in a practical way, where we get it from our parents [...] history, our way of our values and our principles (Appendix 4, 2026: 1-2).

In this part of the discourse, the chain of equivalence expands to include ‘legacy’ and ‘education’. The ‘Ministry’ is the practical manifestation of faith, where the act of growing and cooking one's own food identifies the community. She highlights a practice of mutual interdependence: “*When they have any situation, we are there to support, to help. They to us, we to them*” (Appendix 4, 2026: 2). Here, Celeste expresses a narrative where Afro-Caribbean heritage prioritises loyalty, rooted in the idea that ‘support’ is granted in any situation, ‘they to us’ and ‘us to them’. Being part of the community means a shared commitment to taking care of the land and taking care of each other. Through connecting ‘farming’ and ‘family support’ to her ‘identity’ and ‘culture’, Celeste fixes the meaning of her identity as a collective belonging; to be who she is, is to be part of a network where no one stands alone.

Finally, these signs are brought together through her articulation of the ‘eight natural remedies’ a cultural practice which also functions as expression of the entire chain: “*We want to live a mental, emotional, physical, social, economical and spiritual life. We can follow these eight natural remedies [...] as a base for prevention, for healing and for restoring*” (Appendix 4, 2026: 4). The remedies link ‘body’, ‘mind’, and ‘spirit’, thereby uniting ‘nature’, ‘health’, and ‘faith’ within a single framework. These signs derive meaning from their articulation to the nodal point, God: “*So that's why one of the natural remedy is trust in the divine power. Trust in God*” (Appendix 4, 2026: 8–9). Through this, the chain of equivalence is completed. What might initially appear as separate domains; nature, family, health, and values, are all articulated as expressions of a single organising

principle, the nodal point 'God'. Taken together, Celeste constructs a discourse in which the 'right' way of living is defined as alignment with God through practices of care, responsibility, and connection to both nature and community. Thus, faith is not confined to the spiritual realm, but operates as the discursive frame which organises her entire understanding of how life should be lived.

Discursive Struggle: 'Pura Vida' and moral decline

Having established Celeste's way of making meaning through articulations in her discourse, it becomes evidently clear how these deeper values stand in stark contrast to the new reality of Puerto Viejo. Thus, while Celeste's discourse is firmly rooted in a divine order of care and responsibility, it is also a discourse of mourning.

The Discursive Struggle of Pura Vida

Celeste describes a profound shift in Puerto Viejo, where the arrival of tourism and industrial change has led to what she perceives as a spiritual deviation. In this struggle, the signifier 'Pura Vida' becomes a central site of conflict. In this sense, the transformation of the town is not only experienced as external change, but as a disruption of the moral and spiritual order that previously structured everyday life. For Celeste, the popular concept of 'Pura Vida' has undergone a negative re-articulation. While Grace and Leona used the term to negotiate inclusion or work-life balance, Celeste associates it with a loss of boundaries:

I think that's how they call it, Pura Vida. But not to the Puerto Viejo people. That for we, the founders, it's not Pura Vida. [...] It is for the people who think, 'here we can come and do anything anyhow', it's like a Liberty. Libertinaje [...] You just do anything to anybody, anytime (Appendix 4, 2026: 10).

Celeste expresses a discursive struggle between what she observes as the 'new' Puerto Viejo and the divine order constructed in her discourse. By distinguishing between 'we, the founders' and 'the people' who arrive with a different mindset, Celeste identifies a discursive struggle. Here, the new meaning attached to the phrase 'Pura Vida', becomes a privileged sign in the discourse of change. She expresses that what 'they' call Pura Vida is not what 'we, the founders' call Pura Vida. This

means that while ‘Pura Vida’ has a stabilised meaning in each discourse, the meaning attached to it does not overlap. Instead, the term operates as a floating signifier caught in a struggle for definition. In this way, the changes of Puerto Viejo do not merely represent a physical change, but a disruption of a shared vocabulary. ‘Pura Vida’ becomes linked to ‘Libertinaje’ (excessive/irresponsible freedom), ‘no limits’, and a lack of care for side effects to ones actions. Thus, the newcomers’ version of ‘Pura Vida’ stands in direct opposition to the values of responsibility and care that constitutes her identity.

By positioning ‘the founders’ in opposition to this version of Pura Vida, she establishes an ‘us vs. them’ dynamic. In doing so, she also claims discursive authority, positioning herself as part of the group that holds the ‘legitimate’ meaning of the concept. In her view, the newcomers have replaced ‘faith’ and ‘values’ with ‘irresponsible freedom’, leading to a society where the traditional values and practices are replaced by immorality:

For us, the immorality is the worst thing that is going on. And that is what they call ‘Pura Vida’, too. The immorality is what is affecting our society. Because there are many things that is being practiced today that is not part of what we appreciate, nor a part of how we see what we want (Appendix 4, 2026: 11).

