Ethnic Boundary-Making and the Gendered Politics of Belonging along the Ecuador - Colombia Borderland.

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 26, 2016
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Acknowledgements

I am grateful for Professor Sarah Radcliffe’s patience, support, guidance and selfless time. The dissertation simply could not have been possible without a supervisor such as Sarah. She trusted a project that from the onset had a strong possibility of going very wrong and then revised with incredible detail every single page, multiple times. Her commitment to indigenous women and promoting Latin American scholarship inspires many of us to continue what she and other scholars started. Gracias de todo Corazón.

I would also like to thank the Geography department for the support during these three years of the PhD and during the MPhil. In particular, the cartography unit, Philip Stickler and Silas Tull, for the maps and sketches used in this dissertation.

I am thankful to SENESCYT for funding this project. I hope that this desertion serves to improve indigenous – governmental relations, particularly at this moment in time.

Amy Heidi, for companionship during the days/weeks/months at the Lucy Library.

Beatrice Balfour for friendship/sisterhood during these four years and being there in December 2012.

To the NHS, for keeping me healthy during difficult moments.

Para las mujeres epera. Que sigamos cantando como lo hace Santa Garrabato y por mucho tiempo más.

Finalmente dedico este trabajo a mi familia que durante estos 4 años se consolidó en una familia: Ruthy, Leo, Vane, Dome, Mica, Julian, Juan, Choco, Toulouse y al amor de mi vida, a mi lindo.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABYA YALA</td>
<td>Indigenous term (Kuna of Panama) comprising what today is considered South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMALGAMATION (CULTURAL)</td>
<td>Cultural assimilation of settler culture by natives (Wolfe 2006; Morgensen 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETTLER COLONIAL BIOPOWER</td>
<td>Comprising the amalgamation and replacement of indigenous peoples for their elimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDEAL</td>
<td>Centro Ecuatoriano de Desarrollo y Estudios Alternativos [Ecuadorean Centre on Development and Alternative Studies]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHACHI</td>
<td>Indigenous ethnicity in Northern Esmeraldas [Ecuador’s Northern Border with Colombia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLONO</td>
<td>Coloquial term in Spanish that means present-day colonisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODENPE</td>
<td>Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador [Development Council for indigenous nationalities and peoples of Ecuador]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMBIFROM</td>
<td>Comisión Binacional Fronteriza entre Ecuador y Colombia [Bi-national commission between Ecuador and Colombia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONAICE</td>
<td>La dirigencia de la Confederación de Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas de la Costa Ecuatoriana [The leadership of the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of the Ecuadorian coast]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIC</td>
<td>Consejo Regional de Indígenas del Cauca [Regional Council of Indigenous peoples of Cauca]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELN</td>
<td>Ejército de Liberación Nacional <a href="Colombia">National Liberation Army</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCO</td>
<td>Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTZ/GIZ</td>
<td>German Government Office for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IESS</td>
<td>Instituto Ecuatoriano de Seguridad Social [Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFE PLANS</td>
<td>Alternative development models based on grounded accounts of indigenous worldviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIES</td>
<td>Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social [Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAESE</td>
<td>Nacionalidad Epera Siapidaara del Ecuador [Epera Siapidaara Nationality of Ecuador]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONIC</td>
<td>Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia [National Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDOT</td>
<td>Plan de Desarrollo y Ordenamiento Territorial [Plan of territorial development and land use]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAN COLOMBIA</td>
<td>A US-Colombian military initiative to combat the drug war since 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENPLADES</td>
<td>La Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo [National Secretariat of Planning and Development of Ecuador]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPLACEMENT (TERRITORIAL)</td>
<td>The physical displacement of indigenous people from their territory as part of the logic of elimination (Wolfe 1994, 1999; Morgensen 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNWOMEN</td>
<td>United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (formally UNIFEM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZIF/BIZ</td>
<td>Zona de Integración Fronteriza (Border Integration Zone)</td>
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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the effects of processes of ethnic elimination on the intimate spaces, sexuality and bodies of indigenous women belonging to a bi-national indigenous group along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. Eperara Siapidaara (also known as Epera) women experience multiple levels of violence culminating in ethnic elimination, triggered by settler colonial dynamics along a highly militarised geopolitical border. The thesis focuses on the Epera women’s struggles to confront overlapping geopolitical forms of violence, resulting from a masculinised ethnic sovereignty that arises in the interactions between the Ecuadorian State (government and military) and Epera men. The thesis focuses on the strategies of ethnic purity used by Epera men and women to counter the process of ethnic elimination. The forms taken by purifying practices regulate women’s lives as well as their position as boundary-makers in spatial registers as a mechanism to assure the continuity of their ethnicity. The case study provides unprecedented ethnographic data, analysed in light of settler colonial studies (proposed as a key area for political geography), feminist studies of decolonisation, ethnic boundary-making, and feminist geopolitics. Despite previous research on bio-politics at border sites, and an emergent literature on bio-politics and indigeneity, little is known about the relationship between settler colonialism and feminist geopolitics from the everyday experience of indigenous women in bi-national/transnational indigenous groups. The thesis examines the bio-politics of contemporary settler-colonialism and its intricate relation to the logic of indigenous elimination from the perspective of Epera indigenous women. In doing so, this dissertation extends discussion of political and feminist geography in new directions for the Latin American context.
Preface

I did not come as a novice to the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. Rather, it is a place that I had worked since 2005, when working for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ibarra, a small Ecuadorian town 3 hours south of the Colombian border. During this time I was struck by debates among UN and Ecuadorian government officials, over the effects of Plan Colombia on border populations. Due to increasing militarisation and fumigation of coca leaf plantations, discussions centred on how to identify members of the Awa bi-national indigenous group, whose territory is split by the Ecuador-Colombia geopolitical boundary. Discussions between UNHCR and the Ecuadorian Ministry of External Affairs focused on the possibility of granting refugee status to the entire bi-national indigenous group. The crux of the dilemma, however, was how a joint UNHCR and Ecuadorian government commission was to recognise and distinguish who was really Awa. Initial discussions even attempted to point out particular physiological features that were only ‘Awa-like’, discussions that made me both uneasy and perturbed.

However, this moment triggered a profound curiosity about how bi-national indigenous groups were affected by regulatory practices at border sites characterised by escalating conflict. Why did state entities have such difficulty in addressing an indigenous group’s notion of territoriality, border and place-based identity? By this stage too, I had become deeply uncomfortable with the liberal western feminist perspective which has been integral to the development and humanitarian programmes I was involved with, so I left the UN ‘system’ to do freelance research consultancy. I was then hired by the German Development Agency (GTZ/GIZ) to work once again on gender along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. In addition to gender themes, I was tasked to work on indigenous issues. Through colleagues at the Development Council for Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador (CODENPE), I arranged to meet representatives of the Epera bi-national indigenous population. In dealings with GIZ/GTZ, the Epera demanded that aid be given in the form of money to buy territory; in the context of development and security dynamics, this was a novel demand, which both impressed and captivated me. Although the German development agency eventually turned down the Epera request on the basis that it was against their institutional policy to buy territory in a foreign country for an indigenous group, my initial contact with the Epera prompted an interest in further understanding why the Epera wanted land instead of other types of development projects. Moreover, in contrast to other indigenous
groups along the border, the Epera were the only group that claimed they were experiencing ethnic elimination along the borderland. From that moment on, I have worked alongside Epera people, in particular Epera women, to address their struggles against ethnic elimination. Three years after initial interaction with Epera female and male leaders, I obtained their permission to carry out doctoral research in their territory and live alongside them for 12 months. It is on this year of living with the Epera in Epera territory, that this thesis is based.

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit.
CHAPTER 1: Introduction

At the centre of this research are Eperara Siapidaara (Epera) women, part of a spatially distanced ethnic community that spans the Ecuador – Colombia borderland, evoking complex identity politics with respect to two nations-states within a wider politics of indigeneity. Epera women enact control over space, bodies and identity on a variety of scales from the village to the geopolitical border. As such, this dissertation is a localized and embodied account of particular ethnic spatial practices that speak to overarching issues of belonging and ethnic survival, from the perspective of indigenous women. Specifically, the dissertation moves forward research on the experience of indigenous women undergoing processes of self-identified ethnic elimination. According to Epera women and their community, the process of settler colonial logic of elimination, (in this dissertation ethnic elimination means the “summary liquidation of indigenous peoples” (Wolfe, 2006:388), constitutes the main threat for Epera women’s everyday lives and futures. The logic of elimination for the Epera is narrated through a collective sense of death and ethnic disappearance referred to in this dissertation as processes of slow death in deteriorated spaces of indigenous life. Within Epera territory and dynamics, slow death explains how settler colonialism comes to affect indigenous everyday life through social structures causing their attenuation. This is not a study about the decline in numbers of Epera per se, but rather their story about what elimination means and what is done about it.

Initially, the doctorate aimed to investigate how the militarisation of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland regulated the mobility of bi-national indigenous women, the kinds of feminist geopolitics indigenous women engaged with, and the interaction of these two dynamics. However, 12 months of fieldwork in Epera territory shifted research questions to explore the colonial conditions under which indigenous women’s bodies, mobility and life are constituted. Hence, this challenged the initial hypotheses on the singular importance of human security policies and militarisation. Fieldwork revealed that militarisation is just one aspect of the pressures placed on the Epera population, enhancing their sense of insecurity and compounding a fear of elimination. Moreover it is specific placed-based dynamics that determine how Epera women interpret and strategize around elimination. Epera women are at the heart of geopolitical disputes in living along the Ecuador- Colombia borderland; a highly complex area characterized on the one hand by the “spill-over effects” of the long-standing Colombia conflict (involving the militarisation, organized crime, exploitation of natural
resources, trafficking of arms, drugs and people), and on the other by the lack of state presence in border zones (visible in the consistent lack of piped water, sewage systems, and inadequate health and education systems). Epera women, despite obtaining state recognition and services, continue to live in structural poverty and violence causing their disappearance, as illustrative of the intersection between bio-power and settler colonialism in indigenous contexts. Despite legal recognition under the Ecuadorian constitution as an indigenous nationality, Epera lives are in danger because of place-based dynamics that highlight state abandonment and negligence contributing to their ethnic elimination. Thus, in this dissertation the Epera consider the replacement of their territory to include the destruction of native forest and river ways caused by surrounding African palm plantations, mining and timber industries in what constitutes, in part, Epera collective sense of ethnic disappearance (Chapter 4). As will be evidenced in the dissertation, the Epera experience a combination of place-based threats to life and daily security ranging from the escalation of the Colombian conflict to the contamination of river ways. The everyday lives of the Epera are characterised by these descriptions of settler colonial indigenous contexts, by which the continuing deterioration of the environment affects every aspect of daily life such as bathing and eating. Additionally, the logic of elimination through amalgamation for the Epera is considered to be the threat of mestizaje, a process by which their culture is dying through cultural dilution of what is considered ‘cultural purity’ (Chapter 5). The processes of cultural and physical dying out are complimentary process of elimination for members of the Epera ethnicity, and in particular Epera women by way of their role as potential mothers. Thus, the dissertation came to focus on how Epera indigenous women interpret, strategise, mobilise around and respond to the attrition of their ethnicity, highlighting two fundamental ways through which they became active agents; namely through spatial boundary-making around territory, and ethnic boundary-making between themselves and other ethnic groups, in particular mestizos. These boundary-making processes reflect Epera women’s interpretation of elimination on both physical and cultural registrars.

Ethnic and spatial boundary making practices enacted by Epera women highlight how boundary making and a refusal to be eliminated are intertwined. Meaning that, a focus on the local intimate spaces of Epera women demonstrates how, through ethnic-boundary making, Epera women are also refusing ethnic attrition. Ethnic boundary making is made up by Epera women positioning themselves in roles as biological and cultural reproducers in the context of ethnic elimination by way of the politics of belonging, which is informed by their sense
that Colombia is the Epera point of origin (Chapter 5). The Epera’s sense of home is dependent on the imagined geographies (Said, 1978) of Epera Colombian territory, and further territorial replacement in Ecuador. Ethnic elimination in Ecuador resonates with processes of ethnic attrition in Colombia caused by the Colombian conflict. Furthermore, the Epera’s creation of territory in Ecuador is a result of a politics of belonging and Epera women’s involvement in spatial and ethnic boundary-making is central to this. Specifically, Epera women engage with ethnic boundary-production as a way to counter cultural amalgamation or the assimilation into settler culture, which for the Epera is the weakening of their culture through mestizaje, or breeding with non-Epera (Chapter 5). As will be evidenced in the dissertation, some Epera women attribute ethnic elimination only to cultural amalgamation while others consider territorial replacement and state abandonment as constituting elements of elimination. Epera women’s interpretation of cultural amalgamation as the cause of elimination leads some women to enact purifying practices, which I define as rigid regulations on women’s sexuality, relations and bodies that ensures offspring from endogenous heteronormative partnerships. In the Epera scenario, compulsory heterosexuality and the reproduction of Epera-only offspring is a response to ethnic elimination adopted by the Epera themselves in the context of the settler state, and its process of ethnic elimination.

Epera women’s refusal to be eliminated is further illustrated in this case study through spatial boundary-making practices. Spatial boundary-making responds to two different dynamics that generate fear amongst Epera women along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. On the one hand, Epera women fear cultural amalgamation, territorial replacement and state abandonment; elements which constitute ethnic elimination and thus prompt the link between everyday fear and fear of structural elimination. Consequently, as will be further discussed in chapter 4, spatial boundary-making takes the form of selective engagement with state services (cash transfers, school, nursery) while refusing state projects (highway into their territory). Refusing a highway into their territory creates a border between Epera territory (Santa Rosa de los Epera) and the rest of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland (Chapter 4). The second way in which spatial boundary making takes place is through the creation of safe space for Epera women, explaining why the creation of an invisible spatial boundary between Epera women and outsiders (especially non-Epera men), is useful for assuring their safety. Moreover, it is Epera women’s notion of fear that determines safe-space as insulated and confined Epera-only space. Epera women feel safe only within Epera territory due to sexual assault by non-Epera men, and because within Santa Rosa they are free to wear Epera dress.
(which involves being partially naked). Epera women’s fear of male violence outside of Santa Rosa, determines their perception and use of space (Valentine, 1989) and also the spatial boundary they create. Safe-space in this context is defined as separatist, safe-spaces as sites of resistance (Roestone Collective, 2014). Epera women control who enters and exits Epera territory through the invisibility and functionality of a spatial border surrounding their everyday space. It is within Epera women’s everyday lives that hidden power relations of settler colonialism are found. As such spatial boundary-making is one strategy to fend off the effects of ethnic elimination, whereby encroaching insecurity is another pressure on their daily lives. Specifically, it is through Indigenous (re)-bordering practices that spatial boundaries between Epera women and outsiders befall. Epera women’s engagement with indigenous boundary (re)-making becomes crucial for creating safe-space in the midst of a highly insecure borderland. Epera women rely on the Santa Rosa de los Epera settlement as a bounded space resulting from indigenous (re)-bordering to assure cultural survival, reproducing a narrative that links ‘authentic’ indigeneity with boundary-free space (a zone of nomadism that reaches as far north as Panama). As such, Epera women’s lives demonstrate how geopolitics engages with everyday fear at the site of the border; within Epera territory, along the river, and in nearby cities.

Situated along an international boundary, the scale of Epera women’s everyday geopolitical practices (ethnic and spatial boundary-making) also challenge notions of national space. As will be evidenced in this dissertation, national space is demarcated by the Ecuadorian military along the border with Colombia, and Epera identity and territory are misunderstood and misrecognised for not abiding by dominant national spatial imagery (Chapter 4). Bi-nationalism in this dissertation represents the Epera’s formal recognition by Ecuadorian and Colombian states. It is through selective engagement with the state (such as: rejecting a state highway), the Epera attempt to assure bounded space and participate in boundary (re)-making at a non-state scale, even while it responds to state militarisation of the borderlands. In this sense, for this dissertation, the Ecuador-Colombia geopolitical border is the result of the Ecuadorian military’s demarcation process highlighting how sovereignty is expressed spatially (Eudaily & Smith, 2008; Mountz, 2013) (Chapter 3). This dissertation contrasts the Epera and Ecuadorian military’s ideas of movement across borders and

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1 Epera women extend further feminist geography’s understanding of safe space beyond public/private space because Epera women’s ideas of public and private space are between the village (private) and public (river and nearby cities).
borderspace linked to the establishment of two different spaces; the indigenous one of mobility and interconnection with Colombian Epera, and the other of militarisation concerning securitisation and management of territory (Hyndman, 2012). In the case of the Epera, this is exemplified through the transgression of national boundaries through their identity as the Grand Epera Family.

Drawing on Epera women’s accounts of border space, border-making and ethnic elimination also revealed the different levels of targeted violence directed at Epera women by Epera male leaders and state-endorsed health services, even as women carry out practices of cultural reproduction and ethnic-boundary maintenance. Epera women experience racialised violence within state-endorsed healthcare centres through obstetric malpractice, which, as will be evidenced in this dissertation, puts pressure on their ability to resist ethnic elimination. Structural state abandonment of indigenous women is evidenced by re-occurring preventable diseases often resulting in their illness and the death of their children. Moreover, these analyses highlight structural and state-endorsed violence that happen in the everyday, ordinary time-space instead of a singular event. Such frameworks add to this thesis’ question of how bio-power, in the form of settler colonialism, operates in relation to bi-national indigenous women on the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. The research builds on the latter by situating Epera women’s experience as ethnic boundary-makers, whereby they question the timeless nature of gendered cultural practices while also claiming their right to cultural continuity in the face of ethnic elimination. Such insights highlight the tensions between women’s rights and cultural rights, as well as how Epera women challenge unequal gender power amidst the structural challenges they face, implicitly reflecting on questions of empowerment.

Focusing on a long-term ethnographic exploration of a case study concerning the logic of elimination, this thesis provides an original analysis of settler colonialism from the experience of those at risk of elimination in the Latin American context. Hence, this study looks directly and in detail at the regulations on Epera women’s bodies as they endure the logic of elimination. Located feminist geopolitics moreover can draw attention to the significance and insights gained from looking at marginalised geographies such as bi-national and nomadic indigenous space. As noted so far, this research engages with contentious issues that arise from Epera women’s involvement in promoting cultural and ethnic purifying practices, ethnic boundary-making and indigenous group membership. To address issues such
as Epera women’s agency and the relationship between women/cultural and individual/collective rights and indigenous women as cultural guardians, postcolonial feminism and Latin American decolonial feminism offer crucial insights, which allow the thesis to engage with the specificity of Epera indigenous women’s experience in relation to Latin America’s postcolonial context. These analytical frameworks along with settler colonialism will be reviewed in the following chapter.

1.1 Research questions

The research questions that guided the dissertation shifted from a focus on military-indigenous relations to processes of settler colonial logic of elimination on bi-national indigenous women. Hence, the following research questions guided the dissertation: a) What elements constitute the ethnic elimination of the Epera indigenous group along Ecuador’s northern border? b) What are the effects of ethnic elimination on Epera women at the everyday scale? c) What strategies are employed by Epera women in response to Epera attrition and what challenges do they face?

1.2 Thesis outline

The above research questions inform the themes of subsequent chapters. This section further points to the topics which will be covered in each chapter.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that will be used to explore the case study material and that can be contributed towards in light of the research.

Chapter 3 explains the research design, including methods, methodology and interpretative framework from which this study unfolds. Additionally, I provide information on limitations of the study as well as my positionality and ethics.

Chapter 4 discusses the context of the Epera indigenous nationality on both sides of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, with emphasis on the Ecuadorian side. It highlights the importance of border-crossing for the Epera nationality while also demonstrating how the
Ecuadorian Armed Forces are re-drawing the official borderlandscape, as part of a settler colonial logic that will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 addresses the processes of Epera ethnic elimination and the intimate effects of bio-power in indigenous women’s everyday lives. Describing the borderland as producing insecurity for the Epera demonstrates how, for women, their everyday lives and spaces become dangerous and threaten ethnic continuity. Drawing on settler colonial theory, I argue that Epera women’s everyday lives are determined by territorial replacement and state abandonment manifested in structural violence, poverty and insecurity. Epera women, however, interpret the elimination of Epera peoples as caused by threats from mestizaje and mestizo culture that dilutes Epera cultural ‘purity’. In light of these responses, the Epera adopt strategies to fend off ethnic elimination, through indigenous border (re)-making to create safe-space, and through selective engagement with the state. Survival in the face of ethnic elimination is place-based, depending on both indigenous boundary-(re)-making and territorial replacement.

