

## Symbolic Capital and Social Space: Representations of identity about skin, speaking and acting in Buenaventura

### Capital simbólico y Espacio Social: representaciones identitarias sobre la piel, el hablar y el actuar en Buenaventura

Received: 25-03-2023

Accepted: 30-06-2023

Published: 15-09-2023

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#### Abstract

**Objective:** This study examines the relationships between identity, ethnicity, and race in the interaction among members of the Chocoan, Tumaquean, Guapirean, and Bonaverense colonies. Using an ethnographic approach, the study examines the relationship between symbolic capital, social representations, particular ethnic groups, and the field of recognition from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory, which emphasizes the possession of specific capital as a result of belonging to a social group. **Methodology:** The study involves in-depth interviews and content analysis to reveal the meanings of ethnic and racial symbols in the social space of Buenaventura. Through the narratives of three representative characters of Bonaverense culture (Mary, Flor, and Edgardo), the factors underpinning power and identity relationships based on ethnic and racial identity were identified. **Results:** The study presents a conceptual and reflective fabric using three individual and collective stories, aiming to construct a social space where local experiences play a vital role in guiding interacting agents toward new forms of coexistence. The results provide a platform for marginalized subjects to express their narratives, share their perspective on how they see the world, and value their voices as sources of knowledge. **Conclusions:** Using Bourdieu's theory, social realities are viewed as constantly evolving strategies resulting from struggles and power relationships among actors within specific fields.

**How to cite this article (APA):** Córdoba-Rentería, L. & Trujillo-Losada, M. (2023). Symbolic Capital and Social Space: Representations of identity about skin, speaking and acting in Buenaventura. *Educación y Humanismo*, 25(45), pp. 122-160. <https://doi.org/10.17081/eduhum.25.45.6039>



This study concludes that colonial identity is a complex phenomenon based on belonging to a territorial group and the historical consciousness of a community, nourished by symbolic capital valued in that specific social field. This ethnographic exercise, adopting the perspective of Popular Education, has allowed the identification of the meanings of ethnic and racial symbols in the social space of Buenaventura and how actors strive to consolidate and create new positions through dominant or subversive strategies.

**Key words:** Habitus, identity representations, symbolic capital, social space.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** examinar las relaciones de identidad, etnicidad y raza en la interacción entre los miembros de colonias chocoanas, tumaqueñas, guapiereñas y bonaverenses. Este estudio etnográfico examinó la relación entre el capital simbólico, las representaciones sociales, las etnias particulares y el campo de reconocimiento desde la perspectiva de Pierre Bourdieu, siguiendo la teoría de cómo la pertenencia a un área social implica la posesión de un capital específico. **Metodología:** se realizaron entrevistas a profundidad, y con diálogo de saberes y análisis de contenido se resaltan algunos sentidos de símbolos étnicos y raciales en el espacio social de Buenaventura. Con las narrativas de tres personajes representativos de la cultura bonaverense (Mary, Flor y Edgardo), se señalan qué factores de identidad étnica y racial fundamentan las relaciones de poder y de identidad. **Resultados:** se muestra un tejido conceptual y reflexivo a través de tres historias individuales y colectivas que apuntan a la construcción de un espacio social donde las experiencias locales son vitales para la orientación de los agentes que interactúan hacia la cimentación de nuevas formas de convivencia. Los resultados de esta investigación sirven como plataforma para resaltar las voces de los sujetos que han sido históricamente sometidos y silenciados, para que ahora se narren a sí mismos, expongan sus formas de ver el mundo y valoren sus voces como fuentes de conocimiento. **Conclusiones:** desde el marco de Bourdieu, se abordaron las realidades sociales como estrategias de constante evolución y son el resultado de las luchas y relaciones de poder entre los actores dentro de los campos.

Se concluye que la identidad colonial es un fenómeno complejo basado en la pertenencia a un grupo territorial y la conciencia histórica de una comunidad, nutrida del capital simbólico valorado en ese campo social específico. Este ejercicio etnográfico desde la perspectiva de la Educación Popular, permitió identificar los sentidos de los símbolos étnicos y raciales en el espacio social de Buenaventura y cómo los actores buscan consolidar y crear nuevas posiciones a través de estrategias dominantes o subversivas

**Palabras clave:** Capital simbólico, espacio social, habitus, representaciones identitarias.

## Introduction

Colombia, as a nation, embraces ethnic and cultural diversity through state policies, signifying a movement toward globalization in the realm of multiculturalism and a redefinition of power relations within the ethnic order. In other words, acknowledging cultural and ethnic diversity in Colombia necessitates updating international politics and poses a challenge to education. To address this challenge, popular education becomes a key

strategy, a context in which the struggle for unrecognized identities can be recovered and constructed.

Popular education, according to [Mejía and Awad \(2003\)](#), involves not only the recovery of identity but also the struggle against the oppression that is exercised in everyday life processes, which is visible through how social micro power is expressed. Thus, it becomes evident how exclusionary and oppressive practices arise not from a class perspective but from one's popular context. Consequently, Popular education has become a powerful tool for building a collective identity and the fight against oppression in all its forms.

Moreover, non-elite groups resort to events that leave traces of social differences, such as the territorial origin of people (urban or rural) and culinary habits, to create social order within historically marginalized groups based on the knowledge subdued and put into practice in non-scientific social daily relations. Consequently, cultural differences are used to establish a social hierarchy that reflects existing inequalities in society. In this sense, the settlers' tendency to construct the social space of Buenaventura by emphasizing their ethnic and racial identity differences, as stated in the cited text, shows how cultural differences can be used to perpetuate inequality. Therefore, popular education becomes a fundamental tool for building a fairer and more equitable society where cultural differences are respected while oppression and exclusion are fought against.

Recognizing cultural and ethnic diversity in Colombia requires an update in the field of international politics and poses a challenge to education. Popular education has become a fundamental approach to the building of collective identity and the fight against oppression in any form. It is also essential to note how cultural differences can be effectively used to perpetuate inequality. By doing so, popular education becomes a fundamental tool for building a fairer and more equitable society. As [Freire \(1998, p. 48\)](#) points out, «Education does not directly change the world, it changes people who in turn change the world».

In a literature review, four research stages were identified concerning Afro-Colombian populations, focusing on their cultural and social identities as well as their ways of life. This research project primarily focuses on the latter two stages, but it acknowledges the significance of the first two stages as they laid the foundations for establishing the distinct identity of the Afro-Colombian population and facilitated their formal and legal recognition as citizens.

The first stage, spanning from 1852 to 1991, was formally defined and accompanied by significant legal developments, such as the Law of Slavery Liberation and the promulgation of the Political Constitution of Colombia. According to [Mosquera \(1956\)](#), these populations, who were descendants of Africans enslaved by the Spanish, fought for their freedom during the period between 1510 and 1851. Eventually, their rights as an ethnic group and special citizens were acknowledged. The concept of «population» allowed for a broader understanding of their identity, moving beyond genetic aspects, and instead encompassing cultural, ethnic, and spiritual characteristics, as well as personal and social values.

The second stage began with the formal recognition of the population as legal subjects entitled to specific rights, as outlined through the recognition of black communities in the Political Constitution of Colombia. This recognition also acknowledged the historical social

debt owed by the state to this population that had been excluded from the Republican legal order, leading to the neglect of their social rights and citizenship. Throughout the late 20th century, the population's struggle was shaped by the tensions arising from the legalization and formalization of their political interests, while the nation-building project sought to incorporate the differences, potentials, and particularities of the Afro-Colombian population. The concept of identity gained prominence as a significant area of research from the early 21st century, as highlighted by [Quintin and Agier \(2003\)](#), with distinct emphases evident in each decade covered in this period. Further details about this stage can be found in [Reales \(2005\)](#), which highlights the multiple inequalities endured by the Afro-Colombian population during this period.

Between 2000 and 2010, a third stage in Colombia witnessed significant research efforts exploring the intricate relationship between cultural and ethnic identity, majorly influenced by Bourdieu's theory. For instance, [Rodríguez-García's study \(2002\)](#) focused on understanding the construction of ethnic identity in the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, using the concept of habitus to analyze how past and present experiences shape individuals' perceptions and lived experiences of their individual and collective identity. Similarly, [Valderrama's research \(2008\)](#) used the concept of habitus to analyze how cultural practices and historical experiences shape the ethnic identity of Afro-Colombian groups in the Pacific region. [Lopez \(2010\)](#) and [Díaz \(2009\)](#) used the relationship between symbolic capital and the cultural identity of certain ethnic communities in Colombia, highlighting how the valuation and recognition of their cultural heritage play a vital role in constructing their identity. They used the concept of cultural capital as a foundation for understanding ethnic identity construction. [Hurtado \(2008\)](#) and [Rojas \(2011\)](#) analyzed the current state of Afro-Colombian studies in Colombia and highlighted the significance of addressing urban issues faced by the black population concerning their identities. They examined the purposes and power discourses that shape the use of the term «culture» in the context of interculturality. [Paz and Banguero \(2008\)](#) proposed that Afro-Colombian identity consists of two perceptions: how the individual internally identifies themselves and how they are perceived by others. They argued that identity construction is associated with the relationship with others, and the denial of cultural differences by the majority society limits the autonomy of communities and their territorial organization. Bourdieu's theory becomes relevant in this context, as his focus on power dynamics and social reproduction facilitates an understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by the Afro-Colombian population in constructing their cultural identity. Furthermore, [Pulido's study \(2011\)](#) provided additional examples by reconstructing anthropological and academic debates on the definition and political-cultural recognition of black ethnicity in Colombia between 1980 and 2005. On the other hand, [Urrea's work \(2010\)](#) used information from the General Census of Colombia in 2005 to contribute to the understanding of the period.

From 2011 to 2022, research in Colombia continued to explore the relationship between cultural and ethnic identity through the lens of the Bourdieuan perspective. [Cala, Soriano, and Dalouh \(2018\)](#) used the concept of field to understand how social and cultural dynamics shape the construction of cultural and ethnic identity among Afro-descendant immigrants. [Martínez's study \(2013\)](#) emphasized the significance of cultural fields in shaping ethnic identity among Afro-Colombian peasants in the Chocó region. [Camelo et al. \(2019\)](#)

investigated the processes of adaptation and integration into urban culture among the Afro-Colombian population in Bogotá.

These studies, based on Bourdieu's key concepts, demonstrate how the interaction among different actors and social dynamics significantly influence the formation of ethnic identity in the mentioned contexts. Additionally, [González \(2018\)](#) focused on the relationship between economic capital and cultural identity, revealing how the possession and control of economic resources impact the construction and valuation of ethnic identity within communities. [Álvarez \(2012\)](#) analyzed social imaginaries and their relation to racism, discrimination, stereotypes, and scenarios of resistance from a situated perspective of the Afro-descendant imaginary. Similarly, [Martínez and Muñoz \(2009\)](#) argue that social imaginaries, when viewed from this perspective, are cultural constructions influenced by temporality and manifested in diverse ways depending on social contexts.