In this articulation, ‘immorality’ is constructed as a moment, stabilised in opposition to what she associates with ‘faith’ and ‘values’. In this way, a chain of equivalence is established, where ‘immorality’, ‘excessive freedom’, and contemporary practices are linked together and expressed through ‘Pura Vida’. This articulation shows that for Celeste, the discursive struggle of ‘Pura Vida’ is not just a linguistic disagreement, but a defense of her Afro-Caribbean identity. By fixing ‘immorality’ as the opposite of her nodal point ‘God’, she ensures that her way of life remains distinct and protected from the perceived moral decline of the changing town.

Poison and the Loss of God

This loss of morality is not just social; it is physical and ecological. Celeste articulates the industrial changes in farming as a violation of God’s law. She describes how the use of ‘actual poison’ (pesticides) and genetically modified seeds destroys the earth’s minerals:

[N]ot only like spiritual, financial poison. Actual poison [...] All those is violating God's law because they want to control those seeds. [...] after circumstances pull us away from God's purpose, our intention. And we forget that earth is in ourselves and earth is in nature too (Appendix 4, 2026: 14-15).

In this articulation, 'actual poison' (pesticides) and 'controlled seeds' are not just technical tools, but signs within a competing discourse, where the nodal point 'God' has been removed. Now, when God is no longer the organising center, the chain of equivalence that links 'nature', 'morality' and 'responsibility' falls apart. The use of 'poison' and the rise of 'immorality' become direct consequences of this missing center; without God's law to fix the meaning of 'care' and 'responsibility', land becomes a resource to exploit, and 'Pura Vida' becomes 'libertinaje'.

Additionally, Celeste's use of 'we' reflects a core aspect of her discourse: that identity is never individual, but always a collective belonging. As established earlier, being part of the community means a shared commitment where 'no one stands alone.' In Celeste's chain of equivalence, 'farming', 'family support', and 'loyalty' are linked to her subject position as a member of the Afro-Caribbean heritage. Because she defines herself through this network of mutual interdependence, the discursive struggle becomes even more existential. When she observes the town being 'pulled away' from God's purpose, she does not just see a change in 'the others'; she perceives a threat to the 'we' that constitutes her own being. In this articulation, if the community is corrupted by 'immorality' or 'poison', the entire network is compromised. Thus, her mourning is not only for the loss of traditions, but for the potential collapse of the social and spiritual fabric that allows her to exist as Celeste. To her, the shift toward 'libertinaje' is a direct attack on the Afro-Caribbean community, where "*The innocent are reaping the bad seed*" (Appendix 4, 2026: 13).

Lastly, by stating "*we forget that earth is in ourselves*" (Appendix 4, 2026: 14-15), Celeste stabilises the collective Afro-Caribbean identity by articulating it with the natural world. Here, she fixes Afro-Caribbean identity as something that is physically and spiritually rooted in the land. In this articulation, 'earth' is not an external object to be controlled, but a foundational moment, stabilised in its' connection to the 'we'.

In the face of the new reality of the town and the discursive struggle, this connection serves as her final defense. For Celeste, to protect the earth from ‘poison’ is to protect the community from dissolution. Thus, her discourse is an attempt to maintain a world where the nodal point ‘God’, the preservation of ‘nature’, and the survival of the ‘we’ are all part of the same sacred chain of equivalence. In this way, to forget the earth is to lose the very essence of what it means to be a human being in relation to God.

Subject position: Returning to the Roots

The experience of being an ‘innocent victim’ of others’ ‘bad seeds’ explains Celeste’s subject position as someone who has physically and discursively retreated. Her move away from the center of Puerto Viejo to establish her farm is not just a change of address; it is a counter-reaction. Rather than adapting to the re-articulated meanings circulating in the town, she creates a space where her own discourse can remain intact. By creating a space where she can still follow the “*diet given in Genesis*” (Appendix 4, 2026: 14-15), she is actively resisting the immorality rising in the town. These practices are not only practical, but function as embodied reaffirmations of the chain of equivalence, by linking ‘nature’, ‘responsibility’, and ‘health’ to ‘God’. Her farm becomes a sanctuary where this original chain of equivalence can exist undisturbed.

Additionally, Celeste occupies a subject position remarkably similar those Grace and Leona attributes to their grandparents: A ‘respected elder’ whose authority is earned through time and wisdom — and willingness to share these. While Grace and Leona articulate the ‘grandparents’ as the primary carriers of cultural knowledge, Celeste adopts a similar subject position as she continues the tradition of passing down knowledge, through practicing her the farm and teachings. Not only does this contribute to her own economical survival, but to the discourse of spirituality and community as well. In this way, she occupies the role of a ‘respected elder’ who holds the community together through care and knowledge. In this sense, Celeste’s ministry is a materialisation of her discourse: a space where the ‘God’ remains the nodal point, allowing them to live with community and the rhythm of the earth is reproduced. By positioning herself as a ‘caretaker shared heritage’, she stabilises her place within the shared cultural identity, refusing to let the ‘poison’ of the outside world dissolve the links that connect her to her ancestors and the land.