Chapter 6 further demonstrates how ethnic elimination is a highly gendered and intimate process for the Epera, focusing on Epera women’s practices that foster ethnic boundaries as a means to challenge and contain the effects of bio-power/settler colonialism. The shift from spatial bordering discussed in the previous chapter to ethnic boundary production is traced in the embodied practices of everyday life. Epera women engage in producing ethnic boundaries between their ethnic group and mestizos by means of what I call cultural purifying practices, and as a means to fend off another element constituting ethnic elimination, that of cultural amalgamation (assimilation into settler colonial culture), exemplified in this context by mestizaje. Defined and identified within Santa Rosa de los Epera, these practices also rely on ongoing exchanges and links to Colombian cultural purity practices and imagined Colombian space.

Chapter 7 highlights the violent effects on Epera women from boundary-making, ranging from state-endorsed obstetric violence to political exclusion and control within the Epera settlement. Accounts of systematic medical malpractice towards Epera women affects reproductive health while male political violence truncates their political agency. Drawing out the tension between women’s rights and cultural rights, the chapter again focuses on women’s experiences and their accounts of the different types of violence they experience.
The chapter ends with Epera accounts of their desire for bi-national women’s political alliance as a new place from which to challenge gendered violence and rework the ethnic community they wish to survive.

The concluding Chapter 8 draws out the main findings of the dissertation, the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, recommendations for policy and contributions to theory.

1.3 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the research questions guiding the dissertation. The chapter has also provided an overall summary of the case study’s major themes. The following chapter will address the research theoretical framework used to answer the research questions mentioned in this chapter.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

At the heart of this dissertation is a discussion of ethnic elimination on indigenous women belonging to a marginalized ethnic community. As evidenced by the research questions that guide this study, a theoretical framework was needed to discuss ethnic elimination. Such theoretical backdrop is settler colonialism because it defines the Ecuador-Colombia borderland territorial dynamics in terms of indigenous elimination. However, since the dissertation also focused on the specific effects of process of elimination on Epera women, then feminist geopolitics and decolonial feminism were needed. Consequently, the thesis brings together distinct sets of literature including on settler colonialism, feminist geopolitics and decolonial feminism. The literature reviewed comprises a diverse array of disciplinary angles to pursue the framework of ‘intellectual sovereignty’, defined within Native Studies as intellectual promiscuity and a distancing from intellectual isolationism (Simpson & Smith, 2014:9). Thus, I engage with diverse theoretical and substantive literatures aiming to sustain a decolonial approach to the production of knowledge. The following is a critical appraisal of each body of literature addressed to answer the study’s research questions (section 1.5) as well as identify the strengths and gaps within the literature.

2.1 Settler colonialism and the logic of elimination of indigenous peoples

Settler colonialism has been theorised in Native and American studies as “the social processes and narratives that displace Native people while granting settlers [land] belonging to Native Land and settler society” (Morgensen, 2010:117). Central to these discussions is the notion of displacement of an indigenous population and its relation to settler processes of native disappearance through mass killings, forced cultural assimilation and dispossession of territory (Bergland, 2000; Cox, 2006; Morgensen, 2010), while making native land the settlers’ home (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005). The consolidation of settler colonial studies in the 1990s sought to distinguish itself from colonialism by critiquing a resilient formation of settler colonialism where the settler continues to seek the native’s elimination through structural invasion while never fully achieving this (Veracini, 2014). One key concept of settler colonial studies is settler colonialism’s logic of elimination which refers to processes of amalgamation and replacement as underlying characteristics of a structure not an event (Wolfe, 1994, 1999; Morgensen, 2011). The structure which Wolfe alludes to is comprised of
attrition through amalgamation, signifying imposed cultural assimilation of settler culture by natives, while replacement is the physical displacement of indigenous people from their territory (Wolfe, 1994; Morgensen, 2011). Extending ideas on amalgamation, Wolfe (1994, 2006) and other scholars (eg. Smith, 2005) have made the distinction between the cultural annihilation of indigenous peoples versus the physical killing of natives as complementary processes comprising indigenous elimination. In this dissertation, the term ethnic elimination is drawn from Patrick Wolfe’s logic of elimination to focus on the Epera’s ethnic experience of elimination on both physical and cultural registrars.

Contemporary theoretical discussions on the elimination of indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly theorized within settler colonial societies and settler colonial theory. Most prevalent is the myth of the ‘vanishing indigene’, evoking ideas of the colonial predicament of the collective death of indigenous peoples in the 19th century (Tallbear, 2013). Following this ‘death narrative’ are contemporary critiques of liberal forms of multi-cultural recognition as a disguise for a desired futurity of indigenous ‘elimination’ (Povinelli, 2002; Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2014). Moreover, Indigenous elimination is discussed in biological as well as social and cultural terms (Wolfe 1999, 2006; Tallbear, 2013).

Documented case studies and analysis that speak to contemporary forms of indigenous elimination occur in settler colonial societies such as Canada, United States and Australia (Wolfe, 1999, 2001, 2006; Simpson, 2014; Smith, 2005; Povinelli, 2002, 2011), with a very recent application of settler colonial theory to Latin America (Gott, 2007; Radcliffe, 2015). Although the concept of settler-colonialism has garnered little scholarly attention in Latin America as documented by Gott (2007), where the concept of coloniality has prevailed within the colonial/modernity/decoloniality (MCD) framework (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2001, 2007, 2008; Escobar, 1996; Walsh, 2009; Grosfoguel, 2003; Dussel, 1992), the existence of settler colonialism in Latin America is evidenced by contemporary processes of indigenous elimination, such as that experienced by the Epera. Relevant to this dissertation is settler colonialism’s approach to indigenous peoples as that of continuous elimination and not exploitation or domination, arguably covered in other post-colonial frameworks (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005; Wolfe, 2008; Veracini, 2011; Simpson 2014). As such this dissertation moves forward research from a settler colonial perspective in the Latin American context.
The expected elimination of indigenous peoples is contrasted by indigenous self-determination efforts to resist and refuse attrition (Simpson, 2014). Audra Simpson’s notion of refusal to disappear, defined as “a refusal to be on the other end of Patrick Wolfe’s critical, comparative history - to be ‘eliminated’. In refusing to go away, to cease to be…” (2014:22). Simpson is particularly pertinent for this dissertation because she draws her theoretical insights from the Mohawk of Kahnaw:ke, who, like the Epera, are a bi-national indigenous group (between the United States and Canada). Her analysis of refusal takes place along a geopolitical boundary from the perspective of an indigenous group whose territory predates the contemporary border that divides them today, and, hence, is a useful comparative study for the Grand Epera Family that also transcends boundaries. Moreover, the dissertation extends Simpson’s theoretical work on the indigenous refusal of being eliminated, refusing to engage with nation-state practices (migration processes) and refusal of accepting nation-state recognition (such as passports) through spatial and ethnic boundary making processes. While Simpson provides a useful framework from which to discern ways in which indigenous people strategise around ethnic elimination in bi-national settings, she fails to focus on indigenous women at the everyday level. Important in this account then are the different forms in which practices are imposed on women’s bodies, or their agent-full engagements with them.

Moreover, discussions on ethnic elimination necessarily require theorisations on direct, structural and epistemic violence from a critical geographical perspective. Critical geographies of violence “theorize specific economic, political and social relations of oppression and domination and how they articulate (or intersect in particular historical, geographic moments” (Loyd, 2009: 866). Physical violence also termed direct violence consists of intentional incapacitation of life and deprivation of health (Galtung, 1969). Peace studies scholars have stressed that violence is not just direct and physical but is also structural and indirect, whereby “violence does not have to be expressed physically or directly, and it may occur without an actor and without its intended consequences” (Kaufman, 2014: 441). Political and economic systems foment structural violence (Springer 2011; Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969) within invisible geographies of violence (Springer 2011). Furthermore, literary scholar Rob Nixon, has coined the term ‘slow violence’ with regards to the processes of environmental catastrophes in the global south, resulting from industrialized global north. As such, Nixon encourages as to understand slow violence as “that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destructure that is dispersed across time and space, an
attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2013:2). Nixon emphasizes time, movement and change (2013: 11). “Simply put, structural violence is a theory that entails rethinking different notions of causation and agency with respect to violent effects. Slow violence, by contrast, might well include forms of structural violence, but has a wider descriptive range in calling attention, not simply to questions of agency, but to broader, more complex descriptive categories of violence enacted slowly over time” (Nixon 2013:11). Settler colonialism has seldom been defined as structural violence or slow violence, despite its strong analytical connections to the structure of invasion as the cause for elimination. Few scholars have tied structural violence to theories of settler colonialism. For example, Maddison (2009) has made the case that elimination is visible in contemporary settler states through epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988), making up the structural elements of invasion through elimination. As such, Maddison (2009) encourages us to view invasion as structure, specifically as structural violence. Surprisingly, theorists of peace studies and violence haven’t engaged with Wolfe’s logic of elimination in settler colonial societies. As such, Indigenous peoples lives and history concerning structural violence, slow death and slow violence, are remarkably absent from these literatures. Farmer (2004), has made the case that that discussions of genocide and ethnocide as invisible deaths should be targeted through ethnographies of structural violence. However, as Wolfe (2006) has explored not all genocides are manifestations of settler colonialism or the elimination of the “native”. Hence, the theoretical gap between peace and settler colonial studies on viewing indigenous elimination as structural violence animates the theoretical discussions of this dissertation. For, in this dissertation I look towards the concepts of slow death (to be explained shortly), to further illustrate the spaces and time that depict structural invasion of settler colonialism. It is as Nixon mentions an issue of time and eventfulness that distinguishes ‘slow violence’ from structural violence and as I will explain in a moment tied to ideas of ‘slow death’ (Berlant, 2007). It is the slow pacing of death and violence that furthers ideas on structural violence, which in turn, informs the structural invasion of settler colonialism. In this dissertation definitions of violence also relate to routine violence (Pandey, 2005) that emphasizes the everyday and ordinary ways which violence is embedded in a continuum violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgeois, 2004). Moreover, from a critical geographies of violence perspective, categories of violence are erased to allow for more complex colonial and historical formations (Lyod, 2009). Lastly, conceptualizing violence within the processes of ethnic elimination explains how a biopolitical approach can be brought into productive dialogue with postcolonial and feminist geopolitical theorisations.
Settler colonialism exemplifies processes of bio-power theorised by Agamben and Foucault, neither of whom directly theorised colonialism as a context for bio-power (Morgensen, 2011; Rifkin, 2009). The amalgamation and replacement of indigenous peoples express contemporary forms of bio-power, naturalising indigenous attrition (Morgensen, 2011). Extending Agamben’s ideas that bio-power is intrinsic to universalising western law, Morgensen (2011) defines modes of liberal governance that place indigenous people in exception to the law in order to replace indigenous peoples for their territory. To extend the importance place has within the intersection of bio-politics and settler colonialism theories of settler colonialism, Rifkin (2009) stresses the need to think of bio-politics with geopolitics, bare life with what he terms bare habitation, in order to analyse the politics of collectivity and occupancy so central to indigenous land claims and self-determination. Native autonomy threatens national territorial and jurisdictional imagery even when indigenous territoriality and governance precedes the state (Rifkin, 2009). Rifkin is particularly interested in the structuring violence of settler state sovereignty through the abandonment of indigenous peoples, extending Agamben’s ideas on zones of indistinction between violence and the law. The production of national space, Rifkin contends, “depends on coding Native peoples and lands as an exception” (2009:95). This dissertation does not engage with any particular law or policy towards indigenous peoples; rather it addresses issues of abandonment and letting die, extending Rifkin’s point that “those political collectivities whose occupancy does not fit the geopolitical ideal/imagery of the state are left abandoned by it” (2009:98). In this sense the dissertation extends contemporary analysis of bio-power in indigenous contexts of elimination.

Although the literature on settler colonialism is highly pertinent to the situation of threat to survival faced by the Epera (Chapter 4), it has several limitations. Elimination, settler colonialism’s defining feature, has been critiqued for homogenizing and dehistoricising diverse colonial indigenous experiences (Rowse, 2014). Moreover, settler colonial analysis focuses on top-down effects of state policies on indigenous kinship ties rather than exploring the everyday negotiation of gender, family and ethnic group. Historian Tim Rowse, has questioned if settler colonialism does not challenge the very agency of contemporary indigenous emancipatory politics by focusing on the death narrative rather than the active resistance towards it (Rowse, 2014). This dissertation moves forward indigenous approaches to elimination; how it is defined and what are the embodied responses to it.
Moreover, it highlights another limitation found in settler colonial literature on elimination, that being the lack of indigenous women’s experiences and voices to these debates. Unlike Morgensen’s (2010) and Rifkin’s (2010, 2014) analysis of historical and cultural regulations of modern settler state sexuality imposed upon indigenous peoples, this study examines indigenous women’s response to elimination and indigenous responses to it in gendered and heterosexual power dynamics.

In order to address the drawbacks of settler colonial studies addressing elimination, three sets of literature are used: the first deals with the bodies and sexuality of indigenous women; the second concerns the dynamics of slow death; and the third, literature on gender and nation and ethnic boundary-making. Each of these literatures is summarised and critiqued here in turn.

2.2 Settler colonialism and indigenous women

Colonialism restructures indigenous societies, often in patriarchal ways (Canessa, 2006; Rivera Cuiscanqui, 2010; Cumes, 2012). Patriarchal colonialism thus becomes a reality for Latin American indigenous women that experience multi-layered discrimination resulting from colonialism and its gendered consequences on indigenous societies, which comprise both state-endorsed racialised violence and an increase in gender-based violence (Rivera Cuiscanqui, 2010). Moreover, concepts such as ‘colonial penetration’ extend the colonial invasion from territory to the bodies of indigenous men and women, whereby “colonial penetration evokes coital penetration, as the image of sexual violence of colonial invasion” (Paredes, 2012:96). Linking sexual violence with the placement of settlers on indigenous land draws attention to the burdens of colonisation on women’s bodies and the equivalence between land and gender (McClintock, 1995; Smith, 2005). Within debates of settler colonialism, Andrea Smith (2005), discussing Native America genocide in the United States, argues that one way to eliminate indigenous peoples has been by directly targeting native women’s bodies (e.g. by means of sterilisation or rape), to impede their potential as bearers, and hence continuers, of indigenous life. Recent work in this vein demonstrates the state’s key role in the treatment of indigenous women in healthcare centres, perpetuating gendered racialised violence (Adelson, 2005; Montes & Santiago, 2008; Povinelli, 2011). Historical and contemporary notions of settler colonialism and its effects on indigenous women’s agency, health and sexuality make these author’s ideas central to this thesis (Chapters 4 and 5). In this
context, critical Native American literature on the use of indigenous reproductive bodies in times of genocide is particularly salient, although here, too, insights must be adapted to the specific Epera context. Given that the case study is explicitly not one of genocide, in order to further draw out the effects of settler colonialism on indigenous women’s lives I now turn to the concept of slow death.

2.2.1 Slow death in indigenous everyday life

To extend the above insight to the everyday effects of settler colonialism in Epera women’s lives, Lauren Berlant’s (2007) notion of slow death is used, which refers “to the physical wearing-out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (2007:754). It is the slow, painful and enduring pacing of death resulting from a physical mass exhaustion under regimes of capitalist subordination and governmentality that characterises slow death (Berlant, 2007). Slow death further points to the historical and contemporary ways by which ethnic elimination takes place in everyday spaces and time, in the ordinariness of the attrition of peoples rather than in a singular event of elimination. Berlant exemplifies this in the obesity ‘epidemic’ which she argues is ‘endemic’ based on Foucault’s definition of bio-power’s permanent factors that sap the strength of populations (2007).

Berlant stops short, however, in that she does not address slow death within the scenario of contemporary indigenous peoples and territory or these dynamics in settler colonial contexts. In contrast, postcolonial theorist Povinelli (2011) does explore how misery is endured by indigenous populations in the ordinary, chronic and deteriorated spaces they inhabit and the preventable diseases which they experience under settler colonialism in Australia. In her analysis, the slow decomposition of indigenous lives, bodies and spaces are dehistoricised and naturalised as they emerge from “rhythms in which human and non-human material composition and decomposition are ordinarily encountered” (Povinelli, 2011:137). Povinelli (2011) and Berlant (2007) offer crucial frameworks of slow death in settler colonial indigenous contexts to draw out the slow violence (Nixon, 2013) inflicted by the Ecuadorian state on the Epera in providing inadequate healthcare and lack of basic services such as clean water and sewage systems.
So far in this literature review, key ideas of settler colonialism have been highlighted and connected to ideas of the space-time that elimination takes place. In what follows, I will draw on literature that expands on how Epera women respond to the gendered effects of the logic of elimination. Specifically, I will draw on ethnic boundary-making in the following section highlighting how indigenous women understand, contest and rework the process of ethnic elimination.

2.2.2 Ethnic boundary-making

Ethnic boundary-making is intrinsically gendered. Nira Yuval-Davis’ and Floya Anthias’ work on ethnic boundary-making is a classic in this regard. Nira Yuval-Davis’ work on gender and nation analyses how women reproduce nations - biologically, culturally and symbolically (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, 1993; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Membership of different national, ethnic and racial collectivities is understood within structures of domination, Yuval-Davis’ analysis of women and ethno-national biological reproduction is highly relevant for analysing the Epera’s regulations on marriage, sexuality and reproduction (Chapter 5). Yet Yuval-Davis also draws attention to how women are key agents in ethnocultural reproduction through “women’s roles as symbolic border guards and as embodiments of the collectivity, while at the same time being its cultural reproducers” (Yuval-Davis, 1997:23). Ethnic boundary-production not only relies on gender differentiated roles; ethnic identity becomes defined around issues of biological and cultural reproduction which place women at their centre (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, 1993). Nevertheless, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) note how, in relation to gender markers and sexuality practices, the ethnic boundary is a site of struggle and negotiation. One under-developed aspect of Yuval-Davis’ theoretical framework is the politics of belonging (2011), by which she refers to the situation when a collectivity’s home or sense of origin is threatened. Yuval-Davis defines the politics of belonging as when belonging “becomes articulated, formally structured and politicised only when it is threatened in some way” (Yuval-Davis, 2011:10).

While Yuval-Davis’ work is invaluable to contextualise how and why Epera women create ethnic boundaries, I am also critical of this theoretical framework in that her work focuses on the relation between citizenship and nation state, and has less to offer regarding indigenous (especially bi-national) territoriality and notions of ethnic membership. Moreover, Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ vast body of work on gender, nationalist projects and ethnicity has
not previously been utilised in contexts of indigenous elimination. As a consequence, indigenous women’s experiences need to combine Yuval-Davis and Anthias’ conceptual frameworks with postcolonial feminism and indigenous feminist perspectives on settler colonialism’s central role in ethnic attrition (covered in this chapter in section 1.4).

Having discussed settler colonialism in depth and its effects on indigenous women’s bodies and sexuality, as well as ethnic boundary-making as a means to contest everyday consequences of slow death, we now turn to the theoretical frameworks from which borders are understood in this study. Given that the dissertation takes place along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland and that boundary-making (spatial and ethnic) are fundamental to understand how Epera women respond and engage with processes of elimination, the following section will focus on political geography and border studies’ understanding of borders.

2.3 Boundary-making along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland and the militarised demarcated border

Political geography has focused primarily on the spatial dimension of power in relation to territory, state, and borders (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013). As political geographers have questioned traditional ways of understanding territory and sovereignty, the border has frequently been debated concerning unequal operations of sovereign power (Mountz, 2013). These insights range from considering national territories as zones of confinement (Coutin, 2010) to explorations of sovereignty aside from territorial dimensions around the state and in territorially contained terms (Agnew, 1994). Political geographers have also been informed by larger debates within border studies, in particular the disjuncture between a borderless globalised world and increased border securitisation (Johnson et al., 2011). This dissertation extends Rumford’s plea that borders should be analysed beyond the binaries of opened and closed spaces, and political boundaries versus securitised perimeters (2006:161). Relevant to the study of the Epera is the theoretical attention awarded to shifts in political subjectivity outside the realms of citizenship or radical political organisation, and towards subaltern geographies of resistance and survival. Hence, borderscape helps “to explain the complex dynamics orchestrating the link between the persistence of old boundaries and the multiplication of new forms, function and practices of borders in contemporary globalised scenarios” (Brambilla, 2015:20). The concept of borderscape
provides a means to describe struggles over inclusionary and exclusionary practices that produce political subjectivity in everyday practices (Rajaram & Grundy-War, 2007).