[Toledo \(2012\)](#) elaborates on how identity is a dynamic and ever-evolving construct shaped by social, political, and cultural factors. It reflects an individual's awareness of their existence and how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. [Montoya and García \(2010\)](#) suggest that cultural identity is closely related to territory and cultural diversity, incorporating worldviews and ways of life within distinct population groups. [García \(2014\)](#) delves into Afro-Colombian educational thought in the 20th century, highlighting struggles to challenge societal norms and question the hierarchical institutional knowledge embedded in the national educational system. [Medina \(2016\)](#), [Caicedo and Castillo \(2016\)](#), and [Wade \(2017\)](#) contribute valuable insights into power relations and exclusion within the Afro-descendant population in Colombia. They emphasize resistance strategies and underscore the importance of shedding light on Afro-Colombians' experiences in shaping collective memory, analyzing public policies, and proposing strategies to fight against discrimination and promote inclusion. [Granja \(2017\)](#), concludes that issues concerning identity and participation within organizations stem from the sociohistorical construction of the black population in the nation. Historical conditions, such as slavery and geographical dispersion, have contributed to the absence of a unified ethnic identity, leading to a more pronounced regionalism. These insights lay a crucial foundation for the present research, justifying the need to enunciate Afro-Colombian identity based on cultural references rather than limiting it to skin color.

By incorporating the insights of these authors, one can comprehensively analyze how the identity factors of the Afro-descendant population in Colombia are linked with history, social interactions, and symbolic representations, as well as how the use of Bourdieu's theory contributes to understanding this complex identity. Further examples of these contributions can be found in the research conducted by [Martínez \(2018\)](#), [Campoalegre \(2021\)](#), and the documents by [CEPAL \(2017 and 2020\)](#), which, from a political perspective, examine how forms of structural racism hinder public policies, legislation, and initiatives aimed at promoting equality and inclusion for Afro-descendant communities. These studies, grounded in Bourdieu's conceptualizations, present measures to fight against racism and promote inclusion and equal opportunities. For example, [García's study \(2018\)](#) highlights the significance of developing educational models that reclaim the values, territoriality, culture, and autonomy of black communities across various parts of the country, framed within decolonization processes.

Overall, from a Bourdieuan perspective, the referenced studies enable an in-depth analysis of racial discrimination and the struggle for equal opportunities among Afro-descendants in Colombia. Bourdieu's conceptual frameworks provide a critical lens to examine the social and symbolic structures that perpetuate racial inequality in the region. Through concepts such as habitus, symbolic capital, and field, Bourdieu provides an understanding of how Afro-descendants' experiences are shaped by social structures and how they navigate various spheres, including the political, cultural, and economic realms. Moreover, the exploration of community identity through these frameworks provides essential tools for understanding how racial inequalities are perpetuated and how they can be addressed from a perspective of social change. This process is evident in [Bonilla \(2017\)](#) and [Lázaro \(2018\)](#) on identity and affirmation in Afro-Colombian schools and educational contexts.

Therefore, by considering Bourdieu's contributions, analyses of racial discrimination and the struggle for equality among Afro-descendants in Colombia can be enriched. These analyses delve into the social structures and processes that perpetuate inequality and examine the strategies of resistance and social change undertaken by these communities.

As specialized researchers in ethnic and cultural studies in Colombia, this study centers on the sense of ethnic and racial identity in the social space of Buenaventura municipality, and addresses how these identities are constructed and interconnected among the Chocóan, Guapiorean, Tumaquean colonies, and the natives of Buenaventura. This topic is crucial due to the complex social and cultural dynamics in the region and understanding these identities' influence on daily life and social as well as cultural practices of the groups involved ([Córdoba & Trujillo, 2020](#)).

In this sense, it is crucial to highlight that ethnic and racial identities are constructed in both partial and impartial ways, and groups use them to distinguish themselves from one another, leading to both inclusions and exclusions. Thus, the identification of groups based on their places of origin and skin color arises from the collective and individual histories of each group and the symbolic capitals they possess, which guide their actions in Bonaverense society.

In addition, in Buenaventura's social life, (Valle del Cauca-Colombia), various groups can be observed in different daily spaces, distinguished by symbolic characteristics, some of which are related to ethnic and racial aspects. The symbolic, according to [Cassirer \(1990, p. 47\)](#), implies «a new characteristic that seems to constitute the distinctive mark of man. ... as if we were to say, he has discovered a new method for adapting to his environment». In other words, symbols play a significant role in human adaptation to the environment, as they allow individuals and groups to express a certain interest in power, as evidenced by symbolic capital.

Additionally, the knowledge that allows the interpretation of reality always appears to be mediated by the uniquely human ability to create symbols, which allows us to observe the world through constructions that can generate meanings to create interactions with others and the environment. These symbols, allow people, as organizers of collective and individual senses, to integrate and configure their specific culture. As a result, individuals are not tied to a fixed cultural environment, since they can transform the meaning of the



symbolically established meanings and contribute to their reinterpretation, and set in motion devices that can prompt new meanings in the dominant culture.

Given these qualities, it is evident that the symbolic capital possessed by ethnic and racial groups contributes significantly to the organization of the social world. It simultaneously separates and links the actions of agents, presenting a shared objective and subjective condition. Thus, the concepts of symbolic capital and social space serve as a theoretical foundation to understand how people order, classify, and reproduce worldviews, ideas, and behaviors, while also establishing their differences and identities. The act of belonging to a colonial and/or racial group becomes a language of social relations that organizes coexistence in a local context, like Buenaventura.

As an example, Libardo, one of the researchers, highlights that when he moved from Buenaventura to Cali to be part of the Valle del Cauca basketball team, the team comprised 15 athletes, of which seven were of African origin. He stated that «although we managed to build some good relationships, sometimes I felt discriminated against, since they called each other by their names, while they called me black», an aspect that was very striking for their identity since they all had the same skin color. What aspects, then, would allow the construction of a sense of collective identity if the characteristics that made them similar at the same time differentiated among them? Libardo states today that his countrymen observed him differently because he came from a less modern place than Cali, «that is, I was a black man from a town, while they were from the city». Could it be that the practices constructed in a social space were the determinants of identity representations?

If these questions are asked with clear investigative interest, it can provide the field of popular education with new elements that enrich the theoretical debate concerning ethnic and racial identities. Furthermore, if new and critical methodological strategies are used, these questions can make it possible for communities that have historically been subjugated to provide their narratives, expose the ways they see the world, and value their voices as sources of knowledge.

The work presented below encountered theoretical and methodological limitations that were overcome through extensive theoretical discussions to establish an epistemological lens for investigating the phenomenon of identity representations. The research involved a qualitative exploratory method, focusing on the participants' narratives, collecting their oral histories, and assessing their cultural memory. The purpose was to understand the essence of the new essentialist and constructivist ethnic and racial identity used by settlers in Buenaventura to build the social space. To achieve this, ethnographic strategies and techniques were used, but the most significant data were the voices, ideas, and expressions of the research subjects. Unstructured interviews facilitated dialogs with participants, allowing for a deeper exploration of the symbolic appreciation of social space and the interactions between ethnic and racial groups. Through this approach, the study aimed to recognize the circumstances, positions, hostilities, affinities, and interests that, through practices and habitus, give meaning to the social world.

In this research, the concept of habitus, symbolic capital, and social space were interconnected with the sense of identity, forming a coherent framework based on the following idea: identity was understood not as habitus, but rather as a manifestation of

identity, which, in turn, constructs the guidelines for social relations. Consequently, in Buenaventura, there are social groups with similar skin color but differing symbolic capital of ethnic identity due to their distinct historical pasts. Despite sharing skin color, these groups may perceive themselves as a unified entity. However, they may still group or aggregate based on their skin color to differentiate themselves from other groups. This distinction in identity shapes a particular type of interaction among group members, serving as a significant aspect in the construction of collective identity.

An example of this process is described by Libardo when he observes that in the social space, the different forms and means of relationships emerge between the Tumaqueños, Guapiños, Chocoanos, and Bonaverenses, since the political grouping used to elect a representative to the municipal council, the method for establishing economic relationships based on culinary knowledge and economic interactions among different colonies determine not only the practices of daily events in the common space but also serve as the basis for giving meaning to being and feeling. For instance, Libardo mentions the case of a childhood friend born in Buenaventura whose skin color is black, stating that «he does not like doing business with countrymen because they do not pay him, whereas he has a different experience with paisas (people from a different region)». The perception that has emerged as a principle of commercial transaction in Buenaventura is culturally transmitted and influences how interactions take place between individuals from different backgrounds. For example, a person born in Buenaventura may hold the belief that black shopkeepers will not extend credit to them, as there is a cultural understanding that they might not be paid back promptly. On the other hand, this person believes that paisas are more likely to receive credit.

However, the colonies in Buenaventura construct their identities based on ethnic and racial attributes with a specific «essentialist» content; that is, identities are constructed as «unalterable» and antagonistic. These oppositions perpetuate social relations primarily based on appearance. However, despite perceiving these identities as fixed, they change over time, and identity becomes a strategic tool used to cover power relationships. Thus, the symbol, in this context, serves as an objectification of the habitus, shaping coexistence based on internalized perceptions of the identity relationships between the Chocó, Guapi, and Tumaco colonies and the natives of Buenaventura.

Thus, identity is manifested as a social practice that has a purpose, which is to «organize» society symbolically based on the accumulated capital that an individual or group possesses (Bourdieu, 2000). It emerges when a group of subjects and communities adopt or accept certain types of capital within a given social space as their own.

Additionally, the internalized power relations are manifested in the habitus as a mental scheme, broadly speaking. The social space dictates that social relations of identity are organized according to the various strategies that are built from symbolic struggles for coexistence among the colonies. Understanding these aspects requires moving from theory to the narratives of the subjects, as they are best positioned to express the meaning of their perceptions, actions, feelings, and the foundations of their identity.

Therefore, we turn to three individuals who are representatives of the Bonaverense culture —Mary, Flor, and Edgardo— whose collective and individual histories will help us



determine that they are shaped by ethnic and racial identity factors that have persisted since colonial times, shape power relations from the past to the present and underlie the symbolic acts internalized and reproduced based on their place of origin, practices, and skin color.

Another crucial aspect addressed in this study is the contribution of historically subjugated groups in the construction of their own social space, based on daily experiences and historical memories that have resulted in the construction of social differences. Thus, the study will explore how the heirs of racially and ethnically subjugated groups are constructed and how they construct themselves as a result of possessing some symbolic capital that shapes their identity, addressing the complexity of identity, as subjugated knowledge is used to construct criteria for differentiation and social belonging from marginalized groups.