Analytical Summary and Comparison

In summary, Celeste's discourse is anchored by the nodal point 'God', which stabilises a chain of equivalence linking 'nature', 'responsibility', and 'Afro-Caribbean identity' into a sacred, inseparable whole. While other discourses articulate a different relation to the changes of Puerto Viejo, Celeste's framework positions the changes in Puerto Viejo as a profound spiritual deviation. This shift threatens the network of mutual interdependence and deep-seated loyalty that constitutes her Afro-Caribbean identity, as she experiences the community being pulled away from its shared responsibility toward God and the land. Her retreat to the farm functions as a physical counter-reaction, allowing her to occupy the subject position of a 'respected elder' who preserves a divine legacy against the negative changes. Ultimately, her identity is maintained through her ministry, ensuring that the heritage remains rooted in spiritual alignment and a collective 'we' that resists the influence of the changing town.

Celeste and Velma both draw on their faith as a source of internal stability. However, where Celeste responds by discursively withdrawing to her farm, Velma remains present in the town, using her home and her business as a base from which she maintains her dignity and refuses displacement. Velma's discourse further resonates with aspects of Celeste's articulation, particularly in the role of faith in shaping meaning. Like Celeste, Velma draws on her relationship with God to stabilise her sense of self and her understanding of the world, framing external conditions, such as the weather, as part of a divine order rather than something to be controlled. Thus, both informants are similarly grounded in a connection with faith, acceptance, and identity. In these cases, faith becomes a way of maintaining stability in a changing environment.

Analysis part 4: Rosalind

In this section, I explore how Rosalind articulates meaning through collective labor and mutual care. I delve into new ways of navigating change in Puerto Viejo, focusing on how identity is articulated through practice rather than explicit definitions, and how these articulations establish her subject position within the discursive field.

Community as the Organising Principle

Rosalind's discourse is structured around the nodal point of 'community'. However, community being the organising principle is not introduced as an explicitly defined concept. Rather, it emerges through her descriptions of everyday life, where meaning is consistently articulated through relations of mutual care, responsibility, and contribution. This is exemplified by her narrative of the 'old' Puerto Viejo:

“When somebody got sick, everybody walked around and pick up a little money and give the person, to take your wife out or take your kid out. [...] If the veterinarian couldn't help you [...] they would just fix you so you could get to the doctor. [...] Yeah. If somebody's sick, they would chip in and come and tell you, ‘take her out’” (Appendix 5, 2026: 12-13).

Here, Rosalind discusses the historical social safety net of Puerto Viejo, where the community is not a choice, but a functional necessity. The signs 'sickness', 'money', and 'help' only gain meaning through their relation to the collective community. 'Money' is not articulated as personal wealth, but as a tool for communal survival ('chip in'). By focusing on practices such as collective financial support, shared responsibility for health, and immediate responsiveness to others' needs, Rosalind establishes a discourse where collective care is embedded in the social fabric.

This meaning-making is further deepened when Rosalind connects her Afro-Caribbean identity to these communal practices. For her, culture is the 'glue' (or, articulation) of the community: *“Oh, our Afro-Caribbean culture is very special because we love our culture. And our culture is the dressing, the food and our ways”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 15). In this articulation, 'our ways' functions as a chain of equivalence that links together food, clothing, and social behavior. Culture is not an abstract idea; it is a lived experience that belongs to the 'we'. By mentioning 'the food' and 'the dressing' alongside 'our ways', Rosalind reinforces the idea that Afro-Caribbean identity is inseparable from the way the community interacts.

Furthermore, Rosalind extends the nodal point of 'community' to include the natural world. To her, staying 'with the community' also means staying 'with nature': *“We try just to stay with nature and*

the good things. The good things” (Appendix 5, 2026: 16). By linking ‘nature’ and ‘the good things’ to the collective ‘we’, Rosalind creates a chain of equivalence where community remains connected to its environment. In this way, ‘community’ operates as a nodal point, not because it is explicitly defined, but because of how it organises the other signs. How to treat a sick neighbor, how to cook food and respect nature, are articulated in relation to the nodal point. Thus, ‘community’ is the structure that allows Rosalind to understand social life altogether.

Communal Values and Cultural Practice

Rosalind’s discourse demonstrates how cultural values are not articulated as abstract principles, but are instead embodied through everyday practices, centering ‘community’. Meaning is constructed through a chain of equivalence in which values become visible through action — and through these actions, the community is sustained.

Strong, black background

The chain of equivalence is evident in her expression of identity markers such as ‘we’, ‘strong’, and ‘black’, which together form a discursive cluster rather than separate categories: “*My mom was very strong. We come from a very strong black background*” (Appendix 5, 2026: 1). Here, ‘we’ establishes a collective identity with ‘strong black background’, where ‘strong’ functions not merely as a trait, but as a moral value. ‘Black’, in turn, operates as a boundary and identity marker tied to both race and historical pride. These signifiers are not independent; rather, they are articulated together in a way that binds identity, value, and social belonging. To be part of this collective is to embody ‘strength’, which is defined through specific forms of practice. This becomes particularly visible in Rosalind’s account of her grandmother:

“We were working women. My grandmother used to work, taking out the cocoa bean [...] You go in the jungle and get it off the tree and you make piles. And she had a big pile. And then when she get ready to take it out, she would take me and my sister and I think my nephews, and there would be so many mosquitoes and they didn’t have a mosquito repellent. So, we was terrible. We wanted her to finish right away” (Appendix 5, 2026: 2-3).