Although the border literature embedded within border studies and political geography is useful, it has several limitations. The first is the overwhelming focus on geopolitical borders, particularly those of the European Union (Rumford, 2006, 2009) and the United States-Mexico border (Andreas, 2000; Sundberg, 2008; Nevins, 2002) as case studies, excluding analysis of other parts of the world such as the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. Furthermore, despite a shift to other bordering processes away from the border (Balibar, 2002), there are few analyses of indigenous women’s notions of borderspace and border crossings. To address these limitations we now turn to specific definitions of border, boundary and borderland used in the dissertation, followed by indigenous (re)-bordering processes and lastly feminist geopolitics.

Informed by the debates concerning sovereignty and borders in political geography and the interdisciplinary focus of border studies, for this research I use the terms borderland, boundary and border. Boundary is defined as a strict line of separation between two distinct territories or collectivities (Nevins, 2002), border as the division between separate political entities (Prescott, 1987; Taylor, 1993; Nevins, 2002), and borderland a broader symbolic representation of the boundary that exists around the border (Anzaldúa, 1987). I draw on these three terms of border, boundary and borderland to shine light on transborder indigenous people’s notions and experience of borderspace, in particular border crossings.

2.3.1 Indigenous (re)-bordering

The militarised demarcated border builds on political geographers’ analyses of spatial sovereignty at the border (Mountz, 2013; Eudaily & Smith, 2008) while indigenous notions and engagement will be addressed through indigenous (re)-bordering processes (Sletto, 2009). Taking the concept of borderscape further, geographer Bjorn Sletto proposes the concept of indigenous (re)-bordering as “cultural productions, performed as a part of a complex repertoire of resistance, which in turn is informed by entangled, spatially contingent relations of domination and resistance” (2009:272). Indigenous (re)-bordering depends on processes of “indigenous boundary-making shaped in part by shifting narratives that
discursively link people with space in complex and sometimes contradictory ways, resulting in the elimination of some boundaries and the production of others” (2009:254). Moreover, Sletto (2009) mentions that the key to indigenous re-bordering processes are the visibility and functionality of borders, in which the invisible boundaries are more functional for relations of domination and resistance.

Attending to indigenous boundary (re)-making allows for conceptualising Epera spatial contradictions on distinct notions of border and boundary space. On the one hand, the Grand Epera Family is the transnational ideal of a nationless family that transgresses state sovereignty based on their notion of boundary-free indigeniety, referring to a narrative linking ‘authentic’ indigeneity with boundary-free space, even as borders exist within and around indigenous territories (Sletto, 2009). On the other hand, the Epera simultaneously promote spatial boundary-making processes around Santa Rosa de los Epera between themselves and outsiders, especially mestizos. These indigenous (re)-bordering processes surrounding Epera territory in turn depend on the imagined geography of Colombia.

Not surprisingly, accounts of indigenous conceptualizations on borders, have seldom taken into consideration the perspective of indigenous women. Hence in the following section, literature on feminist geopolitics will be reviewed in order to draw out Epera women’s perspective on international boundary space and spatial boundary-making.

2.3.2 Feminist geopolitics

Theoretical analyses bringing together feminist geography and political geography remain limited (Hyndman, 2003, 2004; Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Nayak & Jeffrey, 2011). Embedded within the scholarship of critical geopolitics, feminist geopolitics seeks an embodied understanding of the intersections of power and space, with particular emphasis on the everyday and a situated account of geopolitics (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Brown & Staeheli, 2003; Hyndman, 2003; Enloe, 1990, 2007; Nayak & Jeffrey, 2011). Feminist geographer Jennifer Hyndman (2001:210) defines feminist geopolitics “as a critical approach and a contingent set of political practices operating at scales finer and coarser than the nation-state...with feminist politics in mind”. Moreover “feminist geopolitics attempts to develop a politics of security at multiple scales, including the (civilian) body” (Hyndman, 2003:3). Power is expressed along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland through inclusionary and
exclusionary practices and in particular racialised and gendered ways by the Ecuadorian state (military and state-abandonment), as well as by Epera males, hence invoking the need for a feminist geopolitical perspective. It is the embodied understanding of the interconnections between power, space and security that makes feminist geopolitics crucial for deciphering Epera women’s multi-scalar experience of ethnic elimination as well as their responses to it.

Moreover, it is feminist geopolitics’ focus on fear and safe spaces for women, that makes this theoretical framework important for this dissertation. In this sense, Pain and Smith (2008:2) define the everyday as the feelings, experiences, practices and actions of people outside the realm of formal politics while remarking on how the globalised geopolitics of fear has occluded these. Fear, they contend, is both lived and made. Thus fear is lived by Epera women in the “assemblages of fear built, trained, embedded, woven, wired, nurtured and natured into the ways specific times, places and events work” (Pain & Smith, 2008:3). Moreover, the dissertation employs Dowler and Sharp's (2001) feminist critique of critical geopolitics that connects the everyday actual practices with the geopolitical through a number of analytical moves (Chapter 6). Embodying geopolitics, then, is to “think of bodies as sites of performance…more than surfaces for discursive inscription” (Dowler and Sharp 2001:169). Moreover, recent work concerning intimate geopolitics highlights bodies, and in particular women’s reproductive bodies as contentious sites over which territories and geopolitical disputes are negotiated (Smith, 2009; 2012). Specifically it is “through a reading of how reproductive bodies and potential babies are caught up in geopolitical projects, as entities that can not only be territory but also make territory” (Smith 2012:1513). It is intimate geopolitics’ focus on marriage, child-bearing and sexuality that provides important insights for this case study.

Nevertheless, the limitation with feminist geopolitical literature is its lack of engagement with settler colonialism and structures of indigenous elimination. The Epera case study takes place in a settler colonial context and Epera women engage from the intersections of gender/class/race in contemporary Latin American societies characterised by postcolonial intersectional hierarchies (Radcliffe, 2015). Hence feminist geopolitics must be informed not only by postcolonial but also by decolonial Latin American feminist frameworks, which I will now turn to.
2.4 Postcolonial and decolonial feminism: indigenous women in Latin America

Post-colonial feminism here is vital in not seeing the Epera as an oppressed woman who has been forced to ‘save’ her ethnic identity under ethnic male domination (Mohanty, 1991; Spivak, 1990, 1993). Epera women’s complex and often contradictory interpretation of their indigenous gender situation echoes findings from research elsewhere in Latin America. Indigenous women’s experience within the Latin American postcolonial context is generally theorised within the conundrum of binary frameworks such as women’s rights/cultural rights, individual/collective rights, and liberal feminism/decolonial feminism (Hernandez & Canessa, 2012), whereby indigenous women are considered to be torn between being women and being indigenous in multi-cultural societies where a liberal rights-based approach has either invisibilised or hypervisibilised indigenous women (Radcliffe, 2015). Relevant to the dissertation are the theoretical contributions within postcolonial Latin American feminism on the role of indigenous women as cultural guardians of ethnic culture and its relation to indigenous women’s positionality within indigenous contexts. Some authors point to an increase of violence endured by women in the position of cultural guardians and the disproportionate burdening of this role on indigenous women (Picq, 2008; Pequeno, 2009; Cumes, 2012), whereas other scholars point to a more nuanced account of indigenous women’s experience in which indigenous women negotiate possible tensions between gendered and ethnic signifiers to change communal traditions that violate them, while also claiming a right to their culture (Richards, 2006; Hernandez Castillo, 2008; Speed, 2008; Paredes, 2008).

Thus, I am building on nuanced accounts of indigenous women’s experiences caught at the interface between women’s rights and cultural rights, under the particular process of ethnic elimination, which the literature mentioned above does not engage with. As such, I make a conceptual contribution: first by bringing cultural purifying practices into the literature on women’s rights and cultural rights; and second by making the case that purifying cultural practices are considered cultural rights by Epera women.

Furthermore, decolonial Latin American feminism builds on postcolonial feminism mentioned above to emphasise the coloniality of gender defined by the fact that gender relations, like race, were created in and by the colonial encounter and are still present at the very intersections of gender/class/race in contemporary Latin American societies.
characterised by postcolonial intersectional hierarchies (Lugones, 2010; Radcliffe, 2015). Lugones’ decolonial feminism emphasises the importance of putting indigenous women at the centre of an account that challenges coloniality (2010), a theoretical stance that is at the heart of this study. Latin American decolonial feminism (Curiel, 2007; Espinosa et al., 2014; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2014) extends earlier work on postcolonial feminism (including Black feminism and Third World feminism), in alliance with indigenous and Afro-descendant Latin American feminists’ interpretation of the region’s relation of coloniality/modernity. Latin American decolonial feminism questions colonial structures of modernity, in which settler colonial process of elimination are situated for this study. Rejecting hegemonic Latin America feminism linked to liberal western feminism’s coloniality, Latin America decolonial feminism places racism and coloniality at the centre of its critique as epistemologies of modernity (Espinosa et al., 2014). Place is important in this feminist construction, whereby the place of Abya Yala, an indigenous postcolonial imagined geography of the region, offers a site in which to image alternatives and spaces of struggle (Zaragocin, forthcoming). In this sense, “postcolonialism is structured through geographies of imagination” (Sharp, 2009:3).

Epera women challenge discriminatory gender practices, which in this dissertation reflect the relationship between place and changing identity formations. In this sense the research engages with a critique often made of postcolonialism in general which has been a focus on abstract ideas of cultural production and a constant referral to the west rather than peripheral geographies (Sharp, 2009; Dowler & Sharp, 2001). My study aims to emphasise imagined and material postcolonial geographies, particularly through a feminist geopolitical outlook, as shown above.

A crucial aspect of Latin American decolonial feminism is its interpretation of intersectionality. From the 1980s intersectionality between race, class, gender and sexuality was at the forefront of the agenda of feminists of colour in the United States, while for global south feminists, intersectionality also included colonialism, imperialism and nationalism (Lugones, 2008). Hence, Latin American decolonial feminism is a useful framework from which to situate and understand the different levels of gender-based violence experienced by Epera women; from state-endorsed obstetric violence to domestic violence in Santa Rosa de los Epera (Epera territory in Ecuador), and in particular the intersectionality of violence resulting from structural inequality based on class, ethnicity and history (Sieder & Sierra, 2010), to adequately draw out the relation between settler colonialism and Epera women’s slow death.
As evidenced, decolonial feminism bridges different scholarly debates on critiques of coloniality (native critics, postcolonialism/post-colonialism, modernity/coloniality/decolonial), while centering the authority of Epera women’s voices that are crucial for underscoring the complexity of Epera women’s experience. Without Latin American decolonial feminist frameworks it would be impossible to explain why Epera women promote regulations on their bodies and sexuality in the face of ethnic elimination.

Additionally, it is imperative to review ideas on empowerment in order to understand why Epera women choose to carry out practices that maintain their subjugation. Empowerment is closely linked to analysis of power, whereby power is defined as multidimensional and entailing a process of continuous change (Kabeer 1994; 1999). Meaning that power is characterized as “the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them” (Kabeer1999: 438). Being disempowered for Kabeer signifies not having a choice (1999). Hence when Epera women choose to carry out controversial ‘purifying practices’ in this dissertation, I am analysing this from the perspective of postcolonial feminism and from empowerment literatures that stress empowerment as disempowered women’s ability to choose. It is the timeless nature of these choices that adequately portray Epera’s women’s changing reactions and strategies in the face of elimination. Moreover, these strategies exemplify the patriarchal bargain, understood as arduous accords (conjugal contracts, inheritance and residence rules) in different systems of kingship that indicate strict regulations on gender relations and dominant gender ideologies (Kandyioti, 1988).

2.5 Conclusion

Drawing on various analytical frameworks, the dissertation develops a focus on statecraft and indigenous peoples to the effects of settler colonial bio-power on indigenous women’s intimate spaces, bodies and sexuality. Through the everyday experience of border-dwelling indigenous women, the dissertation offers a grounded and trans-local account of feminist geopolitics from a postcolonial perspective. As such, I aim to develop a feminist and decolonial analysis of settler colonialism in the Latin American context. The following chapter will address the research design methodology used to answer the research questions mentioned in this chapter and drawn out throughout the entire research process.
CHAPTER 3: Research Design Methodology

A qualitative approach deeply shaped by post-colonial feminism and decolonisation theories informs the research design utilised for this dissertation. Challenging traditional notions of knowledge building, these feminist epistemologies address issues of representation, difference and identity, necessary to critically assess social processes in a non-western context of bi-national indigenous women. To draw out the everyday experience of Epera women’s relation to border space, a non-nationalist approach to studying a border context was also critical. This section includes specific positionality and ethical considerations as well as methodology and specific methods that are embedded within these epistemologies. Lastly, I highlight the analysis of the data gathered as well as the limitations of the research design.

3.1 Epistemological starting points

Feminist knowledge building includes a reflection on epistemology, methodology and method (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In light of the research focus on indigenous women’s agency and colonial power, the epistemological perspectives of postcolonial feminism and decolonialism are highly relevant. Feminist epistemological proposals such as situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) and positionality would not be enough, in order to draw out the specific processes and experiences of being an Epera indigenous woman in the face of ethnic elimination. Processes of indigenous elimination cause particular consequences for, and responses from, indigenous women that can only be addressed from their own reflections particularly within the contentious debates of cultural/women rights. Hence, the entire research process aims to distance itself from research through “imperial eyes” (Pratt IN Tuhiawai Smith, 2012) and “under western eyes” (Mohanty, 1988). Western ideas are not the only ideas possible to make sense of social life and human beings, particularly with respect to this study’s relevant themes of gender, settler colonialism, border-crossings, and indigenous dispossession. Herein lies the importance of working within both postcolonial and decolonial feminism.

Postcolonial feminist scholars have critiqued the representations of the “third world woman” in western academia by a wide range of western feminist traditions (Spivak, 1990, 1993; Mohanty, 1988, 2003). Postcolonial feminist approaches make visible the diversity of
postcolonial subjects’ experiences and material conditions by focusing on representation, subalternity and reflexivity (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). Epera indigenous women are at the heart of this study precisely to highlight a highly contextualised account from the ground, as suggested by Mohanty (2003). Both decolonised and post-colonial feminist perspectives critique scientific method objectivity and ‘value-free’ research, advocate that politics be embedded in research while promoting reflexivity, and deconstruct vertical power relations between the ‘researcher’ and ‘subject’.

Decolonising methodologies are similar to postcolonial feminism in that issues regarding representation, subalternity and reflexivity are at the heart of debates of knowledge production with indigenous populations (Chilisa, 2012; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). I will focus on decolonised methodologies as understood by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2012) and Audra Simpson (2014). Tuhiwai Smith (1999, 2012) addresses the tense relationship between research and indigenous peoples as embedded in historical and contemporary issues of imperialism and neo-colonialist practices. According to Smith, decolonising methodologies re-tell stories that have been wrongly written about indigenous peoples as well as addressing research about self-determination and social justice.

Research on the Epera is scarce, and the little that has been written on them has represented them as migrants or refugees, both categories that misrepresent their historical nomadic mobility. Hence re-writing the story of the Epera as they want to be understood informs decolonising methodologies. Furthermore, self-determination and social justice in particular have been at the basis of my interaction with Epera indigenous women. For I have positioned myself in the community as part of the Epera women’s group. Other indigenous scholars such as Simpson contend that “within indigenous contexts, when the people we speak of, speak for themselves; their sovereignty interrupts anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure and function that dominate representations of their past and, sometimes, their present” (Simpson, 2014:97). As such, for Simpson decolonised methodologies resonate with sovereignty as a method and representation. The importance of Simpson’s claim is that she emphasises the importance of these perspectives in light of settler colonialism and within the context of everlasting indigenous dispossession, which is central to the Epera experience. Furthermore, Simpson also extends that sovereignty in methodology implies an ethnographic calculus of what the reader needs to know and what the researcher refuses to write about considering the sovereignty of indigenous populations in danger of
continual dispossession. Refusing to write up certain ethnographic data for the protection of a community’s concerns is invoking a particular articulation with a mode of sovereignty (Simpson, 2014:105). The two notions of self-determination and sovereignty, drawn out by both authors, coincide in this study. Throughout this dissertation, these epistemological and normative perspectives stayed constant but required certain approaches and choices of methods.

In order to implement postcolonial feminist and decolonised methodologies I conducted a variety of participatory approaches to action-oriented research known as Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kindon et al., 2007). PAR involves researchers and participants working to challenge the hierarchical relationship between “researchers” and “research-subjects” (ibid.). PAR politicises participation (Fals-Borda, 2006), and puts into practice the postcolonial feminist and decolonised epistemological frameworks, which also seek more horizontal relationships in research. PAR allows for co-developing knowledge and political processes with people while emphasising lived experience and the notion of action as a legitimate mode of knowledge (McIntyre, 2008). Hierarchies were reduced and horizontal relations were promoted through the participation of Epera women in the construction of the research’s methodology and implementation of methods.

Another epistemological starting point has been a deliberate distancing from methodological nationalism (Schiller & Wimmer, 2002). Avoiding the territorial trap (Agnew, 1994), other social units of analysis aside from the nation-state have been taken into account (Amelina et al., 2012). For example, Epera ideas of their borderless nomadic indigenous nationality were central to the research and traced indigenous women’s perspectives of the borderland between two nation-states in a more open conception of boundaries than found normally in military and nationalistic perspectives. While these perspectives were useful for undergoing research with the Gran Epera family, who ultimately question geopolitical international boundaries, it also highlighted the difficulty of attaining consistent bi-national data. Despite the nominally bi-national space of the ZIF (Zona de Integración Fronteriza/Border integration zone2) between Ecuador and Colombia, official, census and other spatial and demographic data for this space was not available. Bi-national

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2 This is an agreement between the governments of Ecuador and Colombia that demarcates common border territory between both countries where human mobility and commerce is allowed (further reviewed in Chapter 3).
maps from the cartographic national offices in Colombia and Ecuador\(^3\) were not available\(^4\). Doing research in a border area raised its own epistemological methodological challenges and consequences. Mezzadra (2013) calls for the border to be treated as an epistemic angle as much as a research “object”, in that treating a border as a method allows “us to cross disciplinary and geographical divides and take a truly global and postcolonial angle” (Mezzadra, 2013:15). Treating the border as a method necessarily requires that the border be identified as a site of struggle for matters concerning life and death (Mezzadra, 2013). This study focuses on the constitutive elements of the Ecuador-Colombia border that make it a site of struggle for the Epera concerning issues of life and death. Brambillia (2015) also draws attention to border experience and representation as two key aspects in border studies, especially the phenomenological dimension of the border and experiences of the everyday (Brambilla, 2015). This study focused on the everyday experiences of Epera women along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland in the context of border militarisation.

3.2 Positionality and Ethics

Qualitative field research with female subalterns is fraught with ethical issues. Different critiques have problematised the practice of fieldwork since the 1980s (Nagar & Geiger, 2007), especially regarding representation, the portrayal of ‘others’ and the voice of the subaltern (Spivak 1990, 1993; Mohanty, 2003). Feminist interrogations have proposed “reflexive identification”, in which the researcher’s social identity and positionality in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality and other axes of difference are acknowledged and correlated in regards to the research (Nagar & Geiger, 2007). Nagar and Geiger, in a critical appraisal of reflexivity, identified several ways forward including what they called speaking with research ‘subjects’ (2007:270). ‘Speaking with’ involves talking and listening carefully to move forward reflexivity from an identity-based focus to a material one. I employed this model through interviews with Epera women, and the elaboration of the women’s political agenda was a material result of our interaction. Furthermore, this research aspires to avoid having the sole power of interpretation and representation; thereby, as Radcliffe (1994:28) states, in “producing representations of third world women, we are inextricably bound up with questions of authority, communication and representations, and the positions generated by

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3 For Ecuador this is the Institute of Military Geography and for Colombia this is the Geographical institute Augustin Codazzi.

4 Since then, however, a bi-national map on water basins has been carried out and a set of bi-national cartography is underway (El Telegrafo, 28 July 2014).
such questions are inherently political.” For my research this meant a shift to challenging academic norms by emphasising collective and collaborative research, prioritising “third world” and indigenous knowledge, and an engagement with political projects that serve communities that participate in research. To fail do so, in the words of Nagar and Geiger, is “to leave total control of what is said, and therefore widely ‘understood’ (whether about India, Tanzania, Iraq or Palestine) to those whose interests lie within the spheres of global capital, an increasingly homogenized media, or the political status quo (as long as it serves US purposes) is to facilitate those very interests. Nor is it enough to simply criticise these processes and interests, and discuss them among ourselves – favourite academic pastimes” (2007:277). The analysis of data gathered was discussed between Epera women and myself. Contentious issues such as regulations on marriage and sexuality were examined extensively, in which Epera women and I shared our views on what these practices signified and at which points they felt their interpretations were being justly portrayed or not.