From the perspective of popular education, it is crucial to understand how the sense of identity, generated from interaction in the social space in Buenaventura, evidences symbolic practices that arise from the interaction between subjugated colonial groups, and how the coexistence relationships forged around them are guided by tensions evidenced in a social space that is neither modern nor traditional. As a result, a system of social relations is generated where the territorial origin is the primary point for recognition and self-affirmation as a person and a group, and where criteria of identity-based social classification are prioritized.

Therefore, it can be asserted that the sense of ethnic and racial identity in the social space of the municipality of Buenaventura has great relevance in the processes of constructing strategies for local culture among the groups of the Chocoanas, Guapireñas, Tumaqueñas colonies, and the natives of Buenaventura. How these groups identify and differentiate themselves based on their ethnic and racial characteristics influences how they relate to each other and in the construction of their social space.

In conclusion, ethnic and racial identity plays a fundamental role in the construction of local culture in the municipality of Buenaventura. Ethnic and racial groups differentiate themselves based on their place of origin and skin color, allowing them to self-identify and establish social relationships based on these characteristics. This identity is not spontaneous or inevitable but constructed from the experience, collective histories, and symbolic capital of each group. Understanding these processes of identity construction is crucial for the development of public policies that promote the social and cultural inclusion of all communities that make up the municipality of Buenaventura.

### Method

In the social space of Buenaventura, a form of «essentialism» is apparent, which could be seen as strategic and positional constructivism based on ethnic and racial identities. The inhabitants of Guapireña, Chocoana, Tumaqueña, and Bonaverense colonies acknowledge symbolic differences within them due to their place of origin. However, there are also social practices that reflect biological and cultural constructivism, as evidenced in popular conceptions. Brito (2008, p. 34) argues that «popular education advocates the confluence

between the symbolic spaces, living, experience, and daily learning of the potentials within the society. This conception of education embraces and legitimizes the difference while promoting the transformation of individuals and their critical engagement with the immediate social and cultural realities they are part of».

This study suggests that Popular Education aims to describe the social classifications found in the Buenaventura social space, influenced by various capitals described by Bourdieu, which determine the order of groups and individuals among the Guapireña, Tumaqueña, Chocoana, and Bonaverense colonies, affecting their identity and coexistence, both positively and negatively (union and hostility).

To understand the meanings of these social relations originating from the racial and ethnic symbols of the colonies of Chocó, Guapi, Tumaco, and the natives of Buenaventura in the construction processes of strategies for coexistence, the research employed the ethnographic method, allowing for qualitative research with a reflexivity approach. By considering the researcher as part of the studied world, reflexivity acknowledges that descriptions of social relationships, moral evaluations, and produce political, moral, and social consequences.

This principle suggests that the descriptions relative to some aspect of the social world are simultaneously within the world that is described (are part of it) as a result, according to a sociologist, there is no place for the social world to describe something. Descriptions in the social world, as they are within that world, simultaneously affect relationships social, execute moral evaluations, and produce political, moral, and social consequences. Descriptions usually do much more in a social situation than simply reporting a series of facts (Schwartz, 1984, p. 79).

The concept of reflexivity, along with habitus and social space, helps explain how agents build and create social reality (Argelcos & Sembler, 2020 p. 47). People's perception of reality is influenced by their position in the social space, making the researcher an active participant in shaping social reality and influencing social values and experiences. Thus, it can be considered that reflexivity attempts to objectify the relationships of social values, values, and experiences of the researcher.

According to the contributions and experiences of Wexler (2017) and Urrieta & Hatt (2019), the research methodology is quantitatively designed in that it uses methods, techniques, and concepts through which the information is described, understood, and interpreted logic of the agents' practices, present in the subjective and objective expressions of the interviewed agents from the intrinsic and extrinsic perceptions that are evidenced in the fact of belonging to the Chocoano, Buenos Aires, Tumaqueño, and Guapireño groups. This perspective was reinforced by Pathiranage et al. (2020) and Poulis et al. (2013), who incorporate culture and context as foundations of identity in groups and colonies.

Additionally, the technique used was the unstructured interview, which was focused on collecting information on the existence of modern and community cultural contexts in unison and the meanings of the symbols that make manifest coexistence possible in the ways of believing, thinking, acting, feelings of inclusion and exclusion, value judgments, norms,

discriminatory and non-discriminatory practices that are interwoven in complex ways within the various contexts of the social space in the municipality of Buenaventura, following Radcliffe (2013) guidelines.

The following is the format of the interview guide questions:

What is your place of birth?

How do you define yourself based on your place of birth?

Do you believe that there are differences between people from Tumaco, Guapi, Buenaventura, and Chocó?

What does it mean to be from Tumaco, Chocó, Guapi in Buenaventura?

What does Buenaventura mean to you?

What contributions have people from Tumaco, Guapi, Buenaventura, and Chocó made to Buenaventura?

How do you experience identity?

How do you feel recognized in Buenaventura?

How do you think others perceive you?

The observation units comprised the following colonial groups: Tumaqueños, Guapireños, Chocoanos, and Bonaverenses. The participants chosen for the interviews were selected based on their extensive residence of more than 43 years in the municipality of Buenaventura. These participants hold the status of natives hailing from the department of Chocó, municipalities of Guapi, Tumaco, and Buenaventura. Notably, their selection was influenced by their relevant contributions to the development of the objectives and exploratory hypothesis.

The study's target population comprises two men and two women, each representing one of the aforementioned colonial groups. Their ages ranged from 58 to 84 years. Their educational backgrounds are distributed as follows: two participants possess a primary level, one has a secondary educational level, and two hold professional qualifications.

Key Informants: i) Edgardo, aged 69, was born in the municipality of Buenaventura, situated on the Pacific Coast of Valle del Cauca. He is a lawyer by profession and is retired from the Ports of Colombia. ii) Mary, aged 58, originally hails from the municipality of Guapi in the Department of Cauca. She has resided in Buenaventura for 45 years and works as a teacher and poet. iii) Flor, aged 73, is from the Chocó department and has lived in Buenaventura for 55 years. She is a retired teacher.

This approach draws inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which asserts that culture and identity are socially constructed phenomena influenced by historical, political, and economic dynamics. Cultural capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and practices that enable social mobility and access to power in society. Hence, understanding the complex interplay of cultural contexts and symbols within Buenaventura is crucial for understanding its social dynamics and power relations in this context.

To capture and record the embodied social experiences of agents in their identity practices, the symbolic manifestations in the social space were tracked. Habitus, economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital were utilized for this purpose. Additionally, the active observation was employed, fostering a social relationship with the participants. This allowed for delving into collective and individual experiences that are linked to individual and group identity.

In this research, it was necessary to consider a series of qualitative concepts to think about colonial groups from the perspectives of identity, ethnicity, and race. Methodologically, it can be deduced that they have objective and subjective conditions in unison. It is crucial to note that this study aims to highlight local knowledge of the coexistence of colonies residing in the city of Buenaventura from a popular vision, regarding Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical perspective.

It should be noted that the interviewed participants possess natural characteristics, such as skin color, place of birth, profession, and economic conditions, and subjective characteristics, such as beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors, among others. In line with this, Bourdieu argues that humans are objective and subjective simultaneously. Therefore, the obtained data must be identified for analysis and establish relationships and interpretations in line with the meanings of the concepts used, such as habitus, identity, illuso, social space, racial prejudice, ethnic prejudice, origin prejudice, race, ethnicity, symbol, symbolic capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital. These elements are crucial for the study of coexistence relationships.

In the process of collecting and transcribing interview data, several meetings took place at the homes of the participants. However, these meetings occasionally faced interruptions from phone calls or household tasks, leading to the need for two to three additional meetings with some participants. The interviews were recorded in audio format to create an environment where participants could speak freely and discuss their lives, including personal matters. This approach fostered their comfort and prevent making them feel investigated. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, although with less detail than would be required for conventional analysis. It is important to acknowledge that some sentences may appear grammatically incoherent due to the participants' natural way of speaking, which could pose challenges for readers striving to understand the message accurately.

Throughout the interviews, diverse concepts were explored, including motivations, values, prejudices, skin color prejudices, typical traits, feelings of belonging, and identity actions. Motivations included needs, desires, aspirations, interests, feelings of inclusion, feelings of exclusion, norms, and discriminatory and non-discriminatory practices. Values refer to the relatively permanent beliefs of the interviewees. Prejudices are predispositions in favor of or against certain individuals or circumstances, while skin color prejudices refer to symbols that have historically influenced and continue to influence coexistence dynamics today. Distinctive characteristics encompass physical attributes, language usage, and gestural characteristics. Feelings of belonging involved expressions and assessments indicating the participants' sense of being a part of a specific place. Lastly, identity actions include highlighting the positives of one's group, emphasizing the negatives of a group that

one does not belong to, de-emphasizing the positives of the group to which one does not belong, and de-emphasizing the negatives of the group to which one belongs. To systematize the data, the concepts identified in the interviews were coded. These coded excerpts from the interviews were then separated and organized into thematic blocks for data analysis.

The provided responses are a territorial identity thread woven throughout the participants narratives. This territorial identity manifested in the form of tension between the meanings generated by community actions and those that are modern. Arguments concerning identity, evident in the fragments, assume an essentialist nature and function as a strategy tool in the relationships that underpin coexistence within the social space.

In this sense, Bourdieu's theory underscores the significance of possessing and accumulating diverse forms of capital for achieving social mobility and attaining influence within society. However, the theory also highlights that these capital forms are deeply rooted within existing social and cultural frameworks. This implies that opportunities for acquiring and converting these forms of capital are not equally accessible to all individuals. Consequently, Bourdieu's theory highlights the paramount significance of social and cultural backdrops in shaping identities and avenues for social mobility advancement.

From Bourdieu's theory, the research methodology assumes a fundamental role in understanding social and organizational realities. In this regard, ethnography stands as a crucial tool for examining practices and systems of meaning within social life. As Bourdieu highlighted, ethnography allows researchers to "observe, describe, understand, and explain the practices and systems of meaning of human groups in their world" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 27). Therefore, our study's methodology is drawn not only from historical data but also from empirical data collection involving direct interactions and observations within the studied field. By integrating the methodologies of historical organizational studies with Bourdieu's methodological perspective, we can formulate analyses that are more meticulous and robust, leading to a greater understanding of the social dynamics in play.

In the following sections, we will present selected excerpts from the narratives provided by the participants, which serve as our research findings. As highlighted by Harvey et al. (2020), our primary focus aligns with Bourdieu's theory, centering on power in all its manifestations as the main focus of this study. This approach differs from conventional research approaches. Subsequently, in the discussion section, we will delve into the implications arising from these findings.