Here, 'strength' is not constructed as an inherent personality trait, but as something demonstrated through physical labour, endurance, and responsibility. The work described is demanding and uncomfortable, marked by mosquitoes, physical strain, and even danger such as snakes (Appendix 5, 2026: 3). Yet, it is consistently framed as valuable. This highlights an important nuance: the value of work does not derive meaning from enjoyment, but from its contribution to the collective: Hardship does not undermine the value, it reinforces it.

At the same time, the example illustrates how cultural practices function as sites of socialisation. By bringing children into the jungle to participate in this labour, the grandmother incorporates them into the community from an early age. Through participation in these practices, children do not simply learn practical skills; they are positioned in a cultural framework, learning the values and what it means to take part of the Afro-Caribbean community. In this sense, cultural practice appear as moments, stabilised through its' articulation to 'community' within the discourse.

Additionally, 'nature' and 'culture' appear as interconnected moments in a chain of equivalence, where environmental practice and cultural life are rendered mutually constitutive: The jungle is not an external backdrop, but an integrated part of everyday life. Labour, natural environment, and social relations are intertwined, suggesting that cultural identity is partially fixed through interaction with the natural world. 'Strength', therefore, is articulated not only through social responsibility, but through the ability to endure and engage with this environment. Taken together, these articulations stabilise the meaning of 'strength' through its repeated association with labour, endurance, and collective responsibility. Cultural values are thus not abstract ideals, but lived and embodied through practice, forming the foundation upon which the community is continuously reproduced.

Rosalinds' father as an ideal subject position

In Rosalind's discourse, the nodal point of 'community' is stabilised through the articulation of her father as a central figure of authority and care. He is not merely described as a relative, but as a unique resource that set her family apart: "*We had more resources. We had my father*" (Appendix 5, 2026: 7). In statement, a chain of equivalence appears where her father is equated with 'resources' that the rest of the community lacked, positioning him as the provider of both familial and social stability.

Through Rosalind's narratives, her father emerges as the embodiment of an ideal subject position – a communal leader whose individual traits were vital for the functioning of Puerto Viejo. Even without formal schooling, Rosalind articulates social status through his contributions to the community:

“He didn't have a college education, but he had a psychology degree. He would help people do, if you want to know how to spell your baby's name properly, you come to him. If you want to write a letter for something, you come to him” (Appendix 5, 2026: 5).

She constructs a chain of equivalence where his ‘strength’ is linked to being educated, accountable, and responsible. By stating that people would ‘come to him’ for spelling or legal letters, Rosalind fixes the meaning of his strength as a form of social accessibility and willingness to contribute his skillset. Because there were so few formal resources in the town, he took over the functions of an entire administrative system. Thus, we see a discourse where ‘community’ is linked to accessibility and reliance. Her father's subject position is articulated as relatively fixed within the discourse. Although Rosalind notes that he did not have formal higher education, she emphasises his practical and intellectual competence, suggesting that ‘knowledge’ is valued not as certification, but as being useful to others. In this sense, his authority is not institutional, but relational. The values of being a ‘resource’ to the community is further articulated through the following story:

“I told you, he was strong. He was there for everything. This lady was having a baby and couldn't get to the clinic out of town. So, she would have the baby at my father's house. He said, ‘little boy, come here [...] go get me a razor’. And he said, ‘and call a lady that lives up the other way’. The lady would come and they would put plastic on the bed and all the sheets. And the baby was there and they take the razor blade [to cut the cord]” (Appendix 5, 2026: 7).

Notably, Rosalind begins by repeating her father as ‘strong’, before unfolding a detailed narrative of his actions, further stabilising it as a moment within her discourse. In this sense, her father's actions can be understood as an enactment of the values, where meaning is produced through practices (which function as moments in the discourse) such as ‘responsibility’, ‘care’, and ‘responsiveness’

to others' needs. These actions of assisting childbirth, mobilising others, and opening his home reflects the same values which Rosalind practices, further stabilising the articulations to community

Whereas Rosalind's descriptions of working in the jungle with her grandmother illustrated how values are distributed across everyday interactions, her father appears as a point in which these meanings are condensed and made especially clear. The recurring pattern of people coming to him, and his ability to respond, reinforces his position as a central and trusted figure within the community. His significance lies not only in what he does, but in how he is recognised through these actions.

Navigating Social and Natural Changes

Rosalind's reflection on the transformation of Puerto Viejo is marked by a recurring observation: Certain things are simply different now. She opens this discussion by noting a disconnect between the past and the present:

“But it's culture is not the one that I know. [...] Certain things are not the same [...] It's not the same [...] Just the way they do things, it's not the same as when we were here [...] It changes. A lot of things change, but time changes” (Appendix 5, 2026: 19).