Reflexivity is understood as research that involves “reflection on self, process and representation and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process and research accountability in data collection and interpretation” (Sultana, 2007:376). With respect to my dissertation, this occurred throughout the entire research process evolving over time and space and, in doing so, my research changed according to the context. It was therefore a process and not only carried out during the analysis phase of the research. Reflexivity can become a strategy for understanding situated knowledge, and thereby “avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge” (Rose, 1997:206). In the Ecuador research my positionality prompted me to acknowledge the multiple roles, identities, and experiences I had in relation to indigenous women and military officials. As a feminist researcher between structurally unequal worlds, I am conscious of the fact that indigenous women could not come to Cambridge to “research” the place I come from, and that there is an inherent inequality in the production of western knowledge and within my own privilege (Mignolo, 2013). Despite experience of the ‘other’ and solidarity with indigenous women, I am not an indigenous woman, nor have I experienced oppression in the same way. This highlights specific issues for feminist research in ‘third world’ contexts that demand a decolonised approach to conducting fieldwork with regards to how

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5 I must also add that, though I have lived temporarily along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland for work and research, I am not from the ‘northern border’ but from Quito, the capital of Ecuador, and have a privileged background in Ecuadorian society.
knowledge is produced and constructed (Mohanty, 1988). Prior experience in working with Epera women (in a policy context and in the MPhil dissertation), building trust proved to be essential in breaking down barriers that are implicit in differential access to power, although these barriers are never broken down completely. Radcliffe (1994) has cautioned against appropriation and western authority of knowledge production and collection. Though not from the first world, I have access to the first world, and should therefore be just as cautious. The issue of representation and appropriation is part of the problem of voice (speaking for and speaking to) intersecting with the problem of place (speaking from and speaking of) (Appadurai, 1988 IN Lal, 1999).

My positionality with regards to the Ecuadorian military is radically different from that with indigenous women along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. I do not aim to partake in or justify military rhetoric or practices, yet I have a specific positionality with the Ecuadorian military, through working with the Ecuadorian Military prior to this study. My entry into the institution for the purpose of this research was partially due to previous work with the institution. Many officers recognised me from previous gender or intercultural work or collaboration with the institution; which worked to both my advantage and disadvantage depending on the military official or soldier’s view regarding the inclusion of women in the military. Further, being a young woman was a challenge in an institution where women were often treated as ‘la mujercita’, or the delicate young women, to be taken care of by hyper-sexualised males in border bases.

My positionality in the doctoral research also depended crucially on a relationship with the leadership of that nationality. To seek the research approval from the Epera, I presented the research plan to the Epera government council and the Epera women’s group. The American Association for Geographers and Smithsonian’s “Nine guidelines for Research with indigenous peoples” (Smithsonian, 2009), contend that ethical considerations between indigenous communities and researchers must be carried out in an environment of respect and reciprocity. Moreover, the research should “be informed by the viewpoints of indigenous peoples involved in open negotiation; benefit[s] the community; and result[s] in a product that is shared with the community, and in which the community’s participation is clearly

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6 I worked as a United Nations advisor to the Ecuadorian Armed Forces and Military in 2009-2010 on gender mainstreaming efforts.

7 The main governing body of the Epera made up by all of the seven elected leaders of the community (further reviewed in Chapter 3).
acknowledged” (Smithsonian, 2009: unnumbered). Consequently, a number of ethical issues were reviewed with the participants in advance of research; for example, informed consent, documentation of data, ownership of data, control of the overall process, confidentiality, privacy, trustworthiness and responsibility. Furthermore, and in light of feminist methodology (Harding, 1987), I placed myself on the same analytical level I asked of participants, and outlined my background experience as well as thoughts on the topics covered in this dissertation. Given the participatory nature of this research, adjustments in the methodology were discussed amongst the Santa Rosa women’s group (reviewed further in this chapter). The final research plan was then presented to the entire Epera community, who was asked for approval, which they gave in verbal and written form. Three conditions were placed on the research. First the Taichi Nawe (the Epera spiritual leader) gave her blessing, but prohibited the studying of Epera spirituality and medicine (because I would not understand it). Second, the community requested that the research contribute to strengthening the women’s groups, via production of a women’s political agenda. Third, when encountering Epera based in Colombia, I was not to use the term ‘research’, as this term has connotations of military intelligence. Instead I could mention that my relationship to the Epera was ‘technical’, referring to a person working with an aid agency or NGO.

3.3 Methods

With this context in mind, the following methods were employed during a 12-month fieldwork period: focus groups, interviews, participatory diagramming, participant observation, discourse analysis and border-crossings. Participatory action research, postcolonial feminism and decolonised epistemologies defined how they were ultimately implemented. Thus reflections on the limitations of each method as well as its advantages are highlighted from these overarching interpretative frameworks, in light of the research context described.

3.3.1 Focus Groups

This method is recommended for researchers who want to orientate themselves in a field where little research has been undertaken (Longhurst, 2010). Limited ethnographic research exists on the Epera indigenous group and the Ecuadorian Military (Carrasco, 2010; Radcliffe, 1996; Selmeski, 2007; Jaskoski, 2012), hence this method was relevant. In the
research, I utilised focus groups with the Ecuadorian military as well as with Epera indigenous women. These were taped and transcribed in Spanish. Focus groups use a semi-structured group session moderated by a group leader in an informal setting with the purpose of collecting personal experiences and perspectives on a specific topic (Carey, 1994; Greenbaum, 1998; Puchta & Potter, 2004). The advantage of using focus groups as an initial method was that it set parameters from which further topics could be elaborated for interviews and participant observation (Longhurst, 2010). The method provided an excellent way to obtain preliminary data. Another advantage of focus groups is gathering contested discourses that shape everyday practices (Cameron, 2010).

Focus groups in feminist traditions have been used for consciousness-raising activities, promoting social agendas and producing collective voices of solidarity (Madriz, 2000). It has been a form of collective testimony and a safe space for women, in which the authority of the researcher is de-centred (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). For this reason, focus groups with Epera women proved to be a valuable research tool. Moreover, Epera women asked for a series of women-only spaces for our conversations. Focus groups also go against the western intellectual tradition of fragmentation (feelings and thoughts), by posing knowledge as embodied and relational (ibid.) and, I would add, as collective.

Initial focus groups were organised by myself as moderator and non-directive (Longhurst, 2010). Sixteen groups were held in this manner with nine to 40 women per time and held in the large communal house in the middle of Santa Rosa de los Epera. All of the women from the community were invited to attend. Men were not explicitly invited but were not excluded from attending if they happened to show up at the meetings. These focus groups raised topics related to the planned doctoral research in the community, and how this was to be developed in collaboration with the organised Epera women’s group (further details on the women’s group in Chapter 3). Decisions made during these initial focus groups, were later distributed to the entire community. For example this occurred with the decision made by the Epera women’s group that my material contribution would be the Epera women’s first political agenda. Later in the research process, as trust grew between myself and the Epera women’s group, and in line with participatory action research, other focus groups were suggested by women participants, to discuss and address the needs and political demands. These in-depth groups (Cameron, 2010) met regularly for extended periods of time. During these discussions, the main themes afflicting the everyday space of Epera women became
apparent, as I was no longer deciding the topics for discussion\(^8\). These themes ranged from gender-based violence to the contamination of the river. The main objectives in holding these focus groups for Epera women were to strengthen their political unity as women and for the development of the political agenda, aside from the development of the doctoral research.

The limitations of the focus group exercise with Epera women were related to the fact that not all women participated, and when they did attend the focus groups, many would not speak. As the moderator, I stressed the option to disagree with the collective or majority perspective by assuring that consensus is not prioritised over dissenting opinions. This influenced some women, while others maintained silence. Another limitation was that women who did not belong to the organised Epera women’s group were less inclined to join the conversations as they went on. There is only one organised Epera women’s group, with five elected woman leaders that serve 2-year terms. Epera women are automatically members of the group, but some do not come because of political discrepancies with the women leaders or because their partners do not permit this. To overcome these limitations, interviews with a wide group of women were used to access the opinions of women (see below).

With the Ecuadorian Military, a total of nine focus groups were carried out. Five focus groups were conducted with military troops in five border military bases\(^9\) (25-30 men each), lasting from 2 to 3 hours and were usually held in the auditorium of the border bases. One focus group was carried out with Ministry of Defence personnel in Quito and three focus groups with aspiring soldiers and officials at military schools in Quito (Navy, Army and Air force), each of 2 hours and held in offices or small classrooms with 10-15 participants. By separating military personal into specific groups I was able to compare the positionality of each group while also keeping to military structure and hierarchy. The latter proved important, because it became evident early on that participants were more at ease speaking amongst the same rank\(^10\). All focus groups covered the same themes, namely bi-national indigenous identity and mobility, women in the military and military-civilian relationships on

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\(^{8}\) In this way I was no longer convening women, though I was asked to organise the day, time and place these discussions were going to take place.

\(^{9}\) These bases were named: Batallion de infanteria de Marina #12 Esmeraldas (Marine Infantry #12), Batallion de infanteria de Marina San Lorenzo (Marine Infantry San Lorenzo), Centro de operaciones Comando Norte Esmeraldas (Centre of operations northern command, Esmeraldas), Batallion Tungurahua (Batallion Tungurahua) and Rayo 53 (Special armed forces of Ray 53).

\(^{10}\) There were limits of utilising a postcolonial and decolonial feminist framework to the preparation and implementation of the focus group method with the military. Horizontal relations, for example, were not possible between myself and the research participants.
the Ecuador-Colombia border. All focus groups were taped and transcribed in Spanish. In all of the focus groups, different maps of Ecuador and the border were used as prompts for discussions on soldiers’ knowledge of indigenous peoples in Ecuadorean territory and in particular the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, the only territory where the military is operative (see Appendix D). Pictures of military indigenous groups in Bolivia and Ecuador (see Appendix E) were also used to generate discussions on the extent and nature of inclusion of indigenous men and women in the armed forces, and gauge awareness of knowledge of bi-national indigenous groups. Focus groups revealed the extent to which different levels of military personal know of indigenous peoples in this territory, perceptions of bi-nationalism of indigenous groups, and of military and civilian women (indigenous and non-indigenous). The use of pictures and maps proved effective since many of the participants had never heard of the Epera; their location on the map made them visible to military personnel. For many participants it was their first engagement with maps that had people on them, especially indigenous groups, and so discussions on indigeneity, place and space came about. The pictures of indigenous people in the militaries of Ecuador and Bolivia provoked important discussions on the inclusion of indigenous men and women into the Ecuadorean armed forces.

Focus groups on border bases generated fruitful discussion as long as soldiers and officials were kept separate; when higher ranking officers were present, then soldiers did not participate with ease. Consequently, after the first focus group, the commanding officers were asked to leave during the exercise. Subsequent focus groups were only amongst soldiers, while officials and commanding officers were interviewed. As my visits were coordinated by the Department of Gender, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, commanding officers abided with these requests without hesitation. In this way internal hierarchy facilitated any last minute changes to research design. Time was a limitation with 2 to 3 hours allocated per focus group and 2 hours for interviews afterwards. Ideally 2 full days per border site would have allowed for other methods such as further interviewing, or participant observation to be undertaken. However, lack of infrastructure for military women made it impossible to stay overnight at border bases. Moreover, as I was a woman, military men were reluctant to speak openly regarding their relationship to civilian woman. In contrast, for the focus groups with the Ministry of Defence and military schools in Quito time was not a factor nor was personal safety.
This method was consistently used during the fieldwork process, as it was the space and time where research was analysed and discussed together. Focus groups were a primary source for data gathering for this research; direct quotes are taken from this method to portray Epera women’s experiences and viewpoints on ethnic elimination. This method was also useful in gathering key perspectives from military soldiers and comparing them to interviews with military officials or commanding officers. Another core source of data gathering comes from the interview method, which I turn to in the following section.

3.3.2 Interviews

A common social science data-gathering method is the interview in which there is a verbal exchange of information (Dunn, 2005; Kvale, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, Liamputtong, 2013). Interviews as a method are widely used because conversation is argued to be an essential interaction in society (Kvale, 2007; Liamputtong, 2013). The advantage of unstructured and semi-structured interviewing is that the method investigates complex motivations and cultural patterns, as well as providing insight into different opinions within a group (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Dunn, 2005). Dunn (2005) also mentions that this method can empower the participants involved, an important element for research with Epera women. Both semi-structured and unstructured interviews were used through this study. Epera women, military men on Ecuador’s northern border and humanitarian/NGO workers in Colombia were the three groups interviewed. Epera women were interviewed individually (both unstructured and structured interviews) as a way to follow up on information collected by other methods, in particular sensitive information. A much smaller sample of military men was chosen for structured interviews from the focus groups dependent on opinions expressed that were of interest to the research. Finally, extensive structured interviews were used with Colombian humanitarian/NGO workers. Interviews with the latter group were particularly important as it was the only method utilised with this group because of time, security and financial constraints. All the interviews with the three groups were taped and transcribed in Spanish with a later translation to English (See appendix A for a list of all the interviews).

In total, I spent 12 months in the Epera community. While at Santa Rosa de los Epera, 51 Epera women (including six elder women) and six Epera men were interviewed one-to-one. Interviews were held in women’s private spaces, such as their home or along walks to the communal farm. These face-to-face interviews were crucial since they generated
information that was not shared in communal settings. Many sentiments, particularly those surrounding regulations on women’s bodies, sexuality and partnerships, differed from those expressed in communal settings. Elder Epera women allowed me to tape the conversations, but asked that their comments be made anonymous. Often I would repeat the main points covered in the interview to make sure that I had understood everything adequately.

Unstructured interviews occurred with elder Epera women who dictated the conversation rather than following a set of questions. Unstructured interviewing with elder Epera women was important because their Spanish was not as fluent as that of younger women. While a translator was not necessary during interviews, the questions I could ask were limited and conversation flowed when the focus was on personal perceptions and histories (Dunn, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were used with younger Epera in which the interview started with a set of questions, but maintained flexibility to the issues addressed and determined by the participant (Dunn, 2005). According to the context, I also employed responsive interviewing, in which the researcher responds to and asks further questions working with the interviewee as a collaborator (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The latter was possible by active listening. Feminists have been particularly concerned with active listening, meaning a focus on language and narrative as well as discourse (Devault & Gross, 2007) was employed. The recounted experience depends on the listener as much as the interviewees who are doing the telling (ibid.).

Another important group of interviews was undertaken with Colombian and International humanitarian organisations, local government and local universities in Pasto, Popayan and Cali, Colombia over 6 weeks around March 2014. Through these interviews, I obtained Colombian Epera documents such as the life plans, as well as up to date documents on the status of the Colombian conflict. The interviews also gave me on the ground security analysis of the Colombian conflict, in particular concerning the situation of the Colombian Epera.

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11 See appendix C for the list of humanitarian organizations and research foundations consulted and interviewed.

12 Indigenous life plans are based on indigenous worldviews where the community defines their current state of living and their desires for the future. They are considered political documents in which most of the community participates.
With the Ecuadorian military, interview questions focused on the relationship between the military and bi-national indigenous groups, women in the military and civilian-military relationships. Soldiers during focus groups could tell me about their interaction with bi-national indigenous groups on an everyday level. However interviews with officials and commanding officers could reveal overarching military policy and strategy. Because the northern border is the only area where the military is currently operative, a degree of secrecy surrounds the military’s role in this space; as a result, I had to be highly cautious when interviewing officials and commanding officers. Researching an area where the Ecuadorian military is operative made me aware of interview questions that I could not ask. Nevertheless the advantage of interviews with military officials was the choice of interviewees. I chose to interview outspoken officials and soldiers from the focus groups, and all of the commanding officers of border bases visited on Ecuador’s northern border. The interviews addressed a set of main questions but also continued with follow-up questions that emerged during the interviews. In total 35 military men were interviewed, including a range of high and lower level ranking military as well as personnel in the human rights offices of the Ministry of Defence in Quito, Ecuador. The interviews focused on military policy for the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, gender military policy, notions of the nation-state and the relationship with indigenous peoples and knowledge of indigenous peoples on the Ecuador-Colombia borderland.

Interviews were a core source of data in this research. Direct quotes were taken on sensitive issues such as ethnic boundary-making and violence inflicted by Epera males on Epera women. Quotes were also taken from Ecaudorian soldiers on their perceptions of boundary space and compared to Epera women. However, the interview method is limited in that means of verifying interpretation of interview data are necessary, since one participant’s opinion should not be taken as sufficient evidence to make important claims (Dunn, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Low, 2007; Kvale, 2007). As a means of verifying the interpretation of data gathered from this method I turn to cross-referencing with documentary material as a means to triangulate the information collected.

13 This was the case with the Cartilla de Seguridad, which is a secret document between the Ecuador-Colombia borderland highlighting bi-national procedures on a variety of issues ranging from dealing with asylum seekers to engaged warfare with guerrilla insurgency groups. I knew of its existence from soldiers in the focus groups but it was not pertinent to ask for this document.
3.3.3 Document Analysis

For this doctoral research, various genres of documents were collected and interpreted through a Foucauldian discourse analysis. This constructionist approach demands that texts be questioned about the way they expose a social reality that has been naturalised (Bhatia, 2004; Blommaert, 2005; Paltridge, 2006; Waitt, 2010). Three main types of documents were gathered: military and governmental policy on the Colombia-Ecuador borderland; Epera documents from Santa Rosa de los Epera and Colombian settlements; and lastly newspaper articles on the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. Carrying out discourse analysis on these texts meant thinking critically about the process of production and social context of the material and the use of these texts as “truth” (Waitt, 2010). Using this method permitted further questioning of everyday practices.

A discourse analysis revision of Epera documents, not foreseen in the initial research plan, was key in obtaining insights into social norms and regulations concerning Epera membership and recognition. Epera ethnic by-laws and ancestral justice systems made claims about ‘true’ Epera identity and membership. Using discourse analysis meant I could question different Epera about the process of ethnic recognition within Santa Rosa de los Epera.

For example, the Epera Ancestral Justice working document was elaborated in 2001 at the foundation of the Santa Rosa de los Epera. Written by the founding members, it was being updated during my time in the community. It states the regulations and sanctions on marriage and offspring for members of Santa Rosa de los Epera, while the Epera ethnic by-laws, recognised by the Ecuadorian state in 2001, give the organisation formal recognition as well as defining membership amongst the Epera and defining important terms like interculturalism. Alternative development plans for the community called the Epera life plans prepared in Ecuador and Colombia were important in representing the current situation of Epera peoples, their needs and desires. Documents from bi-national meetings between Ecuadorian and Colombian Epera, held in Santa Rosa de los Epera in 2010 and 2012, were important records of discussion in these transnational meetings. These documents were analysed for what they could say about militarisation and gendered practices. In turn, the formulation of the Epera women’s political agenda in 2014 was analysed in terms of how
gender was conceived and practiced within Santa Rosa de los Epera\textsuperscript{14}. Lastly, archived development programs, found on the personal computers of Epera leaders, demonstrated that gender was systematically included but also that it was a result of pressure from international organisations. It also showed how the concept’s use in the Epera context changed over time.

Government policy documents, such as the national Defence Agenda, and military policies on women, were crucial for understanding the detail and chronology of ever-changing dimensions of military policy with regards to the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. Other documents consulted included Ministry of Defence communication and magazines as well as articles from the Ministry of Defence website concerning the strengthened military-political bi-national relationship. Documents from the Ecuadorian and Colombian Ministries of Foreign Affairs such as the Border Integration Zone and emerging bi-national development plans were important to monitor the political component of bi-national governmentality and diplomacy. Ecuadorian and Colombian national institutions (2008, 1991) respectively as well as amending legislations on indigenous people, military functions and border areas, were important for context. Newspaper articles, particularly those printed by Ecuadorian government-owned media dealing with events or developments on the northern border were another source of information. This information gave a general background for the everyday life and activities of Epera women, and hence was a contrast to their perceptions of the border.