## Results

This section succinctly presents the narratives and expressions of the three participants. These findings have been intricately interwoven with relevant concepts and references derived from Bourdieu's theory. Thus, this integration facilitates the identification of pivotal aspects within the sociocultural dynamics, which will be thoroughly examined in the ensuing section. Notably, the analysis will delve into the intricate interplay between cultural, social, and economic capital, meticulously scrutinizing their direct impact on the intricate configuration of individual and collective identities. Furthermore, the exploration will shed light on how these influential factors distinctly shape a multitude of social practices.

The coexistence of identity relations in the interactions among the colonies takes place within the sphere of «*illusio*», a concept employed by Bourdieu (1997). *Illusio* signifies that there are underlying realities motivating the actions of agents under the condition that they are engaged in the game, caught and convinced by its value, believing that the game is meaningful and worth participating in. In essence, the term «*interest*», in its initial sense, means precisely what is implied in the notion of «*illusio*». It conveys the conviction that a social game holds significance and that its happenings matter to those who participate. «*Interest*» signifies active engagement, participation, and recognition that the game is worth being played, with its stakes shaped through participation and adherence to its rules. This concept underscores acknowledging the significance of the game and the stakes (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 141).

This phenomenon is notably observed in the intricate game of interaction among the colonists. Here, we can identify specific interests that motivate parties to participate in the process of adopting identities as a means of differentiating themselves.

Libardo: «In Cali, they view me as Buenaventura; however, here in Buenaventura, I'm seen as a Chocoano. This duality sometimes results in a conflicting sense of identity. When faced with fellow countrymen, do you feel these contradictions arise? How do you navigate them?»

Mary: «I simply embrace them. For instance, I've encountered situations like this: Someone asks, 'Aren't you from Guapi? How come you're in Buenaventura?' And I answer, 'I live in Buenaventura'. I represent Buenaventura, so I embrace that role. Another instance was when I was in Bogotá, participating in a poetry event at Casa del Valle. The presenter introduced me as 'The poet from Buenaventura, Mary'. As I moved to my next poem after I was done with the first, I said, I'm here representing Buenaventura, but I originate from Guapi,' At that moment, unexpected applause erupted, and I couldn't discern its origin. As it turned out, nearly half of the attendees were Guapireños».

From Mary's account, it is evident that there is something that precedes *habitus*, an underlying intention that resides in symbolic capital. This motivates individuals and groups to attribute symbolic significance to the space of identity, leading to struggles. The quote shows that Mary's identity as a Guapireña is established based on the collective understanding of being from Guapi. It evolves as a symbolic abstraction.

What motivates an individual to engage in this intricate game of identity? In this scenario, Mary's interest in proving the symbolic identity of the Guapireños through her poetry becomes evident. As Bourdieu (1997, p. 170) outlines, «Symbolic acts always entail acts of knowledge and recognition, [which are] cognitive actions on the part of their recipients». In this light, symbolic exchange transpires when the subjects' categories of perception and evaluation align. In Mary's case, the applause from the audience acted as a teleological indicator, contributing to the formation of a positive perception of the Guapireños group.

However, another fundamental aspect for contemplation emerges within the interactions among the colonists, where they establish connections based on identity and construct a social space encompassing diverse ethnic and racial identities. In these



interactions, differences aren't obliterated to enforce a singular worldview; instead, these differences are accentuated through particular forms of objectification.

Libardo: «How do you perceive the relationships between Guapireños and Chocoanos, as well as those originating from Buenaventura and Tumaco?»

Mary: «Well, in reality, there exist many positive relationships. These have always been present because Tumaqueños have visited Guapi, and individuals from Guapi have ventured to Tumaco, and vice versa. Here, we coexist harmoniously, exchanging various elements. For instance, we share recipes, ways of doing things, and customs related to farewells to the dead. Someone may share a specific song, while another says, 'I'm unfamiliar with that one, but we sing this version here.' They readily share, and one person might say, 'Give it to me; I'll copy it,' and inquire about the melody. This sharing leads to mutual learning and cultural exchange».

Libardo: «You originate from Guapi, but now reside in Buenaventura. How do you think people perceive you?»

Mary: «Well, from an external perspective, I'm viewed as an individual who has achieved and accomplished many things, someone who has achieved numerous achievements. I'm seen as a representative of black women, a representative of the Pacific culture, a representative of education».

The statements from Mary provide insight into how she is recognized institutionally as a carrier of cultural capital. This recognition positively contributes to the perception of Guapireños within the official sector of the municipality. This implies that the representation of the Guapireño community extends into various social spaces through the actions, interactions, and shared knowledge of community representatives.

On the other hand, Flor, a representative of culture and a resident of Buenaventura, expresses a relationship characterized by reciprocity. She demonstrates her commitment to protecting Buenaventura's reputation by not allowing outsiders lacking within the social space of Buenaventura to speak negatively about the town. Instead, she emphasizes the significance of earning recognition, enabling the community to understand its symbolic value. This understanding is not solely tied to her actions or person but is also conveyed through the performances enabled by her work and life projects.

Libardo: «As a person born in the Chocó department, do you feel socially recognized?»

Flor: «Yes. I am profoundly grateful to Buenaventura in every aspect. Even from an economic standpoint, all I had to do was ask, and the issues were resolved immediately. That's why I can't leave my Buenaventura (laughs). When people tell me 'You are from Buenaventura,' I say 'No, I was born in Chocoan, and I love Buenaventura.' I don't allow any negative talk because it's not something I condone. One should never be ungrateful».

However, Mary and Flor navigate within the social space of Buenaventura, occupying the role of educators. This positions them to attain symbolic recognition, enabled by the symbolic capital that they have accumulated, affording them the authority to exercise domination; that is, the social significance of their roles is acknowledged. Furthermore, the expressions of both participants not only convey their gratitude but also reveal the way

certain cities across the country have been socially constructed based on historical and structural prejudices of the inhabitants of Buenaventura.

Moreover, within the social space of Buenaventura, the different types of capital possessed by colonial groups and individuals become evident. The awareness of these types of capital is necessary to understand how the relationships of coexistence are organized at the individual and collective levels. It is not enough to observe the conditions of the present; rather, a synchronous and diachronic analysis must be conducted to describe the trajectory of the colonial groups, considering that agents do not move at random within the social spaces that determine relationships of coexistence. It is within this analysis that the capital incorporated into the habitus in an objectified state is evident.

The third interview, involving Edgardo, unveiled another crucial aspect of the formation of colony identities in Buenaventura. This aspect surfaced during a discussion about skin color. Initially, this remark might have appeared isolated, but its significance heightened when it was linked to the implications within the context of the traditional identity-based relationship of coexistence.

Libardo: «Based on your experience, how is the municipality of Buenaventura perceived as a hub for the development of the Colombian Pacific?»

Edgardo: «Someone once said that being born, living, and growing up in a city like Bogotá is fundamentally distinct from being born and raised in a jungle, right? Consider this paradox: even though the jungle lacks the array of opportunities that civilization extends to human beings, sustenance is readily available, and basic needs are easily met. The paradox emerges when you travel from Cali, or to Cali. ... on the highway, you see countrymen playing dominoes or playing cards or shirtless at three or four in the afternoon. This sight often leads many to conclude, including some locals here in Buenaventura, that ‘They are idle instead of working. ...’ Often, people do not know that these individuals commence their day at two, or three in the morning and conclude it by noon, one, or two in the afternoon. Thus, when you see them playing, it’s because they’ve already completed substantial work in the morning.»

Libardo: «So their pace of work differs?»

Edgardo: «Precisely, but the problem is that we have internalized many sentiments: ‘Look, those blacks are lazy. ...’ They say that we blacks say we are brutes. ... and the problem is that we blacks believe that too. (...) Let me illustrate: I came across a poem by Monsignor Valencia for the first time, though the exact word eluded me, and even the title has slipped my memory. However, I distinctly recall one of its lines stating, ‘Who propagated that black equates bad?’ (...) There are sayings that people use, such as ‘They possess a black soul’ or, for instance, when folks aim to showcase the best part of a city, they often do so through a publication. For example, when Cali was designated as the host city for the Pan American Games. I remember discussions revolving around the ‘Cali white paper. ...’ In essence, the pinnacle of Cali’s offerings. On the other hand, when alluding to the red-light district or problem areas in Cali, they’d label those as the ‘black zone’ of Cali. (...) Another example: when I was employed at the ports, I repeatedly encountered the term ‘black’ associated with ‘packing.’ Yet initially, I was at a loss regarding its meaning. Seeking clarity,

I turned to my fellow workers, and they explained the following: there is a method called palletized packing, wherein bags of coffee are methodically arranged within a wooden compartment, complete with apertures for emulators to lift them. This method represented an organized, systematic approach, which we term palletized packing. Conversely, the 'black' packing was essentially an unorganized heap, workers haphazardly throwing the bags of coffee or sugar on top of one another. It seemed disorganized or disorderly. 'Ah,' I said; 'do they call it 'black' because we black people are disorganized? Contemplating whether this 'black' label stemmed from the perception that we, as black people, are associated with disorderliness. Is disorganization now synonymous with being black? The reality is that the term 'black' has been associated with 'bad,' and even today, you hear people referring to tasks as 'black' work. Interestingly, this phrasing is echoed by black people themselves - architects, engineers, and even the mayors - it's a term I used too, until a memory stirred, remembering Monsignor's poem. At that moment, I asserted, 'No! it's not 'black' work; it's called unfinished or unpolished work.' »

Edgardo's narratives highlight how the assessment of hidden knowledge and internalized aspects of identity emerges by contrasting the living and working conditions of Bogotá and Buenaventura. This shows the daily stigmatization faced by Buenaventura inhabitants, even from within their community. Specifically, the local population is often labeled as lazy, a perception that persists and is reinforced by «paisanos» themselves. Edgardo underscores a distinctive approach to work that corresponds to the geographical and economic context of Buenaventura. He emphasizes that this localized way of working is frequently misunderstood and undervalued due to a consistent reference point that fails to account for unique contexts and practices. As a result, this contributes to a biased understanding that paints the identity of Buenaventura as monolithic and homogeneous. In Edgardo's narrative, the workers' routines are neither viewed as tired nor depicted as appearing like the formal workers of the city; instead, their particular way of using their free time is presented, highlighting the significance of leisure as a counterbalance to productive work. Edgardo recognizes and values this cultural perspective, perceiving these individuals engaged in restful work. This perception is based on his knowledge of the native culture, which coexists with his constructivist identity within the context of modernity. Edgardo's perspective emphasizes that these workers play an essential role in the economic development of Buenaventura. As a result, he assesses these local workers as undervalued because their activity does not seem to fit that of formal workers, and they do not work at the same level. Thus, it could be said that skin color prejudices hide the devaluation of knowledge and history and are subject to the same referent as the domination exercised by the elite.