When Rosalind states 'time changes', she acknowledges 'change' as something out of her control, while identifying how 'the way they do things' have shifted. When asked if she experiences a strong sense of community, she responds: *“Yes, but we don't have that now, because we have other races here. Some of them are nice and they try to live our culture ... Some of them, not so much”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 13). Here, Rosalind explicitly marks a shift from a past where community functioned as an organising principle and boundary, to a present where this structure is experienced as weakened by having 'other races' present.

Rosalind distinguishes between two groups of people coming to town: The ones who *“try to learn our culture and enjoy this place with us [...] There's a couple of people here that really like this place and you could tell”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 14) and the other group, who *“just come and it looks like Hawaii, they make a business, sell it and leave. I don't like that”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 14).

Rather than describing fixed social groups, this boundary produces different subject positions within the discourse: one with a willingness to learn the values of the community, such as shared presence and continuity, and another associated with mobility and disconnection from local practices, oriented towards economic extraction and departure. These positions are constituted through their relation to moments such as ‘culture’, ‘place’, and ‘with us’.

This transformation of the town creates a complex landscape for Rosalind. While she misses the old ways, she does not reject the new reality entirely: *“But you know, it's a nice experience. Yeah, but we just have different people in town now and it's not like before”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 15). By describing the current state as a ‘nice experience’, while simultaneously maintaining that it's ‘not like before’, Rosalind shows how she navigates the changes. She does so by maintaining a subject position that is anchored in her own practices, allowing her to observe the new reality without being destabilised by it. The nodal point of ‘community’ is still what she uses to measure the world, but she accepts that the ‘different people’ have created a new, though less familiar, social reality.

Changes in nature

When Rosalind describes the changes of the town, it is initially articulated through shifts in the relationship between human life and the surrounding natural environment. She describes that before the town gained popularity, her family had a big anteater residing in their home:

“On my bridge, we had an anteater, a big one, and he would come and stick his nose in all the holes. [...] Yeah, a big one. But he went away. He never stayed because it got popular. Too many people and too many noise” (Appendix 5, 2026: 4)

Rosalind’s account of change in the town is initially expressed through shifts in the relationship between human life and the surrounding natural environment. She describes how increased population and activity have altered the presence of animals in the area, stating that *“once the place get so popular with all these folks, the animals go back to the inside the jungle”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 3). Here, ‘all these folks’ functions as an undifferentiated collective describing the broader population increase, while the anteater is singled out as a more specific figure within the changing environment. She expresses that the ‘animals go back to the inside of the jungle’, which not only articulates absence, but constructs a time where humans lived alongside animals who now have fled

due to ‘too many people’ and ‘too many noise’. However, Rosalind also stated that once she returned to Puerto Viejo after living in the United States, she had ‘nice’ experiences with the local wildlife:

“Those was nice experiences when I came back, now to see that we still have them around. And we get the monkeys, the black monkeys [...] when there's no food in the back in the woods, they would come and make noise here and eat my stuff [...] Yeah, he make noise and they eat what they want. And then you might hear them at night and you figure, ‘oh, I’m going to see them in the morning’” (Appendix 5, 2026: 4).

Here, Rosalind describes that even upon returning to the town, the black monkeys were still living in close proximity to humans. Rather than attempting to control or distance herself from the animals, she articulates their presence as something familiar and meaningful. Hearing them at night, and knowing instinctively that this means they will be there in the morning as well, illustrates how she is attuned to the patterns and rhythms of the surrounding environment. This suggests a form of embodied knowledge, where her relationship to nature is not articulated abstractly, but lived through everyday practices and experiences.

Reproducing the Discourse through Cultural Practice

Rosalind’s account shows how change is not articulated as the disappearance of meaning, but as its reconfiguration. The chain of equivalence linking community, shared ‘presence’, ‘care’, and ‘responsibility’ remains operative, but becomes particularly visible through its contrast with practices that are articulated as external to it. Rosalind’s subject position is therefore not destabilised by change, but sustained through her continued participation in the practices that constitute and reproduce the discourse itself.

Despite the changes, Rosalind continues to live by the ‘special’ Afro-Caribbean ways she knows, which allows her to experience the ‘crazy’ changes as a spectator who is still deeply rooted in her ‘strong, black background’. Here, Rosalind’s own practices functions as a material articulation of the values she inherited from her parents. She occupies a subject position as a stabilising figure similar to her father, whose role is defined through continuous acts of cultural practice, such as

passing down valuable skills and knowledge. This position is primarily realised through the practice of cooking and teaching children the same skills, which serves as a central identity marker in her discourse.

Rosalind connects her current practice directly to her mother, who served as a discursive mentor: *“Oh, mom, she was the cook [...] That’s where I get the cooking from”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 8). While she emphasises her father's leadership, the mother is articulated as the provider of the specific skill set that Rosalind later transforms into a communal service. By establishing her cooking classes, Rosalind reproduces the familial discourse of the ‘provider’. She creates a chain of equivalence where 'cooking', 'happiness', and 'community' are linked: *“Oh, well, it was 35 kids every Saturday and I used to buy the food and spend for everything. But I never realised how much money I was spending. [...] I just cooked [...] I was happy”* (Appendix 5, 2026: 8-9). In this articulation, money is rendered irrelevant, while the act of giving is placed at the center. This mirrors her father’s earlier practice of hosting home births; just as he provided his house and skills as, Rosalind provides her kitchen, own financial means and transmitting skills.