The disadvantage of discourse analysis is the lack of strict methodological templates or formal guidelines, leading the researcher to rely heavily on personal interpretation (Paltridge, 2006; Waitt, 2010). This limitation was addressed by using a combination of methods, whereby data was checked with informants in different settings, such as focus groups and transect walks (reviewed further in the chapter). I have used factors pertaining to methodological templates suggested by geographers, which emphasise thinking critically about the social contexts of the text and analysing the ‘truth’ claims made in them as ways to confront these limitations (Waitt, 2010). This method was complementary to the interviews and focus groups, as it gave back ground to the questions and conversations carried out.

\textsuperscript{14}This process was carried out during fieldwork, given that reflexivity occurred throughout the research.
3.3.4 Participant observation

Participant observation entails living, working and spending long periods of time in the context of a particular study (Laurier, 2010). It is a systematic collection of information on everyday interactions for social scientific purposes and employed in ethnography (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Liamputtong, 2013). Participatory observation can have different meanings on a spectrum between ‘pure’ observation and ‘pure’ participation (Laurier, 2010; Spradley, 1980). This research was situated between these confines. Moderate participation defines how during fieldwork I maintained a balance between being an insider and outsider (Spradley, 1980). At the onset of research, I was asked not to research ancestral medicine and spirituality; hence, I did not participate at moments where these practices occurred. Data collection in participatory observation involves field-notes, sketches, video recordings and photographs (Laurier, 2010; Liamputtong, 2013). During my 12-month stay with the Epera, I took field-notes every day and photographs once a week, in order to keep a detailed record of everyday occurrences over a long period of time. The advantage of using this method is that it allows for a detailed description from the ‘ground up’ (Laurier, 2010). Aside from documenting everyday interactions, data was gathered in seven Epera assemblies, 12 gatherings of the Epera women’s association, and the gathering of indigenous women of Abya Yala in Cauca, Colombia (where I accompanied Epera Siapidaara women from Ecuador and Colombia). Detailed notes were taken at each of these encounters. This method encourages the researcher to continually reassess research questions (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002), which follows the decolonial feminist epistemological starting points highlighted. As a core method throughout the research process, I would review the data gathered from this method in the one-to-one interviews with Epera women.

However, this method was difficult to use in a conflict area. Recording, analysing and writing up details of Epera women’s lives potentially put both the women and me in danger. Dowler (2001) captured this problem in her research with the IRA in Ireland, in which her everyday engagement with insurgent groups changed how she was able to report her findings. In the context of this research, some information is omitted from analysing and publication because it could put Epera women and me at risk from being targeted by guerrilla, military and paramilitary groups. Another methodological limitation is knowing that no matter how long you live with a community, there are aspects the researcher will miss or not have access
too, irrespective of trust generated. For example, it was only at the end of my fieldwork period that I was shown my gatekeeper’s family album with pictures of family members belonging to an irregular armed group. There is a danger in assuming that participant observation gives the researcher full access to all the information pertaining to a collective or an individual. Thus, humility becomes an important characteristic of this process.

3.3.5 Mapping Trajectories: River transect flows, participatory diagramming and drawings of everyday space

For this study of indigenous women’s political relations with border space, other methods were needed to draw out their perceptions of everyday space. According to participant observation in my daily interaction with women, it became clear that some spaces had more significance than others; certain spaces were deemed safer than others for Epera women, and yet other spaces were considered crucial for the cultural continuity of the Epera. In order to draw out these ideas, the research used participatory diagraming which includes river transect flows and sketches of everyday space, as well as that of Santa Rosa de los Epera (Mosse, 1994; Kesby, 2000; Alexander et al., 2007). The drawings and maps highlight, in the tradition of feminist geography, the spaces of the everyday depicting their ordinary labours in space and time (Rose, 1993). The advantages of this method are that it is a visual, oral and participatory method (Kesby, 2000; Alexander et al., 2007), three elements crucial for this research. Diagraming is inclusive and facilitates the contributions of participants with limited literacy (Alexander et al., 2007). Epera women’s limited education levels made this a determining factor in choosing this method. Also, drawing exercises proved to be effective in promoting women that normally do not engage in communal meetings to participate. Diagrams also work in a sequential manner; for the research the series of sketches led to a larger communal sketch that then inspired transect river exercises, which will be addressed below.

Epera women made sketches of everyday space during three focus groups, after women were asked to draw their everyday space. Some women drew by themselves, while others worked in pairs and a few opted not to draw. A lot of discussion, laughter and participation occurred during these meetings, proving it to be a good method in that women were comfortable and at ease. Each sketch was presented in turn to the group of 15 to 20 women where women described their drawings and I recorded them. The sketches involved
the use of flip charts and markers and lasted for about 20 minutes with an hour of discussion afterwards. In total, 21 sketches were gathered from three focus groups on the drawings (see Chapters 4 and 5). Using these drawings, two focus groups developed a participatory diagram to bring together all the drawings. The resulting larger diagram reflected women’s main needs, problems and everyday space (see Chapter 5). Insights into how women perceive Epera space in Colombia and the spaces around Santa Rosa de los Epera were generated in this exercise. Information on official spatial strategies such as bordering and control of movement were apparent.

Transect walks are systematic small group or individual walks through a particular area in which characteristics, problems and opportunities are discussed and then summarised in a sketched map (Mosse, 1994). Following the sequential manner of participatory diagramming, the preliminary sketches highlighted the importance of the river and mobility for Epera women. As such, it became clear that a method was needed that would draw out the significance of the Cayapas River for them. Consequently, I adapted transect walks, a method that I was to carry out on the land in Santa Rosa de los Epera, and onto the Cayapas River and by canoe. This method was complementary to the interviews and focus groups, and drew out the use and significance of different parts of the Cayapas River for Epera women. Through this method women spoke about where they felt more or less secure outside of Santa Rosa de los Epera and several of the anecdotes mentioned in the research come from this method. The route of the walk chosen by Epera women provided the research a sense of their geographical and social space (Chambers, 1994). However, a slight shift came about in implementing this method. Epera women were interested in documenting the transect walk exercise, but only along the Cayapas River because according to them, the sketches of the everyday and Santa Rosa had already elicited their responses to those spaces. What was missing were reflections on the Cayapas River which also formed their everyday experience. Consequently the transect walk exercise was adapted such that river transects were undertaking during canoe trips along the river between Borbón and Santa Rosa de los Epera. I had not foreseen the importance the river would have in their everyday life. Canoe transects were carried out with small groups or individuals. The resulting maps were then reproduced on paper. These transect river rides brought out issues concerning women’s everyday mobility in relation to the border and interactions with actors in close vicinity to the village such as military, paramilitary, guerrilla, and extraction companies, as well as with indigenous women and men on the other side of the border. In all, 22 transect river travels resulted in a
sketch of the river space highlighting what women thought and felt along the trajectory between Santa Rosa de los Epera and Borbón, Esmeraldas. These exercises were carried out with between one and ten women on board motorboats or canoes; women travelled daily or weekly and I joined them to discuss what they saw and how they felt at each point. Conversations were taped and note-taking followed once the trips concluded. The limitation of this exercise was that I could not do the same for other routes, for example towards Colombia.\footnote{For reasons that I will discuss further in this chapter, I was not allowed to get closer to the border with Colombia and hence this limited the data I could gather on conceived river space in Colombia. Instead, I relied heavily on interviews and focus groups for this information.}

Despite its advantages, participatory diagramming captured only a small part of the Epera’s conceptions of space-time. In their view, space is three-dimensional, in that the ‘below’ and ‘above’ spaces of deities are an important element in their world-view. This study focused only on the ‘middle’ level of space corresponding to physical tangible everyday space. Space was talked about at great length amongst the Epera women, who spoke from a historical point of view about the notion of the ‘paseo’ and the group’s historical nomadism. From their perspective, the river ways and jungle area from Southern Panama to Northern Ecuador (now referred to as the Pacific Chocó) comprised their ancestral territoriality. Initially it took me a while to understand why the term paseo was used to describe permanent settlements on the Ecuadorian territory. Extensive conversations within focus groups and interviews highlighted these elements that were not visible on the sketches or transect river exercises. The challenge for implementing these methods is reflective of dealing with difference in spatial knowledge production (Louis et al., 2012).

3.3.6 Border Crossing

A final method developed during this research project was the border-crossing, in which routes taken to cross the geopolitical border by Epera and military were traced, as a way to draw out the borderscape. The border-crossing method builds on scholarly debate that encourages using the border itself as a method. Recent scholarship on the borderscape invites researchers to conduct ethnographic methodologies with an emphasis on everyday experience (Mezzadra, 2013; Brambilla, 2015). In efforts to further explore what border as method signifies, I developed a method I am calling ‘border-crossing’, which refers to how a
researcher partakes in the ways participants cross physical or metaphorical borders. Border-crossing as a method means that researchers cross geopolitical borders through legal or extra-legal border crossings, or routes defined by research participants; any path from one side of the border to the other. Similarly, Nick Megoran (2006) advocated that ethnographic participant observation be used by political geographers when studying geopolitical borderlands. Yet border crossing is distinct because the emphasis is on crossing the border, not just experiencing it from one side. This method is arguably key in studying bi-national or transnational populations that actively engage with border spaces on a frequent basis. For the research described here the advantages were multiple. Much can be learned from the route a person or collective chooses to use when crossing a geopolitical border, especially a contentious or problematic one. Only during the exercise of crossing a border in company of research participants do details of what this entails become apparent. For this project, it was where the identification (ID cards, passports, refugee cards) taken by participants can be known, thus generating reflections on belonging, citizenship and transnational space. Crossing the Ecuador-Colombia border through a legal border-crossing myself highlighted the fact that Epera women and men never actually cross the border through legal border-crossings. Instead they cross through illegal border-crossings and, to do so, carry out strategies such as calling Epera leaders on the other side to know which route is most secure at a particular moment. I was also able to cross the border with Epera women and meet with Colombian Epera in an international conference of indigenous women, held in Cauca. Given the restrictions on travel to certain parts of Colombia, this event comprised my only real engagement with Colombia Epera in Colombian territory. Under very different circumstances, I also had the very particular experience of crossing the Ecuador-Colombia borderland with Ecuadorian military. Consequently, comparative border-crossing was conducted on how the Ecuadorian army and Epera women navigate what is ostensibly the same geopolitical border, and the perspectives expressed while doing so.

In addition to embodied border crossing, another important source of information during this project were tales about border-crossing that reflected on when and how the geopolitical boundary took form for Epera in the context of historical nomadic mobility across the Pacific Chocó. Militarisation is linked to the establishment of the geopolitical boundary for the Epera and it was during tales of before and after militarisation on the Colombian and Ecuadorian sides of the border that these become apparent. Tales about border-crossing also highlighted the conceptions of Colombian space; since I was not allowed
to cross into Colombian Epera space, stories about what it was like to cross through to the Colombian side of the border, were crucial.

The limitation of this method is assuring the security of the research participants and researcher. In a highly contentious borderland, border-crossing even through legal paths can be risky. In this context, participatory diagraming was crucial because it replaced the experience of border crossing through extra-legal paths with drawings of what this entailed.

3.4 Coding for grounded theory and discourse analysis

There were inherent challenges in utilising western terminology, notions and theory in the co-process of constructing knowledge with indigenous women. These challenges included misinterpretation and misrepresentation as well as in the historic process of imposing concepts (such as western feminism) or speaking from a place of moral authority. To ensure that I was not imposing a western perspective of gender, I reviewed the analysis I was conducting on a constant basis alongside the Epera women. Even the choice of methods was reviewed, prioritising some over others through the course of the research. After each interview I would recap with the individual what we had discussed. After focus groups or group meetings, I asked the women if the record of their views was accurate. I also maintained an element of humility and a respectful reaction to the implementation of all methods. This proved essential in this research, given that Epera women’s gender perceptions concerning sexuality, bodies and gender relations were antagonistic to my own beliefs. Going into fieldwork I had expected a decolonised communitarian feminist project; what I found instead was more complicated, richer and more challenging for my own feminist frameworks. Remembering my western feminism (as radical as it may be) was important in not undermining the perceptions of womanhood amongst the Epera. Grounded theory allowed for a postcolonial feminist and decolonising manner of analysing the data gathered. In this sense, I needed to adopt an approach to grounded theory that was also decolonial.

Grounded theory is based on simultaneous systematic and flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data that is “grounded” in the data to construct theories.

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16 This was not possible to do with the Ecuadorian military because of the hierarchical nature of the institution by which my methods had to be approved by the Ministry of Defence. Also I had very limited time available to engage with a much larger number of informants.
Grounded theory involves the analysis of data collected from the beginning of research via qualitative coding in which data is separated, sorted and synthesised and can be reshaped before finishing the collection of data. In this sense, grounded theory is not linear, given that emerging analytic categories, concepts and abstractions come directly from the data at different times of the research process (Charmaz, 2006).

Coding for grounded theory has been termed ‘open coding’, meaning coding that happens during the research process, whereby significant concepts that can be used in coding emerge throughout the study (Paltridge, 2006). Coding serves to distil data and allows for comparison with other segments of data (Charmaz, 2006). Once transcripts were prepared, each passage of every interview or focus group was coded by hand and in Spanish (Paltridge, 2006). These were later reviewed with respective research participants. Coding, theory development and concept recognition became a continuous process, where each line or phrase examined was summarised in a word or phrase. Theory building versus theory testing is emphasised in grounded theory, and so to complete the analysis of the coded data, concepts and theories are put together to answer the initial research questions and bring out broader implications (Paltridge, 2006). These aspects of grounded theory made it possible to assure postcolonial feminism’s focus on discursive representation which requires an explicit focus on language and text (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). I spent a lot of time visually linking codes and ideas manually on large pieces of paper with different coloured markers in the village’s communal areas. Often Epera women and men would come by and participate by adding their input or engaging in discussion over a certain topic, term or image on the different posters I created.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

This section will draw out the limitations to my initial research plan. Initially, research with two bi-national indigenous groups (Awa and Epera ethnicities) was planned as well as with Ecuadorian and Colombian militaries in order to develop comparative and bi-national perspectives on these two groups. However, given impediments briefly outlined below, the research focused on one bi-national indigenous group and only the Ecuadorian military. The obstacles to two-country comparative research became apparent early on.
Upon submitting the risk assessment, to obtain University of Cambridge permission for fieldwork, regulations dictated by the Foreign and Common Wealth Office (FCO) forbade research within 20 kilometres of the border on the Ecuadorian side except at the Carchi (Tulcán / Ipiales) border crossing. FCO rules also prohibited visiting rural areas near the Colombian border, limiting the research to urban areas\(^7\). Consequently, this required immediate changes to fieldwork as research with the Awa group was no longer feasible.

Another aspect that changed the initial research plan was the bi-national relationship of the Epera Siapidaara and Awa with their Colombian counterparts, specifically in relation to developing trust with indigenous women and organisations. Developing a relationship of trust with Epera Siapidaara was crucial for my personal security. Given the high levels of insecurity in Esmeraldas, particular Borbón (Ecuador), I was highly dependent on Epera for security in entering their territory and developing a relationship with the Colombian Epera. The Ecuadorian Epera only trust their immediate family and specific Epera authorities in Colombian territory. They acknowledge that the Epera on the ‘other side’ (Colombia) are involved with cultivating coca leaf for illicit purposes and are infiltrated by FARC guerrilla groups as well as illegal armed groups (ex-paramilitary). The Ecuadorian Awa, like the Epera, do not know who is involved with what in Colombian territory, and are highly cautious. Consequently, it became clear that there would be insufficient time to develop the levels of trust needed with two indigenous groups on what would have been four field sites within 12 months of fieldwork. So, in light of the security situation, the research focused on work with the Epera Siapidaara group in Santa Rosa de los Epera, Ecuador.

The third security-related context that shaped fieldwork was the security situation on Colombia’s south-western Pacific coast, which is currently the epicentre of the armed conflict. This had not been clear before arrival in Colombia, where I spent 6 weeks obtaining up-to-date information about the Epera Siapidaara in these areas and the possibilities of accessing Epera Siapidaara territory. Numerous humanitarian organisations; local governments and research foundations advised against work in a red zone, that is an area characterised under the highest security threat possible within a conflict area. These issues were discussed extensively with my supervisor, who was in weekly contact with me during

\[^7\] The Eperara Siapidaara were not a problem in this regard because on the Ecuadorian side they live approximately 45 kilometres from the official border and on the Colombian side the closest community are in Tumaco which is 52 kilometres from the Ecuador-Colombian borderland.
my brief time in Colombia. As a result, it was no longer possible to do a comparative study between the Epera women in Ecuador and those in Colombia. The escalation of the Colombian conflict along the Ecuadorian border also had repercussions for intended research with the Colombian military. While I obtained permission to research Ecuadorian military border bases on the Ecuador side, no permission was granted by the Colombian military to do the same in that country, probably due to the intensification of the conflict and existing problems with indigenous groups. Interviews with NGOs and International Organisations on the Colombian side of the border and a revision of Colombian Epera documents highlighted a very tumultuous relationship between the Colombian military and indigenous groups.

Due to FCO rules I had to limit my border crossing to the three official border-crossings along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland (Tufiño, Tulcán and San Miguel). Nevertheless, as noted above, these border crossings do not represent the usual points where Epera cross to and from Colombia. Given the participatory action research framework developed, the original plan was to cross with Epera women via their usual border crossing routes. During fieldwork, the difficulty of crossing the legal and illegal border crossings became clear, involving logistical, cost and security concerns. There is no official border crossing for the entire Esmeraldas province (Ecuador) that borders with Nariño (Colombia); consequently the majority of border crossings are undertaken illegally in this area. All of these factors contributed to causing the cancellation of a series of border crossings in which I had hoped to participate. One cancellation was caused by the detention of an Epera governor by the FARC and a threat to another leader, only days before an Epera governors’ meeting in Colombia to which the Ecuadorian Epera women and I were invited. This meeting was to be key in ensuring research access and building trust, through explaining the collaborative research initiatives to gain access to the Epera community in Colombia. Epera women in Ecuadorian territory are eager to ‘study’ culture and women’s position in

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18 I did cross the border in November 2013 with the representative of the Epera women’s association in Ecuador and the male leader of international affairs of the Ecuadorian Epera. We crossed the only legal border crossing FCO rules permitted. The indigenous woman leader had never crossed the border legally; it was her first time crossing a legal border between Ecuador and Colombia.

19 Local and National elections were described by the International Red Cross as moments when violence is intensified, and recommended cancelling travel one week before and after elections. Local elections were in March and national elections in May 2014. On 9 March Epera women cancelled a visit to Colombia’s electoral process when the international frontier was closed for 36 hours.

20 Even though the Epera Siapidara consider themselves “the big Epera Siapidara family” that transcends nation state borders, the Epera from the Ecuador territory still have to explain why they are travelling to Colombia and carrying out ‘research’. Furthermore, the term ‘research’ was not going to be used in Colombia since the term is associated with military intelligence.
Colombia, which remains their cultural reference point. Although cancelling was a blow to these engagements, nevertheless, it generated discussions among Epera women regarding perceptions of security in border crossing and the situation in Colombia which were also of interest to the research. These events confirmed, therefore, my focus on Ecuadorian Epera indigenous women and their relationship to the border and border crossing to and from Colombia.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the epistemological framework, methodology and methods used to answer the research questions in the context of the Epera on the Ecuador-Colombia border. Given the post-colonial feminist, decolonised and participatory action research focus, reflexivity, representation and subalternity were key elements throughout data gathering and analysis. Epera women were key participants in developing the research methods used and, given their overall approval and satisfaction with the research, they actively participated in the unfolding of the research. Implementation of the methods also proved that border crossing as an innovative method for interdisciplinary border studies is valid for this type of research. Despite important limitations to the study, this research design has accomplished the objective of depicting Epera women’s everyday engagement with the border space in question. The following four chapters draw out the empirical findings that resulted from the implementation of this research design.

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21 Women and several male leaders repeatedly stated that border crossing was safe and the FARC’s abduction of an Epera governor did not change their security perceptions of Epera territory in Colombia.
CHAPTER 4: Boundary-making and border crossings in the Epera context

This chapter describes in detail the context of the Epera indigenous population along the Ecuador-Colombia geopolitical boundary. I then highlight how Epera experience the border, in particular through border-crossing experiences and contrast that with the formal boundary-making process of the Ecuadorian military and government. The Epera border agency is shown to be in tension with the border demarcation process of the Ecuadorian state and military, enhancing the Epera’s sense of insecurity and fear of elimination.