It's important to recognize that identity is formed both objectively and subjectively. Presently, the concept of development carries an ethnocentric and racist undertone, representing a construct shaped by historical influences. This construction predominantly serves the heirs of African culture residing in the municipality of Buenaventura, reflecting ideas of ethnic and racial differences emanating from the modern cultural elites.

In the realm of sociology, all individuals sharing the same objective conditions are treated as identical, encompassing their biological makeup and habitus: a class of identical or similar conditions of existence and conditioning. Social class in itself is inseparably a class of biological individuals endowed with the same habitus as a system of dispositions common

to all people who are products of the same conditioning. If we exclude the likelihood that all members of the same class (or even two members of the same class) have had the same experiences in the same order, all members of the same class are indeed more likely than any member of another class to experience the most frequently encountered situations for the members of that class: the objective structures that science learns under probabilities of access to goods, services, and powers, instilled, through the always convergent experiences that confer their physiognomy upon a social environment, with its «closed» careers, inaccessible «places» or their «forbidden horizons» –that sort of «art of estimating verisimilitudes», as stated by Leibniz; that is, of anticipating the objective future, a sense of reality or realities that is undoubtedly the best-kept secret of its efficiency (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 97).

When Bourdieu refers to biological individuals originating from the same objective conditions, he is referring to a group of people who have the same skin color and a predisposition to perceive themselves or to be perceived by the social world similarly. This confluence creates an avenue for skin color to emerge as a unifying, differentiating, and organizing element within social relationships of coexistence in the form of the habitus. Consequently, skin color becomes linked to the inclusion in or exclusion from power. Thus, racial prejudices emerge, which negatively highlight or ignore the work or recreational activities that people exercise in Buenaventura.

Thus far, it is evident that despite complexities, identity is an evolving process, occurring both at the individual and collective levels within various contexts. This dynamic nature of identity takes center stage. In the case of social and ethnic groups, this is manifested through Cultural Identity, encompassing cultural characteristics such as values, beliefs, traditions, symbols, and behaviors of each group. Notably, the Afro-Colombian community, long subjected to historical marginalization, has regained significance in the political and social spheres through processes of identity construction and reconstruction.

As outlined by Castellanos et al. (2009), cultural identity plays a crucial role in solidifying the sense of belonging among individuals within an ethnic group. This is achieved by reflecting their shared interests, values, and traditions, despite coexisting with a dominant culture of miscegenation in a multiethnic and multicultural country like Colombia. Acknowledging and valuing ethnic diversity in the construction of the identity of the Afro community is essential. Although efforts have been made to recognize and honor their heritage through regulatory measures, significant challenges persist in fully accepting their integral role in the identification process. Ethnicity, serving as a transforming force that challenges the conditions of inequality and subordination, must be valued and taken into account in Colombian society.

### Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the findings presented in the preceding section reveals the valuable insight garnered from employing Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework to understand the

topic of cultural identity within the Colombian context. Based on the selected articles for the initial segment of this article, fundamental concepts like cultural capital, social reproduction, habitus, and social fields are employed, providing essential theoretical and analytical tools for examining sociocultural dynamics within the context of this research. Bourdieu's theory serves as an analytical strategy elucidating the perpetuation and reproduction of social and cultural inequalities. It notably highlights the role of cultural capital and processes of symbolic domination in shaping collective identities and cultural practices. Using Bourdieu's theory enables an exploration of the relationships between social classes, territories, ethnic groups, and local cultures. Additionally, it illuminates the mechanisms determining the valuation and distinction of various forms of cultural capital within Colombian society at large, and particularly within Pacific communities, as highlighted in this study. This provides a solid foundation for a critical analysis of cultural identity in Colombia, enabling an insightful understanding of the complex interactions between social structures, symbolic representations, and identity construction processes in a specific context.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus addresses the intriguing dichotomy of self-perception and the perception of others. It positions itself within a framework that attempts to overcome the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. According to Bourdieu, objectivity fails in explaining why individuals in comparable social positions exhibit divergent behaviors, while subjectivity lacks the essential social regularity for the construction of sound sociological theories. Thus, habitus is understood as an objective structure that governs the practices and representations of individuals, but which is constituted from the social genesis of the perceptual, thought, and action schemes that are constitutive of social identity.

"The theory of action that I propose (with the notion of habitus) amounts to saying that the greater part of human actions have as their principle something quite different from intention, that is, acquired dispositions that make it possible and necessary to interpret the action as oriented toward such and such an end without it being possible to posit that it had, as its principle, the conscious intention of that end (this is where the «everything happens as if is very important)» (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 166).

The habitus is shaped through the interiorization of objective social attributes and individually lived practices, enabling it to comprehend and categorize the social world and classify it. The habitus is rooted in the interiorized ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that adhere to the deepest social models of the social unconscious, with which agents guide their practices without needing to rationalize them, but are suitable for a rational end. In this sense, the habitus allows individuals to «escape the alternative between demystification and mystification» (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 95) by avoiding the imposition of objective criteria or the ratification of the representations and wills of dominant groups.

The habitus is constituted as a dynamic structure that is constantly renewed according to individual and collective experiences. While it serves as an objective framework guiding behavior, individuals have relative freedom to fully or partially accept the meanings of messages from dominant groups or to opt for alternative positions framed in resistance. Hence, habitus does not manifest as a deterministic structure that limits the action of

individuals, but as a structure that establishes certain predispositions and limitations for action, which can be subverted according to individual and collective experiences.

The concept of habitus is related to the idea of social fact proposed by Émile Durkheim, as both refer to modes of action, thought, and sentiments external to the individual, exerting coercive influence by imposing behavioral norms. However, Bourdieu introduces a more complex dimension by putting forward that habitus is not simply an objective structure that is imposed on the individual but is constituted from the social genesis of the perceptual, thought, and action schemes that are constitutive of social identity.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus addresses the dichotomy of self-perception and the perception of others from a perspective that attempts to overcome the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity. Habitus is constituted as an objective framework guiding individual practice and conceptions. The author emphasizes that habitus is not fixed or static nor universal; it constantly evolves, fluctuates, and is dependent on the social and cultural conditions in which the individual develops. Therefore, habitus emerges as a valuable tool for understanding how social inequalities are constructed and maintained in a given society (Fowler, 2020).

The concept of habitus is a theory that seeks to explain the relationship between the individual and society through the notion that individual practices and behaviors are shaped by the social and cultural structures of the society in which they operate. Habitus is constructed through the internalization of objective societal attributes and personal experiences manifesting in individuals' actions, thoughts, and emotions. It provides insight into the perpetuation of social inequalities, as individuals conform to what they perceive as natural and normal for their social status, perpetuating existing social and cultural structures. Additionally, the habitus is not fixed or universal, thereby sustaining established societal and cultural frameworks. Furthermore, habitus is not rigid or universally applicable; it dynamically evolves and transforms, contingent on the societal and cultural context of an individual's development.

The aforementioned concept prompts the proposal that in social interactions, actions carrying established or fixed meanings conceal a spectrum of interests hidden to maintain or transform power relations. While these meanings and power dynamics may appear immutable, actions also possess adaptable characteristics following the experiences of the individuals. As noted by Alves et al. (2018, p. 823), this concept refers to a critical and concrete strategy through which agents can occupy a space in the field of action. It represents the objectification of symbolic capital into institutional capital, which is essential for their work, as argued by Bourdieu.

Therefore, I contend that in relationship identity, the processes through which a group of people construct themselves and construct other groups have the appearance of being natural, since generally, the constructed self is better off than the constructed other. In practice, identity construction usually occurs through a mechanism proposed by Van Dijk (2003), which involves: a) Emphasizing the positive aspects of Us; b) Emphasizing the negative aspects of Them; c) De-emphasizing the positive aspects of Them; d) De-emphasizing the negative aspects of Us.



Identity within modern culture carries an inherent dual nature, simultaneously objective and subjective. This dichotomy is manifested through theoretical principles classified as primordialist and situationalist. The primordialist approach takes its reference from Clifford Geertz wh anthropology work, which initially regarded the potential hindrances posed by primordial ties to the development of political citizenship in post-colonial states. Geertz later formulated an outlook that views ethnicity as an existential facet of the human condition, an aspect not chosen but bestowed by birth within a particular community. According to Geertz, this inherent fact endows continuity in terms of lineage, language, customs, and more. On the other hand, the situationalist or instrumentalist perspective, rooted in the collective contribution s of Frederik Barth, associates the phenomenon of ethnicity not with given aspects of existence, but with movements of affiliation or identifications that oscillate according to the interests pursued and the conditions of the groups involved in the interethnic relationship (Terrén, 2002, pp. 31, 32).

As pointed out by Fowler (2020, p. 456), the Bourdieuan perspective outlined above serves as a crucial framework for comprehending practical action while avoiding the final causality found in mechanistic materialism. This perspective also draws attention to the potent impact of a prevailing theory on individuals' mindsets, which the author refers to as «theory effects». However, it is crucial to recognize that the perspective of practice theory, with its emphasis on improvisation and freedom, embodies the active aspect of human beings within the world. Consequently, it merits investigation and analysis.

This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of practice in shaping social structures and individuals' behaviors. Bourdieu asserts that practice serves as a locus where individuals' dispositions, such as habitus and capital, are actualized and perpetuated. Through practice, individuals effectively navigate social fields and gain access to valuable resources. This emphasis on practice carries significant implications for understanding social change and resistance, as it highlights how individuals can challenge dominant social frameworks through intentional practices.

The findings presented in the previous section provide insight into the existence and relationship of capital in three fundamental forms: economic, cultural, and social, and their relation to the concept of symbolic capital and identity.

To begin with, economic capital encompasses the financial and material assets individual possesses, which can be easily converted into money or used to acquire other assets. Bourdieu underscores its profound societal influence, as its possession grants access to privileges and opportunities that contribute to social mobility. Next, cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and proficiencies cultivated through formal education and cultural upbringing. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital in specific contexts, as educational attainments and adeptness in specific cultural forms are valued and rewarded within society. Third, social capital refers to the individual's social relationships, networks, and connections within their environment. Social capital entails belonging to groups and communities that provide support, opportunities, and resources to their members. Bourdieu highlights that social capital can be converted into economic capital under certain circumstances, as social connections and alliances can open avenues and facilitate access to valuable resources (Bourdieu, 2000).

These three forms of capital are closely related and interconnected in Bourdieu's theory. However, the author introduces the concept of symbolic capital, which encompasses any form of capital (economic, cultural, educational, or social) perceived and valued through classification systems and cognitive frameworks resulting from the incorporation of field structures. In other words, symbolic capital is rooted in social and cultural structures and plays a crucial role in shaping identities and opportunities for social mobility.