The nodal point of 'community' is thus stabilised through the cultural practices of ‘cooking’ and ‘passing down knowledge’, similarly to the practices of Celeste’s ministry. For Rosalind, cooking classes represent a space where the values of the ‘strong black background’ are physically handed down through cultural practice. This is an inclusive practice, as she was both teaching local and foreign children (Appendix 5, 2026: 18). This functions as an active expression of how to belong to the community. By teaching the children specific behaviors, Rosalind socialises them into the shared community, similar to when she was socialised through helping the work of her grandmother. She is establishing a chain of equivalence where 'cooking' is linked to 'manners' and 'respect':

“I taught them their manners in my cooking class and first, they used to walk in the street, they don't speak to nobody. Now, they speak to me, they speak to everybody, you say ‘hello’. And I taught them table manners[...] They have to do it, because Miss Rosalind knows what is right” (Appendix 5, 2026: 17)

In this articulation, greeting people on the street is not just a polite gesture; it is a practice of respect that restores the nodal point of ‘community’. By teaching the kids these values, Rosalind transmits

knowledge and positions herself as a ‘respected elder’ in the discourse. These manners function as moments which she explicitly states will “*take them through life*” (Appendix 5, 2026: 18). This shows that her teaching is an investment in the long-term stabilisation of the community's values — or, in other words — stabilisation of moments, which further strengthens the discourse. Thus, Rosalind is effectively bringing the children into a community-centered discourse, where a simple greeting is articulated as a sign of belonging. Rosalind’s insistence that they ‘have to do it’ because ‘Miss Rosalind knows what is right’ fixes her subject position as the authority of these values. She is not just teaching recipes; she is defining the correct way to exist within the community. Through this chain of equivalence, she connects the physical act of cooking with the social act of showing respect, ensuring that the nodal point remains stabilised across generations.

So I went to something at the school in Playa Chiquita, had and this man came over to me. He was thanking me so much, that his little girl cooked and I was like, ‘who is this man?’, ‘Who is this little girl?’ Then she runs over and she's hugging me (Appendix 5, 2026: 10).

However, Rosalind’s subject position is not only one of moral authority but also one of material contribution. Much like her father, who was articulated as a “central figure of authority and care,” Rosalind’s identity is inseparably linked to being a practical resource for the community. In a discourse-theoretical sense, she steps into the same ideal subject position as a communal leader whose individual actions are vital for the collective. This becomes evident when she describes how she provides for the local school:

Because I had made a rice for the school, something to raise money. And everybody would come running: ‘What did you cook, Miss Rosalind? What did you cook?’. I told them, and it was a big pot, I mean huge and deep! Within two minutes, it was over. Everyone eat. Everyone came. But anywhere I go where I take something that I cook, everybody want to know what it is (Appendix 5, 2026: 10).

In this passage, Rosalind’s position as a central and trusted figure is further articulated through her mastery of traditional practices. The fact that the community ‘comes running’ to her, mirroring how people would ‘come to her father’ for help, functions as a discursive confirmation of the authoritative

meaning in her subject position. Just as her father's strength was condensed in his ability to respond to others' needs, Rosalind's position is stabilised through the act of nourishment. The "huge and deep" (Appendix 5, 2026: 10) pot of rice becomes a moment in the discourse where care and belonging are materialised. Here, the chain of equivalence expands; she is not just a teacher of values, but a condensing point for the community's social fabric, contributing its survival through her actions.

Here, Rosalind shows that while she may not retain individual recognition of every student, she remains a fixed point in their collective memory. Her subject position is defined by this long-term cultural impact; she has become a stabilising figure that others recognise and revere. She is known and remembered, yet she does not position herself at the center of the discourse, instead she actively practices communal values of care and contribution. Despite the transformations she describes, her narrative demonstrates how the discourse of community is not dissolved, but continuously reproduced through practice.

Analytical Summary and Comparison

Rosalind negotiates Afro-Caribbean identity by articulating 'community' as a nodal point that must be actively lived to exist. She links 'strength' to a chain of equivalence involving labor and collective responsibility, which she fixes through the practice of communal cooking. By occupying the subject position of a 'caretaker' and 'provider', she negotiates the town's changes by distinguishing between those who embody these values and those who merely extract from the town. Ultimately, she navigates the transformation of Puerto Viejo by turning her everyday actions into a stabilisation of the discourse, ensuring that the community's social fabric remains intact through continuous reproduction.

Similarly, Velma reproduces the values through actions of care and nurture. As seen in her interaction with the researcher, where initial distance is followed by acts of generosity and nurturing, Velma enacts care in ways that echo Rosalind's and Celeste's roles as caretakers. However, while Rosalind reproduces this through structured practices such as teaching and cooking, Velma's articulation appears more situational, emerging in response to demonstrated respect. All three informants thus articulate care as central to identity, but differ in how and when it is expressed.