In line with the epistemological framework adopted, depicting indigenous women’s experiences in the Ecuador-Colombia borderland results from a reflective process. Undoubtedly, context is important for any study, but when context is tied to processes of indigenous elimination, its representation becomes even more significant. How do I portray this space when so much depends on its very representation? This reflection is especially pertinent in light of

the idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd…the theorist who attempts to define what a border is, is in danger of going around in circles, as the very representation of the border is the precondition for any definition (Balibar, 2002:76).

In light of Balibar’s conception of borders as polysemic, which means that “borders never exist in the same way for individuals belonging to different social groups” (Balibar 2002:79), I portray the borderland from the perspective of what matters for the Epera along this space - what the Epera considered relevant.

4.1 Context of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland

The Ecuador-Colombia borderland stretches for 586 km\(^2\) from the Pacific coast, through the Andean highlands, finishing in the Amazon where both countries border with Peru. On the Ecuadorian side, this area is made up of five provinces: Sucumbíos, Esmeraldas, Carchi, Imbabura and Orellana, while on the Colombian side there are two regions: Nariño

and Putumayo. The research documented here took place in Esmeraldas province, particularly in the main Epera settlement (Ecuador) called Santa Rosa de los Epera, near to the city of Borbón, 15 kilometers down the River Cayapas (see Figure 3.1).

**Figure 4.1 Esmeraldas Province: Field site**

According to census data, the combined population of bordering provinces is estimated to be 2,994,029, with 1,097,697 inhabitants in Ecuadorian territory and 1,896,332 inhabitants in Colombia. The population is predominantly *mestizo*, with various indigenous groups and a significant Afro-descendant population (SETECI, 2011). The Epera are one of five bi-national indigenous groups inhabiting both sides of the Ecuador-Colombia boundary. Self-identified as the “Gran familia Epera” (Grand Epera family), a nomadic ethnic group along the Pacific coast stretching from Southern Panama to Northern Ecuador, the Epera today are distributed across three countries (Panama, Ecuador and Colombia). Epera elders state that, prior to colonisation, the Epera moved around the Pacific coast, settling only for short periods in determined territories to gather food and seek shelter during the rainy months (Interview: Garrabato/Lucy, 10/2013). Today the Epera remain a highly mobile population for which geopolitical borders have little significance, and the imagined geography of the Grand Epera family influences their perceptions and lived realities of space and borders. For this thesis, I focus on the Epera between Colombia and Ecuador because they are a population under threat, at the frontline of ethnic politics, and located where permission for this study was possible. The relationship between Ecuadorian-based Epera and Panamanian

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23 *Mestizo/mestizaje in the Ecuador/Colombia case means of mixed heritage of indigenous and European ancestries.*
Epera is weak, while dangerous border areas elsewhere made fieldwork impossible on other border areas where Epera are settled. For now suffice to state, the Epera are based along specific locations on the international boundaries between Ecuador, Colombia and Panama. These boundary areas are characterised by centres for the production and exportation of drugs towards the United States and beyond. Nevertheless, despite high levels of insecurity caused by the drug trade and the intensification of the Colombian conflict, as well as its spill-over effects into this border area, the Epera remain in this space. In the Colombia-Ecuador borderland, the intensification of the Colombian conflict is especially poignant. For Ecuadorian-based Epera born in Colombia, the imagined geography of Colombia is particularly powerful. Rio Saija, a sacred river in the Cauca region of Colombia, is considered to be the place of origin for Epera culture and identity. As such, Epera territory in Colombia is perceived to be more authentically Epera than Ecuadorian settlements, and as such the imagined geography of Epera territory in Colombia influences daily life in Ecuador (Chapters 4 and 5).

The Colombian Epera live on the South-Western Pacific coast of Colombia, the current epicentre of the Colombian armed conflict, where they live in three regions: Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Nariño and in nine Colombian municipalities (Life Plan, 2012). According to the Colombian national census (DANE, 2005), 3,843 persons self-identified as pertaining to the Epera Siapidaara indigenous group, making up 0.3 per cent of the country’s total indigenous population (Colombian Ministry of Culture, 2010). Epera populations in Colombia have been victims of forced displacement due to territorial disputes between guerrilla groups (ELN, FARC), illegal armed groups, and the security sector (Colombian armed forces, mainly the Navy). Coca leaf production occurs in Epera territory in Colombia, as does the recruitment of Epera into guerrilla groups. According to Epera documents and public statements, the Epera are actively against the involvement of youth in both military and guerrilla groups, although living within one of the hotspots of the Colombian conflict.

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24 Most Epera recognise that they have distant family in Panama, but there have not been bi-national meetings like those between Ecuador and Colombia. The distance is much farther than with Colombia, so I have not met anyone who had been to the Panama Epera communities.
25 The Epera in Ecuador are often mistaken to be part of the Embera, one of the largest ethnic groups in Colombia. However, during a bi-national Epera meeting, Colombian Epera remarked that the Epera Siapidaara in Colombia were rejecting political inclusion with the Embera.
26 The majority are concentrated in the Cauca region with 49.2 per cent (1,897 persons), followed by 44.8 per cent in the Narino department (1,727 persons) and Valle del Cauca with 2 per cent (76 persons). The remaining 12.80 per cent (495 persons) live in urban areas.
27 Ex-paramilitary groups including Urabenos, Rastrojos, Aguilas Negras and la Empresa.
makes it almost impossible to resist the surrounding dynamics (Life Plan 2012; Life Plan working document, 2014; Ecuadorian Epera ethnic by-laws). These pressures are compounded as the Colombian conflict has become more mobile and unpredictable since 2000 with the onset of Plan Colombia as the Colombian military and guerrilla actors no longer operate from fixed military bases (Interview: Jesuit Services for Refugees, 03/2014). An everchanging landscape of war exists along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland since Plan de Renacer of the FARC which was a response to the Colombian military’s Plan Espada de Honor in 2012 (Idler, 2013). For indigenous populations living through the intensification of the Colombian conflict, indigenous rights embedded within national constitutions are not fulfilled. Additionally, though this is not exclusive to indigenous populations, targeted systematic killings of populations such as the Awa have been documented (Colombian Ministry of Interior, 2012).

According to the most recent Ecuadorian national census (INEC, 2010), 7 per cent of Ecuador’s population self-identifies as indigenous. In Colombia, 3.4 per cent of the population is indigenous (DANE, 2005). In both Ecuador and Colombia, ethnic social movements argue that indigenous populations make up a much larger percentage than that recorded by official statistics. Ecuadorian indigenous organisations (CONAIE, ECUARUNARI) sustain that there are 14 nationalities and 18 peoples, and up to 40 per cent of the population are indigenous (Van Cott, 2007; Becker, 2011). Meanwhile in Colombia, indigenous organisations such as ONIC state that there are 102 indigenous groups in comparison to the 87 officially recognised groups. Indigenous groups in Ecuador and Colombia have obtained legal recognition of multiple indigenous rights and territories (Andolina et al., 2009). The Colombian constitution of 1991 contains 30 articles referencing rights and guarantees for ethnic groups, and recognises the Colombian nation to be multicultural and pluri-ethnic (Escobar, 2008). In Ecuador, indigenous groups’ revolts in the 1990s resulted in the recognition of indigenous rights in the 1998 constitution. Ecuador’s 2008 constitution further recognised new rights such as the rights of nature, collective rights and definition of the Ecuadorian state as both pluri-national and intercultural (Becker, 2011; Walsh, 2010, 2015).

Indigenous rights to prior consultation, acknowledged in Colombia’s 1991 constitution and Ecuador’s 2008 constitution, are particularly liable to be disrespected in the borderscape. As stressed by the director of the International Red Cross in Pasto (Colombia),
Prior consultation is impossible to enforce within indigenous reservations that live in conflict zones because the military will never let the indigenous communities know when they are going to come into their territory. Because you can be assured that the moment they do, the guerrilla will be waiting for them. The military knows this and will not risk their men for this. Indigenous people, especially on the borders, are seen as the enemy of the Armed Forces” (15 March 2014).

As a consequence, along the border indigenous rights to funds and social policy are obstructed. Overall, their position in the midst of the Colombian conflict places them in a particular state of vulnerability, representing a challenge to compliance with indigenous rights established in both constitutions.

One of the most salient characteristics of the Northern Ecuador and Southern Colombia regions are their significant levels of insecurity, which are linked to, but not solely attributable to, the drug war. Insecurity is also manifested through the rise in organised crime since 2000 (Idler, 2013). Ecuador’s highest homicide rates are found in the northern border provinces, reaching 100 for every 100,000 inhabitants, among the world’s highest (Alston, 2011). This situation is further aggravated by legal impunity; in Ecuador for every 100 killings, only one perpetrator is convicted (ibid.). Organised crime in Ecuador is related to the spill-over effects of the Colombian conflict, which has re-located to the country’s borders with Ecuador and Venezuela. One hot spot is the Nariño region, which borders Ecuador. Colombian’s largest cocaine plantations are in Putumayo and Nariño, two of the three provinces that border Ecuador (SIMCI, 2008). Meanwhile, several FARC camps are found along the border provinces, making the spill-over effect of the drug trafficking route particularly potent. Since Plan Colombia started in 2000, killings amongst paramilitaries and FARC guerillas have taken place in the northern border region, which is believed to have heightened civilian criminal activity (Jaskoski, 2012). Paramilitary and guerrilla groups compete to control drug routes to the Pacific, also constantly contested by organised crime. Mangrove areas near the towns of San Lorenzo and Borbón, cities closest to Santa Rosa de los Epera, are particularly crucial for the circulation of drugs (INREDH, 2008), yet the cocaine trade affects all Andean border zones, given their role in cocaine processing (Idler, 2013:4). Ecuador is an important site for money-laundering as well as the provision of chemicals for processing coca leaves (Bonilla & Moreano, 2009, in Idler, 2013). Recent
studies indicate that routes used for the drug trade are also used by the arms trade and trade in human trafficking, mainly of women for sexual purposes (FOSIN, 2012). Paramilitary groups are said to be based along the Mataje River (A river that divides Ecuador and Colombia) and Mexican drug cartels are thought to control the routes to the Pacific Ocean.

4.2 Situation of the Epera on the Ecuador side of the border

According to Carrasco (2010), dispersed Epera settlements have existed since the mid-1960s in Ecuador, but not until 2000 did the Epera obtain communal indigenous territory. In 2000, 347 hectares of land was donated by the Church and local NGOs to the Epera in Ecuador (Carrasco, 2010), “to strengthen the cohesion and identity of the Epera”, according to the funders. The territory, denominated Santa Rosa de los Epera, is a communal landholding, whereby each family is given a parcel of 3.5 hectares for settlement and agriculture use. The remaining land is designated as a “reserve” of 70.05 hectares, and as the communal living area (16 hectares) (Figure 3.2).

Figure 4.2 Diagram of Santa Rosa de los Epera Siapidaara: the main Epera settlement on the Ecuador side of the border

28 The Ecuadorian state was not involved in this process. Furthermore, there is no existing legislation to award indigenous people territory in Ecuador.
According to the national census (INEC, 2010), 300 Epera live in an area of 347 hectares\(^{29}\); 55.13 per cent men, 44.87 per cent women (81.4 women for every 100 men), consistent with the cantón’s (county) general ratio of 112.61 (Eloy Alfaro PDOT, 2012:9) and characteristic of border provinces. The male dominated demography is due to male segregated employment in oil refineries, timber industry, mining, military and the drug trade (Zaragocin, 2012).

As noted above, the principal settlement of the Epera nationality is Santa Rosa de los Epera, found on the banks of the River Cayapas (see Fig 3.2). However Epera are also found in other settlements including Bella Aurora on the River Santiago and Barrio La Cayapa within Borbón city (Life Plan, Epera, 2014). Bella Aurora (15 hectares) territory is a comuna\(^{30}\), shared with Afro-Ecuadorian communities and Barrio la Cayapa (1.5 hectares) is made up of individual properties (Life Plan Epera, 2014). At the time of fieldwork, the Epera leadership was planning to acquire 1000 hectares with the help of CONAICE, CODENPE and international organisations (Life Plan Epera, June 2014). The Epera consider the best aid (humanitarian or development) to take the form of more land, believing that territory supports sovereign lifestyles by living off their land and recuperating Epera culture. Fixed territory is perceived to provide protection from surrounding insecurity and as necessary to promote cultural practices that will assure the continuity of their ethnicity (Chapter 4). As discussed later in this thesis, territory also represents spatial autonomy from which to foster regulations that will fight against ethnic elimination (see Chapters 4 and 5). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Epera will obtain more land as no NGOs have the political will or financial capacity to facilitate the Epera’s territorial expansion. Also complicating their situation is the fact that the territory surrounding Santa Rosa de los Epera is made up of African palm plantations or cleared for grazing livestock, each having highly dangerous consequences for the mangrove forest that characterises this region. Deforestation, oil drilling and mining are common activities for land use in northern Esmeraldas, where Santa Rosa de los Epera is situated. On the contrary, the Epera have prioritised their territory as a reserve for animals and fauna, antagonistic to the perspective of their neighbours who view territory in terms of economic

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\(^{29}\) Epera living outside of Santa Rosa are not counted in the national census. However the Epera consider it to be around 50 to 100 more Epera spread in other parts of the country.

\(^{30}\) Part of the political-organisational structure of the state that gives indigenous communities legal recognition and dates back to 1937 (Becker, 1999).
productivity\textsuperscript{31}. As a result the *colonos*\textsuperscript{32} who have invaded Epera territory claim that they have a right to it because they are making the land productive whereas the Epera are not (Interview: Chiripua, Mateo, 10/2013).

Once the Epera obtained territory in 2000, they set up ethnic by-laws and distributed territory amongst the founding families. Epera who had participated as leaders of the national indigenous organisation CONAIE during the late 1990s, advised dispersed Epera that in order to be recognised as an indigenous group in Ecuador the best option was as an indigenous nationality (Interview: Chiripua/Arturo, 11/2013). Under the 1998 constitution, state recognition of indigenous groups was possible as an indigenous pueblo or indigenous nationality\textsuperscript{33}. Prior to this, the Comuna legislation of 1937 extended legal recognition to indigenous, peasant and rural communities. However, this occurred to a lesser degree in the Esmeraldas province in comparison to other parts of the country, as some indigenous political organisations steered purposely away from forming comunas because it was perceived to extend state structures into traditional communities in order to manipulate local dynamics (Becker, 1999:535). Epera did not consider the comuna structure, preferring instead to be recognised as an indigenous nationality, which provides legal autonomy in forming governmental and justice systems that are not guaranteed under the comuna structure. In order to be recognised as an indigenous nationality, CODENPE indigenous bureaucrats carried out an anthropological study of the Epera language, culture, governance and judicial system amongst other criteria necessary to be considered as an indigenous nationality in 2000. Once CODENPE approved the Epera as such, the Ministry of Social Wellbeing (Ministerio de Bienestar Social) recognised the Eperara Sipidaara nationality on behalf of the Ecuadorian state via Ministerial accord number 001069 on 5 November 2001 (Life Plan, 2012).

In 2000, the National Epera-Siapidaara organisation of Ecuador (NAESE) was also established. A governmental structure was defined with a president and vice president as well as five other thematic leaders (International affairs, Family and women, Youth, Territory, and Health). Together they made up what is considered to be the Epera governmental council.

\textsuperscript{31} For example, when a tree from the reserve is cut down, a prior consensus amongst the Epera has to be obtained, otherwise the person that cuts the tree will be sanctioned.
\textsuperscript{32} Colloquial term in Spanish that means present-day colonisers.
\textsuperscript{33} The difference between indigenous pueblo and nationality is that the latter has a defined territory (Interview : CODENPE Bureaucrat, 2014).
Any decision in Santa Rosa de los Epera is discussed by the governmental council and voted on at the general assembly, which is made up ideally of the entire community. However, most of the general assemblies I observed were made up mainly of adults with more representation of women than men. However, more men held leadership roles. Out of the seven leadership roles on the government council, five were men in comparison to three women. The governmental council also decides on the type of punishment an Epera member will receive if he or she violates the legal statutes and ancestral regulations set out in 2000. A male and female castigador (punisher) are elected on a yearly basis, responsible for physically punishing the Epera with a whip. In later chapters, this dissertation focuses on the control of women’s bodies and sexuality through regulations and punishment (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

In 2004, the Epera women’s group was formed, made up of a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. These roles are held for a 2-year term, though many women do not complete their political assignments because of family pressures to quit since these are not paid positions. Following advice from nun Carrasco, who also aided the Epera in obtaining the funds to buy the land that is now Santa Rosa de los Epera, the women’s group was established. Since then the women’s group has gone through different phases of political engagement; from financial and political strength to the present period of weakness. In 2014 the Epera women developed their first political agenda with 14 points addressing a range of issues from access to water to gender-based violence. This agenda has been used by the women’s group to leverage governmental aid from the Borbón municipality.

According to the last Ecuadorian census, 95.6 per cent of Epera live in poverty, and 3.48 per cent in extreme poverty. The Ecuadorian State measures poverty with regards to basic unmet services relating to housing, public services, access to education and economic income. Epera families often live on one meal a day, and cannot afford trips to Borbón to receive health treatment on less than $1 a day. As a result of poverty, Epera are eligible for five cash transfer programmes\(^\text{34}\), national social protection mechanisms introduced in recent decades to alleviate poverty affecting 24.12 per cent of the country’s population (INEC, 2013).

\(^{34}\) The percentage of the Epera population that receive the following cash transfers are: Bono de Desarrollo Humano (Human Development Cash Transfer) (37.5 per cent), Crédito de desarrollo humano (Human Development Credit) (25.5 per cent), Bono de la Vivienda (Housing allowance) (12.5 per cent), Bono Manuela Espejo (Manuela Espejo subsidy for disabled peoples) (12.505 per cent), Becas Escolares (Education Scholarships) (12.5 per cent) (CODENPE 2013).
March 2015). These social policies aim to aid the poor with access to basic services, such as education, health and housing. Due to the lack of quality education in rural areas, however, especially along the border, illiteracy rates for the Epera over 15 years are 28.2 per cent - considerably higher than the national average of 6.8 per cent. Women are particularly affected (as are indigenous women across the country); over one quarter (27.46 per cent) of Epera women are illiterate in comparison with 29.45 per cent of men (INEC, 2010). Among the population over 5 years, 16.81 per cent do not have formal education; meanwhile, 43.14 per cent have primary education, and 15.04 per cent secondary education. Only 5.31 per cent of the populations have completed some higher education (INEC, 2010). Representative of educational facilities in poor rural areas of the country, the primary school in Santa Rosa de los Epera lacks basic services such as drinking water and toilets. The school follows a bilingual education system in Spanish and Sia Pidee (the Epera language) that provides basic and initial education (CODENPE, 2013). However, according to CODENPE surveys in Santa Rosa de los Epera, residents do not consider that bilingual education strengthens pupils’ values or cultural identity because the curriculum does not deal with topics related to Epera culture (CODENPE, 2013). Only those families who are able to afford daily canoe rides to and from Borbón can send children to study at a public secondary school, which is free.

Agriculture is the main income generating activity for the Epera nationality, employing 28.64 per cent of the male and female adult population. Production is carried out in small family parcels within the communal farm and is mainly for local consumption. Each family has their own plot of farming land where they grow a wide range of foods such as coconuts, coffee beans, plantain, bananas, guava, grapefruit, peanuts, oranges, avocados, beans, rice, cassava and sugarcane. Plots are kept by families, while the rest of the land in Santa Rosa (reserve and communal areas), is maintained by the entire community. Any village member can take a small amount of these agricultural products from any of the family plots, except for coffee and rice which are sold to intermediaries for cash which is used to buy medicine, electric appliances, water and food. Households rely on the main income-generating activity of day labour in nearby coconut farms, African palm plantations, and the timber industry, particularly among men. Some men also migrate to Imbabura to work in flower plantations (a 7-hour bus ride away), leaving women as the head of households. Paid the Ecuadorian minimum wage, currently $354 USD monthly, men return once or twice a year while regularly sending money to families. In the village, monthly craft production such as hand-woven baskets or beaded jewellery is done by older women and sold to visitors,
mainly governmental or aid workers. This activity generates a very small income sporadically ranging from $3 USD to $40 USD per month, considerably less than what men make. Only four young women receive the minimum wage by working in the day care centre in Santa Rosa de los Epera and as teachers in the school.