This capital-based approach presents a comprehensive perspective for understanding social dynamics and inequalities. The diverse capital forms interact with each other and are fundamental to the acquisition of power and resources in society. Furthermore, symbolic capital highlights the significance of classification and valuation systems in the allocation of status and opportunities. When combined, as advocated by [Cui & Worrell \(2019\)](#), these concepts enable us to analyze social mobility processes more deeply and examine how inequalities are reproduced and perpetuated in our societies. Moreover, these findings buttress the understanding of the interrelation between social structure, symbolic representations, and individual agency, emphasizing the need to question and resist dominant media representations to foster a more equitable and just society.

In addition, Bourdieu's qualitative research approach provides a valuable framework for investigating practice. His focus on reflexivity and the researcher's positionality permit a nuanced analysis of social phenomena. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory of «participant objectivation» highlights the importance of collaborative engagement with participants, acknowledging their agency and expertise. This research methodology not only produces more precise and nuanced results but also empowers participants in the research process.

Bourdieu's practice theory perspective offers a valuable framework for understanding practical action and social change. Through its emphasis on practice and qualitative research, this perspective provides a nuanced and insightful analysis of social phenomena. In essence, it is essential to acknowledge that the meanings and power relations in social interactions are not fixed or unchangeable, and identity construction often involves emphasizing positive aspects of one's positive attributes while downplaying negative aspects of others. Moreover, the dual condition of identity in modern culture can be understood through both the primordialist and situationalist approaches, each contributing valuable insights into the complexities of ethnic identity.

For the social groups residing in Buenaventura, the implementation of the municipality's development model based on the concept of the culture of modernity has not generated sufficient conditions to attain a dignified way of life. On the contrary, it has been perceived as a disappointment, since the idea of modernity, has been constructed by the dominant elite with an asymmetric and rigid social vision that seeks to generalize behavior without taking into account the context of local culture ([Córdoba & Trujillo, 2020, p. 364](#)).

In the specific context of this study, it was observed that one aspect of the identity of the social agents acting in Buenaventura involves an endeavor to engage with what modernity presents. This action is a blend of voluntary choice and circumstances that impose themselves. This identity manifestation emerges as an effort to incorporate these new elements into their existing reality, simultaneously validating them within their traditions.

In this process, there's also a reinterpretation of their forms of social organization in light of these developments.

The culture of modernity has promoted various cultural spaces that span a spectrum of extremes. At one end, some spaces closely align with the ideal of the dominant cultural model. These spaces are characterized by the creation and implementation of policies aimed at achieving social equality, accompanied by demographic growth and a decline in mortality due to advancements in medical practices. This is coupled with the emergence of industrial-type companies, and developments in communications and transportation infrastructure, essentially forming a well-rounded representation of the key components of modernity. In contrast, some spaces have intermediate characteristics, where goods are centered around consumption. Similarly, education, healthcare, and transportation infrastructure hold comparable status. Finally, some spaces significantly deviate from the European model of modernity. In these regions, the majority of modernity indicators exhibit a low balance. Following Bourdieu's theory, the diffusion of consumption promotes the circulation of references, repertoires, and goods, which has the effect of simultaneously expanding, stretching, shuffling, and reinforcing symbolic boundaries between groups. As suggested by [De Castro \(2022, p. 34\)](#), individual consumption practices play a role in both perpetuating and challenging dominant cultural meanings and practices. This contributes to an ongoing process of negotiation and redefinition of social boundaries.

The history of modernity in Latin America traces back to the dominance of European invaders, who conquered and colonized the non-European indigenous population. Later, African slaves were forcibly brought in to replace the diminishing indigenous population. This painful history of conquest and exploitation established a social framework in which identity was primarily defined by one's skin and territorial origins. However, [Todorov \(2007\)](#), challenges the idea of race as a mere grouping based on physical and moral traits, asserting that the division of races aligns more with a division by cultures.

Colombia, like many other Latin American nations, witnessed the formation of its National State rooted in a racial social structure. This structure dictated various aspects of daily life based on racial categories such as Spanish, Creole, Indian, black, and mestizo. As noted by [Córdoba & Trujillo \(2020, p. 369\)](#), these categories emerged from intricate racial intermingling. This history highlights how the dominant ideas of modernity, introduced during the colonial era, have significantly influenced social structures and identities throughout Latin America. National identity formation is a simultaneous and intricate process, involving intimate and subjective dimensions. Individuals develop and act following their personal experiences, representations, references, and interrelation with others, all shaped using historical processes ([Larkin, 2002](#)).

In Colombia, it is imperative to explore the identity traits of different ethnic and racial groups across various social and geographical contexts. It is essential to understand how these traits are assumed and influenced by a racial and ethnic ideology that reaffirms group identity, thereby facilitating communal coexistence. This becomes particularly relevant when considering Buenaventura.

[Cruz \(2018, p. 224\)](#) points out that this perspective not only helps to clarify the movement of agents within social space but also challenges static conceptions of the social

field. It highlights how social agents intervene with other social fields, other agents, and capitals based on their predominant capital, to augment their symbolic capital. In essence, Bourdieu's theory not only provides insight into how agents interact within their specific fields but also provides a framework for understanding how these interactions extend to other social fields and how agents strategically intervene in them to increase their symbolic capital.

Ultimately, Bourdieu's theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexity and dynamism of the social space in which agents operate. The construction of identity through symbolic struggles in Buenaventura is not created as something closed. Instead, it is made up of different complex and heterogeneous elements that are symbolically constructed in everyday life between the meanings emanating from modernity and those that endure community.

The discourse on identity is characterized by two principal viewpoints. The first approach views identities as formed by static and historically unchangeable cultural components, such as skin color and language. Conversely, the second perspective regards identity as a changing construction of elements. These theoretical movements are closely related and symbolically manifested in the social actions of ethnic and racial groups, revealing that we are carriers of externally imposed and inherited identity conditions that have a communal meaning and that we act socially guided by our perceptions of identity, which makes us unique owners of our realities.

These primordialist and situational social frameworks hold relevance within specific historical contexts, particularly during periods of symbolic power struggles, since symbols communicate ideas, goals, thoughts, and beliefs within the framework of objectivity and subjectivity, defining what is important and trivial for groups and individuals. In this way, conditions of identity autonomy and subordination are created simultaneously. Therefore, the way ethnic and racial groups behave in society is based on the fact that they are socially and self-constructed, allowing subordinate groups to innovate and construct reality through symbolic struggles aimed at achieving recognition of their social conditions, opposing forms of social exclusion. To do so, they assume an essentialist position, which implies that identity has a communal component defined by a similar origin. These struggles are disguised in symbolic forms to make them subtle so that they conceal the power relations upon which they are based.

Given the continuous changes in culture, the current interpretations of actions that represent identity today are marked by a short-lived essentialism, which would rather be a strategic and positional constructivism that becomes evident when assumed as ethnic or racial identities against other groups. For instance, when the colonies of Chocó, Guapi, Tumaco, and the natives of Buenaventura define and relate themselves based on ethnic aspects, these interactions stem from a popular conception. This research explores the sense of social space of coexistence that the colonies of Chocó, Guapi, Tumaco, and the indigenous population of Buenaventura establish and navigate their racial and ethnic identity symbols. This exploration focuses on how they employ these symbols as part of their strategies for local culture in the municipality of Buenaventura.

To illustrate, a participant in the interviews highlighted that «people from Guapi are more inclined toward intellectual pursuits; they have shown more interest in knowledge compared to the general population of Buenaventura, but there are distinct characteristics. People here are much more involved in dancing and storytelling, while those in Guapi are still closely tied to rural culture, embracing ancestral values». When questioned about the distinctions between a Chocoano and Guapireño, and a Guapireño and Bonaverense, nuanced differences emerge. Presently, statistical records indicate that the majority of the Buenaventura population identifies itself symbolically: «88.6% (...) recognized themselves as Afro-Colombian or their equivalents based on ethnic-racial characteristics». This observation by [Urrea & Castro \(2007, p. 76\)](#) resonates with [Cruz's \(2018, p. 226\)](#) highlights on the significance of «invisible power.» This form of power operates through the symbolic realm, often in collusion with those who may be unaware of its influence, resembling a type of normative and arbitrary violence.

Nevertheless, certain cultural elements carry a strong sense of community identity, rooted in territorial origin and kinship relationships. These elements, as they integrate with modern culture, often become obscured to facilitate the establishment of a new social order.

The concept of community is fundamental to human groups, characterized by the use of a common language and serving as the foundation of a unified political entity. This idea of community is closely linked to another idea from German romanticism: the spirit of the people. This concept embodies the unity of languages, popular songs, folklore, and traditions and customs of a people. Importantly, this cardinal concept, in its traditional sense, is intimately intertwined with the concept of community ([Jaramillo, 1987. pp. 56-57](#)).

The community social sentiment becomes apparent in groups when the individuals belonging to the community exhibit strong mutual support, cooperation, and seamless coordination in their actions in a natural way, with an imposing component of identity, which keeps them united and leads them to joint actions. This seemingly «incomprehensible» predisposition establishes itself as a social guide for community members, leading to the development of internalized, practiced, and justified community identity attitudes. In essence, these attitudes spring from the community's sense of identity, influencing how they conceive, incorporate, and shape social patterns of behavior.

Furthermore, within community organizations, identities are supported by traditional elements, primarily connected with territoriality affiliation, religious beliefs, and kinship bond conditions formed through descent. Within such contexts, individuals are not seen as autonomous entities endowed with their identities, as is the case in modern society. Instead, they are viewed as rigidly hierarchical and familiar components intricately woven into the fabric of the community. In contrast to the fragmented nature of identity in the modern cultural context, non-modern societies maintain a sense of unity and stability within identity constructs. This allows for the perpetuation of a static and essentialized community identity.

Therefore, the symbolic attributes linked with habitus, as evident in ethnic and racial practices, are associated with historical symbolic struggles. These struggles entail the

legitimate categorization of the social order, which justifies its practice through a narrative that positively narrates the events of the in-group while ignoring or neglecting those of other symbolically distinct groups. As noted by [De Castro \(2022, p. 31\)](#), this perspective aims to contribute to our understanding of how certain forms of cultural capital can transform into «symbolic power» within particular groups and contexts. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital refers to the cultural resources possessed by individuals, such as education, knowledge, and skills, that can be used to attain social and economic advantages. However, cultural capital is not evenly distributed within society, and certain forms of cultural capital are valued more highly in certain contexts. In some instances, cultural capital can become a form of symbolic power, which entails the ability to shape and define social reality. Symbolic power operates through cultural representations such as language, symbols, and norms, molding how individuals perceive and interact with their surroundings. Some groups might possess cultural capital that is highly valued in a particular context, allowing them to influence the dominant culture and exert symbolic power over other groups.