Part 5: Discussion of results

This section discusses how Afro-Caribbean identity is articulated and negotiated across the informants' discourses. By comparing their nodal points, chains of equivalence, and subject positions, the discussion highlights both shared stabilised moments and key differences and similarities in how identity is constructed and negotiated.

A central similarity is that 'respect' is articulated as a stabilised moment across all discourses. Through repeated articulations, 'respect' is linked to everyday practices such as greeting others, sharing resources, caring for others, and behaving appropriately within the social space. In this way, 'respect' becomes part of chains of equivalence that define belonging and shared Afro-Caribbean identity. Although 'respect' it is organised around different nodal points, its meaning remains relatively fixed across discourses. For instance, Velma articulates 'respect' as an internalised dignity and a moral requirement for social interaction, which allows her to maintain a clear sense of self-worth despite the external pressures of tourism. Similar patterns emerge with Leona and Rosalind, which emphasises that 'respect' functions as a key moment through which the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate subject positions are drawn. Those who fail to articulate 'respect' correctly are positioned outside the community.

Beyond this, the informants articulate Afro-Caribbean identity through overlapping chains of equivalence linking signs such as 'care', 'nature', 'intergenerational knowledge', and 'shared values'. While these signs are arranged differently in each discourse, they consistently construct identity as relational rather than individual. Across all cases, identity emerges through connection to the shared Caribbean community - and everything this may include - rather than as an isolated or autonomous self.

The discourses overlap most significantly in their articulation of cooking and intergenerational knowledge as stabilised moment. In all four discourses, older generations function as privileged reference points through which meaning is anchored and transmitted. Grace and Leona articulate grandparents as central carriers of 'knowledge' and 'values', Rosalind constructs both her

grandmother and father as embodiments of communal strength and responsibility, eventually adapting this position herself, while Celeste, too, positions herself similarly in the discourse, by reproducing this role through her ministry and farm. Despite differences in nodal points, this shared articulation produces subject positions in which individuals are embedded within an ongoing intergenerational chain. Identity is thus constructed as something received, maintained, and passed on. At the same time, the analysis reveals significant differences in how meaning is stabilised. These differences primarily emerge from the fact that the informants organise their discourses around different nodal points, which restructure the chains of equivalence and produce distinct subject positions.

This is particularly visible in the comparison between Grace and Leona. At first glance, they share a fundamental common ground; both value kindness, hospitality, and respect for others as core Afro-Caribbean traits. However, the nuance lies in how they discursively navigate these values in the face of change. Even though they both use 'Pura Vida' as a nodal point, they articulate it through opposite strategies.

For Leona, 'Pura Vida' is a preservative nodal point used to protect tradition and fixed communal values. She sees change as a shift in the social order where disrespectful outsiders lead her to maintain clear boundaries to protect her heritage. In contrast, Grace articulates 'Pura Vida' through 'inclusive ownership' by welcoming change as a part of the culture. She experiences the inclusion of outsiders as an embodiment of Afro-Caribbean culture, transforming external pressure into a source of community strength. Ultimately, while both aim to protect their heritage, they represent a discursive struggle between two different paths: Leona preserves the culture by reinforcing its borders, while Grace preserves it by expanding them.

This divergence becomes even more pronounced in Celeste's discourse, where the nodal point 'God' reorganises the entire structure of meaning. Here, signs such as 'nature', 'responsibility', 'health', and 'identity' are articulated within a morally structured chain of equivalence that leaves little room for alternative meanings. In contrast to Grace and Leona, Celeste constructs a direct opposition between her discourse and the transformations of Puerto Viejo. Competing articulations, particularly of 'Pura Vida', are positioned as morally incompatible. This produces a subject position

defined by resistance and withdrawal, where identity is preserved through the creation of a separate space (the farm) in which the original chain of equivalence can be reproduced.

Rosalind's discourse introduces yet another variation, where 'community' functions as the nodal point. Signs such as 'care', 'strength', 'respect', and 'belonging' gain meaning through their articulation in everyday actions, such as cooking, teaching, and helping others, in relation to 'community'. This produces a subject position as 'caretaker' and 'provider' of the discourse, where identity is continuously stabilised through practice rather than defended or expanded at the level of discourse alone. In contrast to Celeste's withdrawal and Leona's boundary-making, Rosalind navigates change by continuing to enact the chains of equivalence that define her understanding of community. Velma, on the other hand, navigates afro-caribbean identity through her anchoring in the physical space of her home and driving her restaurant. By refusing to sell her land, she negotiates a subject position of permanence and dignity, making a discursive claim to place that resists the marginalisation from outsiders.

An additional crucial dimension is the generational positioning of the informants. Celeste, Rosalind and Velma, who are in their late 60s and 70s, articulate identity from subject positions shaped by a fundamentally different Puerto Viejo than the one experienced by Grace and Leona in their 30s and 40s. This generational difference structures how meaning is articulated, what is perceived as being at stake, and how identity is stabilised.