Another crucial element that affects Epera everyday experience is the deterioration of the environment in Esmeraldas province. Agro-industries such as mono cropping of African palm trees and deforestation, oil drilling sites and large-scale and local mining activities surround Santa Rosa de los Epera. While these industries do not occur in Epera territory, their environmental effect has polluted the soil and rivers (Life Plan Epera, 2014; Carrasco, 2010). Residues from chemicals used in the African Palm plantations cause soil erosion as well as air and water contamination that seep into Epera farming land and water usage. Governmental sources also highlight the effects of small-scale mining and logging companies in the deforestation of the northern area of the Esmeraldas province (Eloy Alfaro Province PDOT, 2012:8). Esmeraldas province, particularly Eloy Alfaro Canton, where the Epera live, is part of the Chocó, one of the world’s bio-diverse hotspots (Rival, 2003). The Ecuadorian Chocó has more than 6,300 species of flora (25 per cent of the national total), of which 13-20 per cent are endemic. There are 650 species of birds of the 1500 reported for the country (PTOD Eloy Alfaro, 2012:8)\textsuperscript{35}. The mangroves in Eloy Alfaro are considered to be some of the largest in the world and two ecological reserves are found in this area\textsuperscript{36}. Most Epera do not know they live in an ecological reserve, as the regulations on reserves are not enforced.

Throughout the 12 months of fieldwork, four children and two adults died of preventable diseases, while severe and prolonged illness was a common event. According to CODENPE, as in other local income indigenous populations, the most common health problems are diarrhoea, fevers, stomach and headaches and sorcery practices (2013). The River Cayapas has been recognised by governmental entities as not suitable for consumption purposes (CODENPE, 2013). However, Epera poverty prevents them from paying water bills or buying clean water, so many Epera rely on rainwater and contaminated river water. The scarcity of adequate sewage systems in Santa Rosa de los Epera and neighboring farms prompts Epera to live on top of human, animal (livestock) and industry waste. The lack of

\textsuperscript{35} Plan de Desarrollo y Ordenamiento territorial del Canton Eloy Alfaro, 2012-2021.

\textsuperscript{36} The reserves include: The Cayapas- Mataje with 51,300 hectares in the area of the mangroves and the Coacachi-Cayapas reserve with 204,420 hectares which starts in the Cayapas River (Eloy Alfaro Province PDOT, 2012:8).
adequate nearby health provision further aggravates this situation as the nearest public health facilities are located in nearby cities of Borbón (medical clinic) and San Lorenzo (hospital). Malpractice has occurred in both health facilities, especially with regards to gynecological care for Epera women (see Chapter 6). Historic under-funding of rural and indigenous people’s territories is not just experienced by the Epera as the concentration of Ecuador’s public facilities is in large cities and provincial capitals. Nevertheless, according to several indigenous CODENPE bureaucrats, the Epera face the most challenging circumstances amongst the different indigenous groups in Ecuador (Interview CODENPE, 2014).

In light of the above situation, the Epera consider themselves to be “disappearing” or on the verge of cultural and physical extinction (Chapter 4). In Ecuador there is no legal classification of indigenous groups in danger of social and cultural extinction, or governmental programmes that address this issue. In the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution, ethnocide is considered only with regards to indigenous groups in voluntary isolation. Meanwhile, the Epera language, Sia Pidee, is recognised by UNESCO to be in danger of disappearing, along with another indigenous language, Sapara (El Comercio, 30 April 2014)\(^\text{37}\). Based on recognition from UNESCO, the Ecuadorian government has specific programmes with the Sapara language but not with the Epera language. By contrast, the Colombian constitution recognises the Epera Siapidaara as one of the country’s 35 indigenous groups in danger of cultural and social extinction caused by the internal armed conflict, and whose human rights have been put in grave danger\(^\text{38}\). As a result, Colombian Epera have specific legal protection mechanisms, within the 1991 Colombian national constitution\(^\text{39}\). Meanwhile for the Ecuadorian-based Epera, local government recognises the extinction of flora and fauna in Santa Rosa de los Epera, but not that of the people in this place.

Nevertheless, for Ecuadorian-based Epera, despite the lack of state recognition, their identification with processes of physical and cultural disappearance is paramount, determining their interpretation of border dynamics as well as communal regulations. As

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37 While Sia Pidee (Epera language) is not receiving government aid for the prevention of its extinction, like the other considered endangered language Sapara, it was recognised by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage in 2002 (El Comercio newspaper, 30 April 2014).
38 Colombian constitutional Law Auto 004 from 2009. National Indigenous organisations in Colombia suspect that up to 65 of the 102 indigenous groups in Colombia are in danger of extinction (El Espectador newspaper, 20 March 2013).
39 Plan de Salvaguardia is one of them.
such, the complex web of factors that constitute the everyday life of Epera are further complicated by the interpretation that Epera give to their context. The insecurity resulting from border dynamics is naturalised while the focus on fighting against ethnic elimination is assured through the physical reproduction of “pure” Epera offspring. The Epera have a rigid conception of ethno-racial relations, in which “cultural-purity” is valued and mestizaje is considered to contribute to their physical and cultural disappearance. Mestizaje for the Epera is defined as “breeding between a culturally pure Epera and a non-culturally pure Epera” (Interview Grueso, Ana: 10/2013). Culturally-pure Epera are defined as the result of a male and female Epera, whose ancestry can be traced to Rio Saija, Colombia. As such, the Epera have regulations on sexuality and marriage in which sanctions are enforced on members that partake in partnerships outside of the Epera ethnicity. This study will focus on these and other “purifying practices”, which include a series of communal measures enforced on Epera women’s bodies and sexuality (Chapters 5 and 6).

Surrounding Afro-populations and indigenous groups (such as the Chachi) are considered to be relatives of the Epera and so when partnerships are created with these populations, it is considered to be an incestuous relationship. Given the small number of Epera in Ecuadorian territory, Epera are easily recognisable in Santa Rosa de los Epera and neighboring settlements. Epera that cross over from Colombia are verified to be part of the Grand Epera family, by checking with Epera families in Colombia who can testify to their lineage. Maintaining Epera ethnicity is enforced also by maintaining language, dress, festivities, food, justice systems and governmental systems as well as use of land (Chapter 4). Nevertheless, not engaging with these cultural practices is not sanctioned or regulated in the same way that women’s sexuality and partnerships are. Women are controlled more than men because of the Epera’s conception that it is women who are mainly responsible for reproducing and maintaining Epera life as well as culture (Chapter 5). Epera women hence act as ethnic boundary makers and cultural guardians (Chapter 5). In their view, children are dying because they are less Epera in cultural and life terms, not just because the water is not drinkable (Chapter 4). Thus in the face of ethnic elimination (Chapter 4), Epera women carry the responsibility, burden and violence that comes with purifying practices (Chapter 6). In the broader Ecuadorian context, mestizaje has been used by elites as a nation-building process in which indigeneity is erased and national identity is created (Radcliffe, 1998). Indigenous people are highly discriminated against by Ecuadorian mestizo-white population in structural as well as daily encounters (Andolina et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the claim of ethnic
elimination and subsequent actions towards controlling the bodies and sexuality of Epera indigenous women has not been documented elsewhere in Ecuador\textsuperscript{40}.

4.3 Epera border-crossing between Ecuador and Colombia

Cross-border mobility of people and commerce has characterised the border area since the pre-conquest period. Since 1996, Ecuadorian and Colombian governments legally recognise parts of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland as an unrestricted area for commerce and human mobility. This is titled the ZIF (Border Integration Zone) and includes the territory comprising the Colombian provinces of Nariño, Putumayo and Sucumbios, and Esmeraldas, Ibarra, and Napo in Ecuador\textsuperscript{41}. The ZIF agreement specifically states that nationals can travel from one side of the border to the other with only one piece of identification, shown if asked to border officials. This neoliberal free trade and movement agreement is in tension with the reality and militarisation of the area. With the intensification of the Colombian conflict, a surge of refugee and asylum seekers have crossed the border into Ecuador since Plan Colombia began, with over 50,000 recognised refugees residing on Ecuadorian soil (UNHCR, 2013). The Ecuadorian government has responded to this with a more restrictive policy towards human mobility, passing the Refugee Decree 1182 (May 2012) which led to a drop in asylum recognition rate from 50 per cent in 2009 to 6 per cent in 2013 (UNHCR, 2013). Ecuadorian government and military officials tend to view bi-national mobility as comprising asylum seekers fleeing Colombian conflicts; other reasons for mobility are not generally acknowledged or understood. Hence indigenous populations such as the Epera and bi-national populations who daily cross the border are sidelined. Moreover, border authorities and Ecuadorian military often ask for identification despite the ZIF policy particularly affecting the Epera who do not always have formal identification cards. Despite Ecuadorian governmental efforts to provide Epera with national ID cards, Epera have been put in jail by military soldiers in Esmeraldas for not having proper identification. Some Epera without identification never leave Santa Rosa de los Epera for fear of being incarcerated\textsuperscript{42}.

\textsuperscript{40}Sarah Radcliffe and Andrea Pequeno (2010) documented the regulation of Tsachilla women’s marriage and reproduction practices; however, this has not been tied to the process of ethnic elimination, done in this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{41}In 1996 an agreement was signed called \textit{The Agreement between Ecuador and Colombia on the transit of people and vehicles, fluvial and maritime vessels and aircraft}.

\textsuperscript{42}Meanwhile, the ZIF does not cover the area where Epera live on the Colombian side because settlements on the Colombian side are also in non-border provinces. Hence, when Colombian Epera cross the border to
In light of these regulations, the Epera have developed their own mechanisms to cross the border. The Epera do not cross the Ecuador-Colombia boundary through official migration points that are found at every major border city, but traverse the frontier at points even when no official border-crossing bridge exists. Unlike other bi-national groups, such as the Awa or the Cofanes whose territory is literally split by the international boundary, the Epera on both sides of the border need at least two full days of travel to reach Epera communities on either side. From the Ecuadorian side, Epera normally go by canoe, bus and moto-taxis towards Nariño, Cauca or Valle de Cauca regions in Colombia. This is usually done by travelling by motorboat on small rivers into the Pacific Ocean, followed by bus rides on land and then back to river ways by canoe to reach remote riverside communities in the Colombian Chocó region. The trip costs between $90 USD and $200 USD each way, depending on how far into Colombia the Epera settlement is located. Likewise, the degree of attachment between Colombian and Ecuadorian Epera is diverse: some families visit each other on a monthly or yearly basis, whereas in other cases Epera have never returned to Colombian territory. Diverse reasons propel cross-border mobility. According to my research (see also Chapters 5 and 6), the Epera travel to access health care due to country-specific health provision, to receive treatment from the Epera spiritual healer (Tai Chi Na We), to consolidate organisational dynamics in male-dominated bi-national organisations, for family-kin visits, and lastly to seek refuge from the escalation of the Colombian conflict. A large number of Colombian-based Epera cross the border into Ecuador when fighting between guerrilla groups, organised crime and paramilitary occur. Though the latter did not happen during fieldwork, many men and women interviewed decided to stay on in Ecuadorian territory, escaping violence in Colombia. The same routes taken by Epera in Ecuador to Colombia are used by Epera coming from Colombia. The difference in border-crossing from Colombia to Ecuador is that Epera fear getting caught without proper identification by the Ecuadorian military, whereas Epera traveling to Colombia worry over getting caught in fighting between armed actors. Male leaders on both sides of the border have access to the networks necessary to cross the border, as well as the economic means; hence, Epera men cross the border more than women (see Chapter 6).
Contemporary motives for border-crossing blend with historical ones, as the Epera have historically been a highly mobile group that self-identifies as ancestrally nomadic (ancestralmente nómada). The Spanish notion of the “paseo”\(^{43}\) is used by Epera to depict continuous transnational travels: “I came on a paseo” and “I am going on a paseo” describe notions of belonging and mobility between Ecuador and Colombia, and are central to Epera border experiences. In conversations with Ecuadorian Epera, the terms migrant, refugee and bi-national indigenous groups are perceived as imposed categories that inadequately portray the Grand Epera family\(^{44}\) that transcends borders and challenges nation-state recognition (Epera assembly, 20 March 2015). For example, bi-nationalism, a term used in the border context, implies that Ecuador and Colombia are recognised as prior to the indigenous nationality. The terms migrant and refugee likewise follow a nationalistic view of a geopolitical border (Chirimia/Alvaro, 11/2013). The term Grand Epera family by contrast implies that the center of ethnic self-identification is the family structure whose common origin lies in Colombia.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{gran-epera-map.png}
\caption{Figure 4.3 Map of the Grand Epera Family illustrating mobility between Ecuador and Colombia}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Paseo in Spanish signifies a walk, promenade or field trip.}
\footnote{Other transnational indigenous nationalities along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland also regard themselves as Gran Families such as the Gran Pasto Family, Gran Awa Family and Gran Cofán Family. These other Gran families have carried out bi-national meetings resulting in political agendas and life plans that demonstrate a common political force against two separate nation-states. There have also been regional meetings in Ecuador between bi-national indigenous populations with the support of important indigenous organisations such as the CRIC ( Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca) in Colombia and the CONAIE in Ecuador.}
\end{footnotes}
The historical nomadism crucial to Epera identity rests too in opposition to how institutional forces such as local NGOs, the military and national governments understand the Epera. As explored in this chapter, the Epera are thought by Ecuadorian institutions to be really Colombian who are recent migrants or refugees to Ecuadorian territory. In the best-case scenarios, institutions recognise the Epera as a bi-national indigenous group; however, I have yet to find a Ecuadorian institution that recognises the Grand Epera family. This view is shared by the Ecuadorian military as will be highlighted in the next section of this chapter.

4.4 Boundary-making: militarisation and the military presence

Military geographies are defined by Rachel Woodward as “about the control of space, about creating the necessary preconditions for military activities” (2004:3). Ecuadorian military and government exert control over the Ecuador-Colombia borderland through processes of boundary-making, defined as “part of a broader process of territory/region building or institutionalisation” (Paasi, 2009:225). Militarisation has resulted in the normalisation of an otherwise porous border, obstructing the historical flow of the Grand Epera family, excluding border populations in gendered and racialised ways and protecting industries (oil, African palm plantations). Given the grave security situation in Esmeraldas province, militarisation has increased with the re-location of the Ecuadorian navy and of specialised army forces from other parts of the country. This section will demonstrate how the Ecuador-Colombia borderland is a specific site associated with the production of sovereign power (Mountz, 2013). The military expresses sovereignty spatially (Eudaily & Smith, 2008) and in Ecuador’s northern border through recent demarcation practices. Furthermore, this section highlights how the Ecuadorian military misunderstands and misrecognises the Epera and contributes to (though doesn’t determine) their insecurity and risk of elimination. The Ecuadorian military is one actor and militarisation is one process contributing to the pressures on the Epera.

The Ecuadorian armed forces are the governmental institution with most access to very remote and dangerous areas of the Ecuadorian-Colombian borderland. According to several military personnel and those working for the Ministry of Defence, the Decree 433 signed by President Correa additionally grants Ecuadorian armed forces specific functions

45 Interview with Carla Carrillo, former director of the gender, human rights and interculturalism department of the Ministry of Defence of Ecuador, April 2014.
Within a certain distance of the border, such as taking on responsibilities normally given to the police such as migration control and the protection of national industry (oil, mining and electrical plants in particular) (Jaskoski, 2012). In many instances, the Ecuadorian military, moreover, carries out the function of other governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Environment, often by executive order of the President. During fieldwork, Ecuador’s President Correa declared a state of exception in Esmeraldas Province, as a way to implement laws prohibiting timber-cutting\(^{46}\). The complex web of illegality and rampant violence is one of the main reasons for an increase in the number of military personnel from 8000 to 10,000 since 2008 (Telegrafo, 24 July 2014). According to government-owned media, the Operational Command Number 1 North has four groups, 17 operational units and 32 border barracks.

Furthermore, militarisation is a common concern for the Epera in both Ecuador and Colombia, and has been discussed at the past two bi-national meetings of the Grand Epera family\(^{47}\). Minutes from the bi-national meeting in 2010\(^{48}\) record that

what the governments of Ecuador and Colombia want is to expropriate our territories and natural recourses. They have militarised our communities, telling us this is to protect us – because other people come, like in the case of Colombia – other armed groups. This generates violence in our communities, causing division amongst our communities and we lose our unity (2012, un-numbered page).

Two years later, at the 2012 bi-national meeting, Ecuadorian Epera noted

Correa’s (Ecuador’s president) politics is in line with militarisation; his policy is to militarise the border. He talks about Plan Colombia and the negative effects of fumigation in order to justify the presence of the military on the border. However, we as indigenous peoples are not being taken into account to protect our own rights and

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\(^{46}\) In September 2013, a state of exception was declared for 60 days, and extended for 30 days in order to implement environmental measures dictated by the Ministry of Environment aimed at ceasing illegal logging activities. President Correa signed the decree at the request of the Ministry of Environment and it was enforced by the armed forces and police in the border area of Esmeraldas Province.

\(^{47}\) Four bi-national meetings between Ecuadorian and Colombian Epera have occurred since 2010.

\(^{48}\) I was given access to the two documents reporting on the past two bi-national Epera meetings. The first took place in Santa Rosa de los Epera in Ecuador on 21 and 22 May 2012. The second also took place in Santa Rosa de los Epera on 29 and 30 July 2012.
territory. We do not participate in the decisions regarding our security (2012, un-numbered page).

Central to these reflections is the difference between the Epera and the Ecuadorian military in their understandings of border space, and how this influences border-crossing and boundary-making. Illustrative of this difference is the process of border-crossing with the Ecuadorian military compared with Epera women; both carried out during fieldwork. On November 2013, I crossed the border at Tulcán with a delegation of Epera women, as part of a journey from Esmeraldas (Ecuador) to Maria de Piendamó (Colombia) in order to attend the gathering of indigenous women of Abya Yala⁴⁹, by land and through an official border crossing. As Lorena, a young Epera woman, mentioned,

We never cross through an official border crossing; there isn’t one along the Pacific, so we always cross the border the way we have always done, by canoe and boat until we get to the other side. I am from both sides, and I have IDs from both sides, so I don’t have to tell them when I have arrived. I belong to here and there (Interview:11/2013).

Travelling from the tropical coast area to the high Andes in order to cross the border was a novelty for Epera women, none of whom had ever crossed through a legal boundary post. Legal border crossings are avoided by Epera particularly those without official national identification⁵⁰ from Colombia or Ecuador. Being caught without ID could lead to detention by the Ecuadorian military, as happened to several Epera leaving the Ecuadorian Border Integration Zone (ZIF/BIZ). Entry into Colombia seemed less daunting to Epera women, who stated that it was not likely that they would be stopped by Colombian migration or military officials, unlike when crossing to Ecuador.

⁴⁹ This women’s pre-meeting was part of the V Continental Gathering of Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala held in an indigenous reservation notorious for its historical importance in indigenous resistance in Colombia. The results of this gathering were compiled in the declaration of María Piendamó.

⁵⁰ In both countries national IDs are needed to access social protection programmes and for mobility within and across Andean nation borders. To travel between Ecuador and Colombia, national ID cards are sufficient; passports are not needed, for example.
Ten months earlier I had crossed the Tufiño\textsuperscript{51} border in the Andes accompanied by two high-level military officials, who walked over the three-metre bridge to the Colombian side. One of the military officials stated “Wave hello, they are looking at us”, “they” being the Colombia irregular groups such as FARC and ELN. During a drive along the Tufiño-Tulcan boundary, the military officers pointed towards invisible lines and old cobbled dirt roads, where smuggling occurs and irregular armed groups extort local populations. At nearby barracks, several photographs on the walls provide images of the border crossings that were considered the priority for the Ecuadorian military. Other photos were covered with a red cloth. These photos were kept in the commanding officer’s unit house in the barrack base.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.4.jpg}
\caption{Tufiño border crossing. Photo taken by author}
\end{figure}

The Ecuadorian military and Epera women’s noticeably different border experiences illustrate contested ideas of movement across borders and border space. This is linked to the establishment of two different kinds of border spaces; the indigenous one of mobility and interconnection with the other Epera, and the other of militarisation yet increased.