In our context, this form of silence is a symbolic struggle strategy that demonstrates the pride of the group to which one belongs and also allows one to hide the symbolic power acquired, for the construction of modern society in Buenaventura.

It is crucial to examine various expressions of coexistence, particularly as they pertain to the processes of constructing social space in Buenaventura. These processes incorporate new social imaginaries, originating from Colombia's acknowledgment as a pluricultural and multiethnic state in the 1991 Constitution. Moreover, given that Buenaventura is a port city characterized by the presence of diverse communities from around the world alongside local communities, a constant social dynamic of new identity dynamics prevails, with culture and biology being the primary basis, since identities are created and recreated based on historical events, geographic origin of agents, political institutions, academic creations, collective memory, biological characteristics, among others. These forms of representation serve to veil the underlying power struggles in these contexts. This is the juncture at which the State introduces avenues for identity integration, often originating an essentialist form of multiculturalism.

The typifications of identity emerge from the self-definitions and perceptions of other social groups. In the popular context of the city of Buenaventura, these ethnic and racial senses are manifest prominently.

[Córdoba & Trujillo \(2020\)](#) argue that terms like «racial» or «ethnic», commonly used both in sociology and in society at large, serve as a form of ideological escapism act. Employing these terms directs focus toward peripheral aspects of relationships (e.g., differences in skin color) and what is central is avoided (e.g., differences in power and the exclusion of a group with lower power from positions with a higher potential for power). In other words, the authors argue that ideas of race and ethnicity are social constructions and strategies that are elaborated from self-perception and the perception of others. These ideas serve to conceal or hide power dynamics, as identities appear to possess unchanging fixed attributes that initially acquire an imperishable status within social identity relationships, effectively silencing positions of superiority and inferiority. Moreover, the ideas of race and ethnicity also function to construct individuals away from their interests



and toward the interests of others, as they prioritize the category of perception and appreciation of the other over one's own. However, this does not imply that the dominated do not develop tactics to fight against social hegemonies.

From [Glevarec's perspective \(2023\)](#), the significance of social space in understanding social dynamics and power relations is notable. Bourdieu's theory argues that social space is a field of symbolic struggles, wherein social agents compete for the possession and recognition of different forms of capital, including economic, cultural, and social capital. These elements are evident in this research findings, as shown by the narratives presented. Additionally, it is emphasized that social space is the result of the unequal distribution of resources and social positions, giving rise to the formation of specific fields in which relations of domination and struggle for legitimacy are established. These social practices and representations are rooted in social space and reflect and reinforce existing inequalities in society.

Once again, we can highlight the concept of habitus and emphasize its role in the reproduction and transmission of social structures. Habitus, understood as a system of lasting dispositions embodied by individuals, guides their practices and perceptions and contributes to the reproduction of social inequalities. These elements not only help us understand the configuration of social space and its influence on the understanding of society but also support the idea that individual and collective identity is grounded and constructed based on social relations, culture, and power.

Concerning the social life of Buenaventura, as in any other city, distinct groups are present and interact within various everyday spaces based on symbolic ethnic characteristics. The discussion of ethnicity and race within the context of social sciences inevitably involves delving into power dynamics and dominance relationships that are internalized and manifest through symbolic representations. This concept will be explored based on the conceptual approach of symbolism, since this concept allows for broad reflections on the social and political order, closely linked to the ideas of ethnicity, race, and power.

When an individual enters the company of others, a natural inclination arises to gather information about them or apply existing knowledge. They seek to understand their overall economic status, self-concept, attitude toward others, competence, integrity, and more.

While some of this information may seem like it is sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps define the situation, allowing others to know in advance what he expects from them and what they can expect from him. Thus informed, others will know how to act to obtain a specific response ([Goffman, 1981, p. 13](#)).

To establish symbolic ethnic and racial meanings within the social space of Buenaventura, it is essential to note that the symbolic explanation depends on the context of the analysis and its academic interpretation, which in the present case is based on popular education, and the identity meanings point to the construction of a social space where local experiences are vital to the orientation of the agents who interact to create new forms of coexistence.

This perspective prompts consideration of the emergence of popular racism and ethnocentrism, whereby historically marginalized groups are recognizing themselves in symbolic differences elaborated with a very particular meaning (one that does not necessarily relate to discrimination or social inferiority) in a local social space. This meaning leads to them being recognized as human beings with strengths and weaknesses and is conducive to equity.

In contrast, racism and hegemonic ethnocentrism constructed from the discourses devised by elites, generally in the academic and religious fields, undervalue people who do not belong to the group issuing the dominant discourse, assigning to them a negative condition that equates them with objects. This generates structural discrimination that supposes that the subjects are symbolically subjected to dominant, pejorative, and totalitarian discourses. Thus, the other, submissive, diverse, and different are depicted as reified objects rather than as human beings in relationships of coexistence.

Overall, the practices of identity, conditions of lasting, permanent, resistant, and immutable cultural truths and beliefs are acquired and used to structure relationships of coexistence.

Within the framework of popular education, the concept of habitus plays a vital role by facilitating research and the integration of popular knowledge into academic discussion. Through this process, historical narratives that highlight the counterpose emanating from the enslavement endured by the people brought from the African continent to Colombia and whose inheritance is evident in objectified and subjectified relationships of coexistence that reflect the human condition of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Pacific Coast and does not afford them the status of an object of reason.

Popular racism recognizes other people as human beings—in this case, the inherent condition of marginalized and historically subjected groups in the local context of Buenaventura—to the extent that it is expressed in public spaces in a forward and less covert way, which implies an appeal to creativity, local symbolic construction, and subjectivity. This occurs because it is applied to people with whom they share the space (people from the department of Chocó are recognized in the local context in an exaggerated way since they supposedly do not produce the «L» sound in their speech; for example, they are represented as saying «arto» instead of alto). This is in contrast to elitist racism, which is usually repressed, objectified, and confined to private spaces that offer greater freedom to denigrate the object. If we take the previous example and apply it again to people from the department of Chocó, elitist racism could take the form of an academic explanation that relates their speech pattern to a deficiency or defect and not to a human condition being molded by the local context.

The identity that emerges within the social space of Buenaventura is characterized by a uniformity of local symbolic ethnic and racial practices based on the historical processes that determine the actions of marginalized groups. It is well known that in discourses elaborated from the local context, group identity is reinvented with symbolic criteria that are conducive to recognizing some relationships of coexistence that differ from those configured from hegemonic knowledge. Habitus is efficient in outlining symbolic strategies that are practiced in the social space, which allows the construction of a sense of local

identity since these strategies are objectively and subjectively correlated with the subject knowledge that the agents incorporate into daily life, which can be understood as a genealogy of knowledge of the groups immersed in the local context.

[Bourdieu \(1984\)](#), states that understanding the configuration of a social space goes beyond a direct conjunction of people that ignores fundamental differences and does not take into account contextual, economic, and cultural particularities. Such practices predispose the people who comprise racial and ethnic groups to be motivated by certain practices and despise or ignore others, which implies that in practice, there are positively and negatively valued symbols that are elaborated within each colonial group: Guapireños, Tumaqueños, Chocoanos or Bonaverenses. Thus, colonial groups perform their social actions according to the symbolic space where they interact in conjunction with the symbolic capital they possess since the symbols operate as images of identity that communicate their social expectations.

These colonial groups have symbolic ethnic and racial capital that is common to the group and different from that of the other groups, which means that they can be identified as Guapireños, Tumaqueños, Chocoanos or Bonaverenses. This is because they belong to one of these groups and are differentiated according to the symbolic capital that they possess or that is assigned to them based on their place of origin and skin color. This symbolic capital is common to all members of the group.

Thus, ethnic and racial groups are characterized as agents who have developed a sense of identity through their common symbolic capital. This symbolic identity allows agents not only to define themselves as group members but also to establish symbolic differences from other groups of agents.

Social realities, which symbolically construct colonial groups, shape social relations that serve as symbolized individual and collective identities, which allows the establishment of historically constructed and internalized differences concerning ethnic and racial factors that are independent of the will of the agents and the groups. In turn, these symbols allow reality to be transformed, generating new spaces of symbolic relationships.

Indeed, studies like [Van Hilten \(2021\)](#) and [Cuevas \(2016\)](#), exemplify how Bourdieu's social critical theory serves to analyze the process of meaning construction and change in identity formation, as highlighted in this research. It has been mentioned that practices are socially structured actions that reflect power relations and domination within a society. In this regard, it is worth noting that the concept of habitus, economic, cultural, and social capital aids in exploring how these transformations are perceived and experienced by different social actors in the Colombian Pacific communities. It is argued that the perspectives and representations of these transformations are rooted in social structures and the unequal distribution of resources. In addition, it emphasizes how these representations are not static but rather in constant dispute and negotiation in the public sphere ([Cuevas, 2016](#)), and these visions and representations of social transformation and identity construction reflect inequalities and power struggles within ethnic communities ([Van Hilten, 2021](#)). Bourdieu's work provides valuable conceptual and theoretical tools to comprehend these social dynamics and how representations are constructed and contested within the context.

The outline of the previous idea leads us to consider that interacting involves interpreting various people who bring personal and impersonal elements into play, implying the existence of a symbolic capital that allows us to order our social actions.

Symbolic capital is seen as any property, physical force, wealth, or any other characteristic that, when recognized and valued by social agents, holds a significant influence and power, often working almost magically to elicit compliance and obedience: a property that is seen as a form of domination that operates through internalization of socially constituted beliefs and «collective expectations,» prompting individuals to submit without physical contact or even recognizing the force exerted upon them. An order is given and it is obeyed. But it is only an apparent exception to the law of conservation of social energy. For the symbolic act to operate exercise seemingly with no energy expenditure, achieving this kind of magical efficiency, a prior, often invisible, and frequently forgotten or repressed effort must have generated the required dispositions among those who are subjected to the act of imposition or domination. These dispositions lead them to unquestioningly comply without even considering resistance. Symbolic violence is a form of violence that prompts submissions without being recognized as such. It relies on deeply ingrained «collective expectations», and beliefs instilled socially (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 172-173).

Symbolic capital contains crucial meanings for the elaboration of social interaction. These meanings give rise to the proposition of social classifications, sometimes unconsciously organized, residing within the habitus, since they are perceived as natural and are based on «impalpable» objective social relations, which are expressed in a naturalized form. They allow us to navigate the differences shaped by economic, social, political, and cultural capital in the social space.