For Celeste and Rosalind, identity is closely tied to continuity and the reproduction of values. Both occupy subject positions as knowledge holders, where 'age', 'experience', 'care', and 'knowledge' are linked within a shared chain of equivalence. Celeste enacts this through spiritual guidance and moral articulation, while Rosalind does so through teaching and everyday practices. Despite their different nodal points, they converge in their role within a broader intergenerational discourse, where identity is stabilised through the transmission of knowledge. This way, the act of passing down values functions as a central stabilised moment within Afro-Caribbean identity. In contrast, Grace and Leona being a younger generation, articulate identity from subject positions shaped within an already transforming Puerto Viejo. Rather than reproducing a known past, they must navigate a present characterised by change. Thus, the differences between the informants reflect not

only individual variation, but a broader generational dynamic, where identity is negotiated differently depending on one's position within the temporal transformation of the town.

Ultimately, the negotiation of Afro-Caribbean identity in Puerto Viejo can be understood as a discursive struggle between preservation and transformation. While Leona and Celeste attempt to fix identity through tradition and morality, Grace and Rosalind articulate more adaptive forms of identity grounded in inclusion and care. Velma occupies a strategic middle ground in this struggle by asserting her dignity and ownership of her land, while using her faith (much like Celeste), as a source of internal stability and resistance. While the informants share a foundational commitment to Afro-Caribbean values, their different ways of stabilising meaning show that there is no single way of 'being' local in a town under transformation.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis explores how Afro-Caribbean identity is articulated and negotiated in Puerto Viejo de Talamanca, in the context of ongoing change. In a context where tourism and migration increasingly reshape social landscapes, it becomes essential to understand how these processes are experienced and made meaningful by those who live within them. Against this background, the thesis set out to answer the following research question:

How are discourses of Afro-Caribbean identity articulated and negotiated by residents of Puerto Viejo?

To address this question, discourse theory is approached as an integrated framework in which philosophy, theory, and methodology are closely intertwined, shaping both how reality is understood and how the empirical material is produced and analysed. Within this framework, identity is not understood as fixed or essential, but as something continuously constructed through discursive practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Ontologically and epistemologically, this implies that reality and knowledge are contingent and relational. Consequently, the analytical focus shifts from

searching for a fixed essence of identity toward investigating how it is constructed and negotiated in specific social contexts.

Methodologically, the thesis is based on an inductive, qualitative field study conducted over ten weeks in Puerto Viejo. Through participant observation, field notes, and narrative interviews, I approached the field as a ‘traveller’, allowing knowledge to emerge through relationships, situations, and gradually built trust. This inductive approach made it possible to let the empirical material guide the analytical direction, rather than imposing predefined categories. In particular, the narrative interviews provided access to how informants themselves articulate meaning, belonging, and identity in their everyday lives.

Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory (2001) not only frames the overall study, but also offers concrete analytical tools for engaging with the empirical material. Concepts such as nodal points, chains of equivalence, and subject positions are used to trace how meaning is structured, stabilised, and contested within the informants’ narratives, and how different articulations of Afro-Caribbean identity coexist and come into tension. Across the empirical material, identity is structured through shared yet differently configured chains of equivalence, where nodal points such as ‘Pura Vida’, ‘community’, and ‘God’ temporarily stabilise meaning.

Grace articulates identity through adaptive inclusion, where external change is incorporated into existing frameworks of belonging and reworked into new forms of knowledge. Leona, in contrast, emphasises boundary-making and continuity, positioning respect and cultural integrity as central stabilising forces. Celeste introduces a moral and spiritual register, grounding identity in religious practice and framing it as something that must be protected from disruption and erosion. Similarly, Velma grounds her identity in a framework of religion and clear cultural boundaries of behavior, dismissing anyone who does not conform. Rosalind highlights identity as something that is actively reproduced through everyday practices of care, labour, and intergenerational transmission. Rather than producing a unified discourse, the analysis reveals a differentiated discursive field in which informants occupy distinct subject positions in response to the pressures of tourism, generational change, and shifting social relations. Some articulations, such as Grace’s, expand the boundaries of belonging by incorporating change into the discourse of continuity, thereby transforming external

transformation into an internal resource. Others, such as Leona and Velma, respond by reinforcing boundaries and attempt to stabilise meaning.

Despite these differences, the analysis points to a crucial commonality: Afro-Caribbean identity is articulated through a shared discursive field, within which certain chains of equivalence function as stabilised moments across individual discourses.

It is precisely these stabilised moments (such as ‘respect’, ‘food’, and intergenerational knowledge) that allow the informants, despite their different nodal points and subject positions, to recognise themselves within a shared Caribbean identity. These signs function as partial fixations of meaning that hold the broader discourse together, even as other aspects remain contested. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that this shared discourse is not static, but continuously negotiated through articulation. The informants navigate a rapidly changing social landscape by expanding, protecting, redefining, or reproducing their chains of equivalence. In doing so, they do not simply react to change; they actively produce different versions of Afro-Caribbean identity.

Ultimately, it is within these varied articulations of the physical land, the spiritual life, and communal practices that the complexity of modern Afro-Caribbean identity is truly found. This illustrates that the construction of Afro-Caribbean identity is a continuous discursive struggle, where meaning is constantly being negotiated between the preservation of the past and the transformative pressures of the present.

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