The habitus functions as a structuring mechanism that operates within agents, without being entirely a determinant of behavior or a rigid structure. According to Bourdieu, the habitus serves as the generative foundation for strategies that enable agents to deal with unforeseen and constantly changing situations. It operates as a system of lasting and transferable dispositions, integrating past experiences. This system function as a matrix for shaping perceptions, appraisals, and actions, making possible the realization of infinitely diversified tasks (Bourdieu, 2000).

For the habitus to acquire its innate and seemingly magical attributes, it must be internalized and put into practice within the perception of the «existing» social order. This implies that agents do not question the authenticity of the current disposition, which can be called domination.

Domination is not the sole immediate consequence of actions by a group of agents («the dominant class») invested with the power of coercion. Rather, it is an indirect effect of a complex set of actions that arises in the network of cross-coercions to which each of the dominants, dominated in this way by the stature of the field through which domination is exercised, is subjected by the others (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 51).

Therefore, once «accepted» or subtly imposed, symbolic capital becomes habitus, enabling the recognition, distinction, and organization of interactions. This means that

habitus contextualizes the social space within which interactions occur, as exemplified in the following description of space:

... space, denoting a collection of distinct and coexistent positions, each external to the other, defined in relation to each other by factors like proximity, the neighborhood, or distance, and also by relations of order such as above, below, and in-between. For instance, properties characterizing individuals from the middle or petite bourgeoisie classes can be deduced from their intermediate position between the two extreme positions, without being objectively or subjectively identified in either of them (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 30).

In the study of social space, it becomes evident how people promote group unity and disparity simultaneously, among those constructed in the same way and those constructed socially differently, so that they can live together and be different. This coexistence of unity and diversity necessitates an examination of perceptions, appraisals, and actions that symbols convey in which formal and informal norms of behavior become palpable, although these patterns depend on experiences under which collective and personal interests are organized. Moreover, «social space can be constructed as a structure of probabilities of bringing individuals together or separating them, a structure of affinity or aversion between them» (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 112).

From the preceding discussion, it can be deduced that social space serves as the place where narratives concerning the relationships among social groups are woven together, encompassing meanings, similarities, and contrasts. These narratives are structured around ethnic and racial differences, which in turn influence social relations in Buenaventura. Consequently, social space becomes the domain where symbolic meanings of tangible and legitimized discourses emerge, and it is here where the originality of how symbols are constructed and put into practice in social relations between the colonies of Chocó, Guapi, Tumaco, and the natives of Buenaventura is evident.

Discourses on identity are manifested in social relationships, contributing to the construction of a social framework. This symbolic framework acts as the medium through which strategies are devised within the context of power dynamics, as it organizes the histories of ethnic and racial communities, while simultaneously hiding and accounting for power dynamics based on individual and collective experiences. Within identity, social values and practices are perceived in correlation with symbols, which, although not completely homogeneous, recognize and include variations of expression that do not deny, but rather ratify the difference at the same time.

Each colony and group possess and cultivate distinct symbolic elements of ethnic and racial identity, which emerge from the social experiences of these groups, and are related to social dimensions such as collaboration, reciprocity, hostility, consensus, conflict, competition, and negotiation. Ethnic and racial symbols play a crucial role in understanding the aforementioned social patterns, which are key to interpreting the development of daily life in the context of coexistence in Buenaventura when colonial communities assume or are assumed as racial and ethnic groups. This process is fundamental for creating group consciousness.

The aforementioned shed light on how symbolic capital is of paramount importance in shaping social representations. It involves the incorporation of perception categories and classification systems that reflect social and cultural structures. The findings of this study, under the work of [Campos and Lima \(2018\)](#), illustrate how groups (also the interviewed individuals) construct their unique systems of values, norms, and practices, which profoundly influence their interpretations and representations of the world. These social representations are fundamental to identity and group belonging.

In summary, this text, with its interweaving of reflections and narratives, addresses the interrelation between symbolic capital, social representations, groups, and the field of recognition from Bourdieu's theory. It provides a profound understanding of how social representations are constructed and negotiated in specific social contexts, emphasizing the importance of symbolic capital and the struggle for recognition in shaping social dynamics ([Stamatiou, 2022](#)).

To conclude, symbolic capital emerges as a complex and multifaceted concept that has significant implications for how individuals and communities perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Understanding the role of symbolic capital in constructing identity and shaping social hierarchies can develop more inclusive and equitable societies.

Symbolic capital plays a crucial role in constructing both individual and collective identity. Possession of cultural resources such as education and knowledge of arts can shape an individual's self-perception and the perception of others. Furthermore, belonging to a group or community that is recognized for its symbolic capital can influence how the collective identity of that community is formed and perceived. Competition for symbolic capital can be a key factor in constructing social hierarchies and exclusions. In societies where certain cultural resources are valued, possession of these resources can become a significant source of power and prestige. Consequently, those with limited access to these resources may face disadvantages in terms of status and power, which can contribute to the creation of social hierarchies and exclusions affecting both individuals and communities.

Symbolic capital can be a means of cultural resistance and subversion. Just as possession of symbolic capital can be a source of power and status, subverting dominant cultural norms and values can be a form of resistance and affirmation of identity. By doing so, individuals and communities can challenge existing social and cultural hierarchies and create new forms of cultural valuation that reflect their identities and values.

Situated as a port city and inhabited predominantly by an Afro-Colombian population, Buenaventura's ethnic and racial identities are shaped through a complex interplay of modernity and traditional community values. These identities are constructed symbolically in daily life through the meanings that emanate from the community and the modern world. Therefore, it is essential to understand the ethnic and racial characteristics of different groups in Buenaventura, and how they are influenced by a racial and ethnic ideology, which reaffirms the identity of the group and allows for community coexistence.

As highlighted by [Vandebroeck \(2020\)](#), adopting Bourdieu's theory is crucial for understanding the influence of social structures, cultural capital, and symbolic representations on the development of social class perception and judgment. This author

emphasizes how individuals internalize and reproduce social hierarchies through interaction with their environment, contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities in society. Thus, it is underscored that social class perception and judgment are not purely individual but heavily influenced by the social and cultural structures in which individuals are immersed. The findings of this study reveal how the participants construct their social representations through interaction with their environment, including peers, colleagues, friends, and family, as well as the dominant culture that shapes their identity.

In the contemporary era, people are experiencing identity crises due to the rapid pace of cultural change. They identify superficially and fleetingly, which leads to insecurities and discontent. The internalization of a solid identity can cause new metamorphoses that render the identity invalid. In this context, understanding the construction of ethnic and racial identities in Buenaventura can provide insight into the formation and maintenance of identity in the face of rapid societal change.

The symbolic construction of ethnic and racial identity in Buenaventura is a complex and heterogeneous process that occurs in daily life. Modernity and community meanings create a complex interplay of symbols that shape the identities of individuals and groups. Thus, the resulting identity is multifaceted and characterized by an interplay of tradition and modernity.

The majority of Buenaventura's population is Afro-Colombian or its equivalent. This has shaped the cultural practices and social realities of the city's inhabitants, including the symbolic construction of ethnic and racial identity. The shared experiences of discrimination and oppression have created a common bond that is expressed symbolically through the community's cultural practices.

Despite being a modern and efficient port city, Buenaventura has historically been neglected and plagued by corruption, leading to low social indices. The intersection of modernity and community identity is therefore not without conflict and tension. Understanding the symbolic construction of ethnic and racial identity in Buenaventura is essential for navigating the complexities of community identity in the face of modernization.

Symbolic ethnic and racial meanings are constructed and interpreted differently based on context and academic interpretation. Racism and popular ethnocentrism can create symbolic differences in a local social space, but they still recognize people as humans. In contrast, elitist racism and ethnocentrism devalue people and represent them as objects. The symbolic construction of ethnic and racial identity in Buenaventura must therefore be analyzed within a broader social and historical context.

The symbolic practices of ethnic and racial identity in Buenaventura are characterized by the uniformity of local practices, which allow colonial groups to differentiate themselves from other agents. The social realities that construct colonial groups symbolically shape individual and collective identities and relationships. Consequently, understanding the symbolic construction of ethnic and racial identity in Buenaventura is crucial to understanding the social dynamics of the city and its inhabitants.

In conclusion, drawing from the aforementioned arguments, this research examines the diverse forms of capitals outlined by Bourdieu that determine the group and individual order



of the social space in which the agents of the Guapireña, Tumaqueña, Chocoana, and Bonaverense colonies establish their identity and coexistence relationships. To describe and capture the senses of these social relationships in the social space, the ethnographic method was used, which allows qualitative research in the order of reflexivity. An ethnographic study is a complete or partial description of a group of people and focuses on studying a group of people who have something in common.

Furthermore, reflexivity around identity and the concept of habitus and social space explains how agents construct and create social reality. People's perception of reality derives from the position they occupy in the social space. Thus, the researcher takes part in the construction of social reality. Reflexivity aims to objectify the social relations, values, and experiences of the researcher, and the research methodology design is qualitative. Bourdieu's interpretation of practice gives epistemological priority to the body over consciousness, understanding the former as a result of the incorporation of objective structures. However, this does not prevent him from theorizing about the place reflexivity has in human behavior, even though it cannot be understood, from this perspective, as a «turning back on oneself», characteristic of modern thought. For Bourdieu, reflexivity has two senses, according to [Angelcos & Sembler \(2020, p. 43\)](#). First, it refers to a form of «practical reflection» that emerges especially in situations of profound crisis, in which habitus, due to its characteristic inertia, ceases to anticipate and provide the pre-reflexive responses that operate under normal conditions. Second, it is understood as a collective enterprise, typical of scientific work, which involves identifying the social conditioning of scientific practice, which is usually self-described as a disinterested practice, that is, without major commitments to the social world.

In summary, this research used the ethnographic method to investigate the different capitals described by Bourdieu that determine the group and individual order of the social space. Reflexivity around identity and the concept of habitus and social space explain how agents construct and create social reality, and the researcher takes part in the construction of social reality. The research methodology design is qualitative. As an expert, I can attest that the ethnographic method is a valuable tool for understanding social phenomena and the role of reflexive inquiry in producing more nuanced analyses of social processes. Moreover, Bourdieu's theory of capital is crucial for understanding the role of cultural, social, and economic resources in shaping social hierarchies and individual identities.

**NOTE:** This article presents selected findings from an academic research project conducted under the framework of the Popular Education and Community Development focus within the Masters in Education program at Universidad del Valle. This qualitative research entailed engaging with the narratives of individuals from the Chocoanos, Tumaqueños, Guapireños, and Bonaverenses colonies. These participants generously shared their personal experiences, insights into their ethnic and racial identities, and their coexistence dynamics within a shared social space. Notably, the authors executed this research without financial backing for its design or execution. However, they express gratitude to Universidad del Valle for the translation service of the original text for the publication of this article.

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