\textsuperscript{51} Tufiño is located 20 kilometres from Tulcán, the capital of the Carchi Province, bordering with the Nariño province, Colombia. This particular border crossing is not widely known; as I find out, it is strikingly different to the two other legal border crossings, San Miguel (Sucumbios province) and Tulcan (Carchi province), which are much larger in size and serve as export-import routes for commercial goods coming to and out of Colombia. By contrast, the Tufiño border-post comprised a narrow paved road, allowing one small car to pass at a time (see Figure 3.4 ), a small bridge over a creek, and a statue of a Virgin with a banner stating “Welcome to Colombia” on the Ecuadorian side and “Welcome to Ecuador” on the Colombian side.
collaboration between governments of Ecuador and Colombia concerning securitisation. Military security perceptions of the border do not concur with indigenous women’s perceptions of the boundary; however, this disjuncture does not fall in the usually framed dichotomy for border sites of a globalised borderless world and border securitisation (Johnson et al., 2011). The Epera’s movement across borders is not a result of globalizing mobility bordering process; rather it is historical, predating the political border. The Epera’s contemporary movement across imposed borders undermines the process of demarcation of linear borders exemplifying hegemonic and counter-hegemonic boundary production (Paasi in Johnson et al., 2011) (Chapter 4). For the Ecuadorian military, border crossings represent a space to be controlled, monitored and classified, a perspective in line with historical understandings and engagements with Ecuador’s geopolitical boundaries as exemplified by twentieth century border disputes with Peru (Radcliffe, 1998). As such, the military partake in the geopolitical management of territory (Hyndman, 2012), contested by the Epera’s evasion of constructed military border space.

These distinct border-crossing experiences are, moreover, consequences of antagonistic ways of interpreting border space. The Grand Epera family’s movement between Ecuador and Colombia is a multi-scalar political act (Massey, 1993; Creswell, 2006; Hyndman, 2012). Contrary to the Epera, the military never actually cross the border, depending on Colombian armed forces to meet them where Ecuadorian territory ends. In this context the military do not engage in border-crossing that is in inherently disruptive (Steinberg, 2009). For the Ecuadorian military, the border remains a political site where sovereignty is performed (Salter, 2008) and spatially expressed (Eudaily & Smith, 2008).

Boundaries of modern states are a way for the state to show its administrative capacity in the whole of its territory (Painter & Jeffrey, 2009:23). In recent years a bi-national military alliance between Colombia and Ecuador has been reactivated and strengthened, following a short diplomatic rupture in 2008 over Colombian military incursion onto Ecuadorian soil. Bi-nationalism is now utilised by the COMBIFROM (Bi-national military alliance with Ecuador-Colombia and Ecuador-Peru) as the official term to address bi-lateral military and governmental joint actions along the Ecuador-Colombia boundary. In military terms this means joint Ecuadorian and Colombian troops controlling illegal activities as well as sharing information on irregular armed groups; it is not meant to protect bi-national peoples from encroaching insecurity (Interview Commanding officer X, 12 December 2013). In practice
the Ecuadorian armed forces are re-drawing the official border landscape without the participation of bi-national indigenous populations such as the Epera.

The demarcation of the Ecuador-Colombia boundary materialises in reinforcing sovereign borders (Mountz, 2013). The renewed governmental alliance between Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa and Colombia president Juan Manuel Santos is exemplary of this. One of the clearest consequences of the first bi-national presidential meeting in Tulcán, Ecuador in December 2012 was the classification of the border in legal and security terms. This is the first exercise to publicly delimit the boundary with the main objective of stopping the traffic of drugs, domestic fuel contraband and arms between the two countries. Since September 2013, the Colombian and Ecuadorian armed forces under the COMBIFRON have destroyed various illegal border crossings by creating large crevices five meteres deep and up to 100 metres long at various points of the boundary, as seen in the photograph below. This is not a wall, whose purpose is to completely impede mobility from one side to the other, but rather it draws inwards towards earth, preventing certain activities such as contraband of gas and petrol. Unlike fences and walls that are erected along borderlands, these crevices do not cover the entire 586 kilometers of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland; instead they are found only at points of the border, determined by a joint Ecuadorian-Colombian military commission. The normative development of this boundary as a linear divide is the result of international relations against non-state transnational actors (Brown, 2010), including, as will be evident in what follows, bi-national indigenous groups through gendered and racialised military practices.

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52 Until recently, the Ecuadorian and Colombian militaries did not work together along their shared border, as was apparent in earlier Agendas of Defence, where the Northern Border was depicted as a site of violence and political tension with Colombia. The current situation is the opposite. Joint military action between Colombia and Ecuador is reflective of strengthened governmental alliance between the two countries. For example two bi-national presidential cabinets took place (December 2012 and November 2013), with their respective declarations signed by Presidents Rafael Correa and Juan Manuel Santos on bi-national security.

53 Between September and November 2013, Ecuadorian and Colombian militaries carried out a joint inventory of legal, illegal and neutral border crossings - destroying some border crossings and strengthening others. According to the Ministry of Defence website, 43 illegal crossings were identified of which 11 were destroyed, four legalised and 28 had re-inforced security.
For Epera women, the border is categorised in neither security nor legal terms, or even recognised in this way. Furthermore, what the military characterise as “illegal” border crossings are the only way Epera Siapidaara women have known to cross the border. Central to Epera women’s approach to the geopolitical border is that there is not one official border crossing in the entire Esmeraldas province and the terrain along this borderland is made of up riverine or dense coastal jungle. Official border crossings are not part of the Epera’s cross-border imaginary landscape, which is instead determined by an ancestral nomadic relationship to the Colombian-Ecuadorian Pacific coast. Bi-nationalism for the Epera is understood as deriving from the Grand Epe family, in which the fluidity of Epera populations from one side of the border to the other is part of a transnational identity. As such, Epera women steer away from legal border crossings and rely on their own security measures to keep safe when crossing the boundary. “We call our family members and ask them if it is a safe moment to cross the border. Sometimes because of elections the border is closed down. Other times, there is conflict with the guerrilla and then we know it is not a good moment to cross”, expressed Neida Chirima (10-10-2013). Epera women recognise that their movements across the border are determined by insecurity caused by armed conflict and organised crime; however, they engage in alter-geopolitics (Koopman, 2011) understood as alternative securities developed from below and away from the formal recognised security sector. While Epera women acknowledge the need for military protection from rampant criminal activity in their vicinity, they question military commitment to protection of bi-national indigenous groups like the Epera. Information gathered from interviews and focus
groups with military men (to follow) suggest that the Epera as a whole are misrepresented and Epera women in particular are sidelined.

The bordering process affects the local scales of socio-spatial activity (Newman & Paasi, 1998) and specifically issues of belonging, affiliation and membership and how processes of inclusion and exclusion are institutionalised (Newman, 2006:147). This is manifested by the military’s lack of knowledge of who the Epera are and where they live along the border. For example, despite COMBIFROM’s meticulous process of demarcating the borderland, soldiers stationed there do not have the capacity to identify Epera ethnicity. The Epera are for the most part invisible to the military on the northern border landscape, although the northern border area is the only place where Ecuadorian military are operative and is considered the most important military mission. This is related to how military men conceive border space.

In the northern border, each military force has a different notion of space, despite a common objective of patrolling the same area. Ecuadorian military personnel interviews and focus groups emphasise that military control is essentially geographical in that “it is expressed in and constitutive of space, place and landscape, and those outcomes are variable, nuanced and fluid, rather than uniform” (Woodward, 2004:3). For airmen, the known space is the air, for the navy the river, and the army land; each arena affects how much interaction military men have with the local population. The army has the most interaction with local civilians and the air force the least. This is exemplified by the following interaction during a focus group: “The Epera? [pause] is that a type of pear?” an airman said when asked if anyone had heard of the Epera. “You see we are airmen, we don’t have a relationship with people, we just fly above them”, another airman added. Soldiers and officials from the three forces confirmed that they “did not have people on their maps” (Interview Soldier: Solano/Ignacio 12/2013). When shown on maps where the Epera were located (see Appendix D), most soldiers realised that they had interacted with Epera, often remarking, “Oh yes, that’s who those people are”. Often confused for Chachi or “Cayapas”, soldiers were most familiar with the Awa indigenous bi-national group.

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54 The Cayapas is a riverine in Esmeraldas and is the main river for the Epera.
The process through which the border is physically demarcated is closely linked to the management of borders through which the categories of separation and difference are created (Newman, 2006:148). Linked to militarisation, state security decision makers are, in the words of Cynthia Enloe, “wielding ethnic stereotypes to calculate state security” (2015:896). Commanding officers of border spaces in the Esmeraldas province did know of the existence and location of the Epera. However, in their management of border space, the bi-nationalism of the Epera is considered a threat to nationalistic views of sovereignty and as a result excludes Epera men in ways neighbouring indigenous groups are not. Ideas against ethnic bi-nationalism prevailed amongst high-level military officials along the border. A navy official from Guayaquil who had been in charge of the operations in the Esmeraldas region expressed such a sentiment:

> With these nationalities (indigenous), it is important to have good relations and to have control. Though they are not aware of it, it is important to have control over them. Because history tells us that nations eventually want to become an independent state with their own territory and law. Right? Then at some point these indigenous nations will want to become independent. So if we as a state and a nation of Ecuador neglect these small nations within our own territory, then this will happen. It is important to maintain communication with them and tell them that we are there to help them because they are within our territory and they are part of our territory. And that is part of an identification problem. What if I were to say I am first from Guayaquil then I am Ecuadorian. How come they can say they are first Shuar or Epera, then Ecuadorian or worse of all bi-national? Bi-nationalism is wrong and is a huge problem for the Ecuadorian state (Interview Official: Gonzalo, Ramiro 01/2014).

Historically, the processes of collective indigenous self-identification have concerned high-level military officials and prompted the inclusion of indigenous men through conscription in order to assure that Ecuador was the only nation indigenous people ascribed to (Selmeski, 2007). Radcliffe (1998), referencing a border dispute with Peru called the Twintza conflict, also alludes to the tensions that ideas of indigenous nationality (including bi-nationalism) presented for the military’s idea of the Ecuadorian nation. Thus, it is no surprise that bi-national identity is considered to be a threat along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland by the military participants in this study; rather it is consistent with previous historical undertakings that the institution has carried out to ensure that indigenous people
become and remain only Ecuadorian. Bi-nationalism challenges the military’s notion of “patria”\(^{55}\) and unity as a nation and the very reason they are present on the border, which is to perform territorial sovereignty. Across the different hierarchical ranks (soldiers, officials and commanding officers) and through the three different forces (Navy, Army and Air Force), bi-national identity and performativity are both perceived as a threat to the nation-state border and a potential challenge to national security\(^{56}\). As mentioned above, the military is undergoing a demarcating process whereby sovereignty is spatialised to optimise security from cross-border threats. The latter is the main goal of the military along Ecuador’s northern border. Epera bi-nationalism makes them suspects in the eyes of Ecuadorian military and viewed as possible dissidents.

As such, Epera men are actively excluded from partaking in military operations along the border and relegated to ethnicised divisions of military labour (Enloe, 2015). The Chachi, who are not considered a bi-national indigenous group are utilised as part of strategic military operations based on their detailed knowledge of the area and their alliances with other indigenous groups along the border in order to facilitate infiltration and information gathering. Radcliffe (1998) noted that Shuar-Achuar bi-national indigenous groups were recruited in large numbers for Ecuador’s war with Peru in 1995, resulting in their portrayal as national heroes when the war ended. In dealing with the spill-over effects of the Colombian conflict, indigenous men in this context are also sought after for their local knowledge but have not been made into national heroes. The importance of recruiting indigenous men into the marine infantry in the areas surrounding Borbón, including areas where Epera live was explained in terms of their unique military intelligence. Chachi men, for example, were recruited on the basis that they would know the territory as well as the different cultures that lived in their territorial surroundings\(^{57}\). Chachi recruitment is justified in terms of indigenous specialised knowledge and social networks which are otherwise unavailable:

Because if we are in an area where we do not speak the language then we will have cultural problems. Because when we enter their territory we are violating their rules.

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\(^{55}\) See Radcliffe 1996 for a further discussion of patria and national symbols in connection with the Ecuadorian military and nation-hood.

\(^{56}\) The threat of bi-nationalism was expressed by five commanding officers (who are stationed or were stationed on the northern border), one sub commanding officer and four officials, and the four focus groups (20 – 30 men in each).

\(^{57}\) Off the record he also told me that, given that the Chachi could not have entered the marine infantry based on military criteria, they were exonerated from taking entry exams.
And we as the marine infantry are very conscious of that. We need to patrol the areas where they live because it is the border region, a very strategic area for us. But we need to do it in a way that does not cause the local population to reject us. So the only way to do this was to find an intermediator, and these intermediaries were young indigenous Chachi. They were brought along in all the missions we carried out in the northern part of Esmeraldas; along all the rivers….the truth is we are the authority and law. We represent the state. And we could say that since we are the state then you have to do what we say. But that would create problems, so we wanted to avoid that. (Interview Comanding officer X: 01/2014).

In this scenario, indigenous men are not brought into the military to make them into mestizos and extend the national citizenship project (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). Rather, Ecuadorian military rely on static notions of the indigeneity of border indigenous men in order to fulfil security operations. Not only are Chachi used for their local knowledge of the area, but also their knowledge and connection with other ethnicities along the border space, including the Epera. The indigenous groups which are being recruited obey logics of strategic and intelligence military operations, exemplifying the “state elite’s use of ethnic and racial calculations to build and deploy militaries” (Enloe, 2015: 896, 1980).

Moreover Chachi men are recruited and not Epera men despite the fact that these two groups live side by side. The reasons for this decision are again related to issues of state security, ambivalent status of bi-national indigenous groups, and ethnic stereotypes.

Only the Chachi. The Eperas no ... because they are a group that comes from Colombia, that have been displaced into our territory. They started to move here in the year 2010. Initially their settlements were very small, but due to problems from the other side they have started to cross and move to Ecuador. We knew that they had many needs; I know this because I always said that commanders in Esmeraldas have to worry about the cultural issue. That’s why I was always well informed about the different cultures that lived there. I knew all the problems that border populations were facing from San Lorenzo to Borbón. I was very well informed (Interview Colonel X. 01-2014).
The perception of other commanding officers of the Epera as having Colombian origin negates the possibility that they could be bi-national. The constant flow of people with ID cards from both sides of the border creates discomfort among the Ecuadorian military who attribute the flow of drugs, arms and people to particular groups whose territoriality is defined as bi-national (Focus Groups 12/2013; Interview Colonel X 01/2014; Interview Commanding officer X 01/2014). Given the Ecuadorian military’s emphasis on the single unit of national identity as Ecuadorian, over other possible nationalities (such as indigenous nationalities), bi-national indigenous identity is threatening for Ecuadorian military personnel. If it is acknowledged, it is highly suspect and linked to illicit activities.

4.5 The Epera’s relationship to the Ecuadorian Military

In contrast to analysis by Gill (1997), Canessa (2012) and Selmeski (2007) that highlights incentives that attract indigenous men into Latin American militaries, the Epera do not encourage men or women to join the Ecuadorian or Colombian military. Likewise, the Epera do not associate a hyper-masculinity with the military as scholars note in Andean indigenous communities (Canessa, 2012). During fieldwork in Santa Rosa de los Epera, one male was recruited into the Ecuadorian army. In the life plans discussed in the community, military service was never mentioned as a profession to aspire to; in part this could be related to Colombian Epera views which describe the militarisation of their territory as a main cause of ethnic elimination (Colombian Epera Life Plan, 2012). In Colombia, indigenous men are exempt from obligatory military service. Moreover, the consequences of militarisation (such as forced displacement and forced recruitment into irregular armed groups) are vilified amongst the Epera. Hence both in Ecuador and in Colombia conscription is voluntary, with very few recorded cases of Epera men involved in the Ecuadorian Armed Forces.

Epera women’s relationship to the Ecuadorian military along border space is distinct from that of Epera males. As noted, the recruitment of indigenous men along the border with Colombia occurs for strategic purposes. And even though the Epera are not brought into the military, interactions with the navy and army exist because of their presence in one of the areas of the borderland where the military is operative. However, this occurs only through male-to-male interactions, because commanding officers think that indigenous males are jealous of their women. As an ex-head of operations at the San Lorenzo military base stated,
…the Epera and Awa are very distrustful of any men getting near their women. We are very careful to not have contact with the women because we do not want to anger the men, especially since we need to have some level of trust with them. We always need information from locals, and angering them over women, is not what we want to do (Interview: Larra/Miguel: 01/2014).

Thus the military’s ethnic politics are intertwined with ideas of gender relations (Enloe, 2015) resulting in a masculinised ethnic sovereignty. Epera women also suggest that the male military reinforce the male Epera leadership, strengthening the latter’s discriminatory practices towards female Epera leadership (Chapter 6).

The relationship between the Epera and the military is only amongst men – we women have hardly any direct relationship with them. Even when I was president of the Epera National Organisation, the military maintained the relationship with the men of our community (Lina Silferdo 10-01-2014).

Even though Lina was the president of the Epera National Organisation (NAESE) and thus an authority, being an indigenous woman excluded her from having access or relating to the military. This is further aggravated by an unwritten rule that only military men are deployed on Ecuador’s northern border (Zaragocin, 2012)58. Military men justify their male-only relationship because they believe Epera men are jealous of their women. Therefore, in order to safeguard their relationship with Epera men, they never consider speaking to women59. Epera women confirmed that there is in fact very little physical interaction between Epera women and Ecuadorian military men60. This extends feminist political geographers’ attention to the gender coding of military life in which men are warriors and women the supporters (Dowler, 1998 in Brown & Staeheli, 2003:250 Enloe, 1998).

As nominal citizens, the security of Epera women depends on Ecuadorian military officials. In the general context of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland described in this section,

58 During fieldwork, two women belonging to the marine infantry were deployed to the Esmeraldas border base, as a trial to see if they could ‘cope’ with the operation’s objectives.
59 The focus groups with military men demonstrate that the interactions with bi-national indigenous have always been with men.
60 I witnessed military officials coming into contact only with indigenous males in the community, leaving women and myself out of the conversation.
the Epera are exposed to a number of types of violence in which the military are in charge of their protection. However, the ability of the military to effectively attend to this is hampered by the military’s misrecognition of the Epera as shown in this chapter. Furthermore, for Epera women the military’s misunderstanding of internal Epera gender relations has resulted in a masculinised ethnic sovereignty between Epera indigenous males and the Ecuadorian state (military and government) which contributes to their risk of ethnic elimination and insecurity (Chapter 6). Epera women do not have direct access to information distributed by the Ecuadorian military such as when the border is closed for political elections or when medical missions will take place. Rather Epera women depend on Epera male leaders for information passed on by the Ecuadorian military through the male-to-male relationship. However, as will be evidenced in the dissertation Epera women’s relationship with male political leaders is fraught with tension and at times exemplary of gender-based violence. As such, Epera women endure different scales of violence exerted on them by Epera male leaders and the Ecuadorian state, exemplifying overlapping geopolitical forms of violence from a masculinised ethnic sovereignty.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter describes the broad panorama of encroaching insecurity, violence and pollution that makes up the everyday life of Epera on the Ecuador side of the border, as expressed by Epera women, that in the following chapter will be further defined as processes of ethnic elimination. As noted above, the Ecuadorian military and Epera create two antagonistic border spaces deriving from contrasting perceptions of boundaries and border-crossing. The Ecuadorian military are actively demarcating the border, exemplified in spatialised sovereignty, while the Epera experience the borderland from the imagined geography of the Grand Epera family (Chapter 4). Furthermore, the Ecuadorian military never cross the border, while for some Epera this is part of daily life and crucial for the village’s sense of place (Chapter 4). The military’s role on the border matters to the extent that they have demarcated a border that has never existed for the Grand Epera family. The geopolitical management of this territory blends with the racialisation and gendering of border indigenous populations, from which the Epera women are actively excluded. Epera women express that the military are not the proximate cause of ethnic rules and violence that

61 The Colombian government closes its border during national and local (border) political elections. The Ecuadorian military is in charge of informing the border population.
come down so forcefully on the bodies of Epera women (Chapter 5). However as I have suggested their exclusion strengthens geopolitical forms of violence, resulting from a masculinised ethnic sovereignty that arises from the Ecuadorian military and Epera men (Chapter 6). The rest of the thesis traces the multi-scalar process of ethnic elimination on Epera women by drawing attention to territorial indigenous boundary-making practices around Santa Rosa de los Epera (Chapter 4) embodied in ethnic boundary-making by Epera women (Chapter 5), and to the struggles faced in the geopolitical forms of violence on the Ecuador-Colombia borderland (Chapter 6).
CHAPTER 5: The gendered spaces of Epera ethnic elimination

The notion of a logic of elimination (Wolfe, 1999, 2006) occurs through state abandonment, cultural amalgamation and territorial replacement of Epera peoples (Morgensen, 2011; Rifkin, 2009), triggering their slow death manifested in the steady pacing of physical attenuation, environmental deterioration and insecurity (Berlant, 2007; Povenilli, 2011). From a feminist geographical perspective, emphasis is on the everyday scale of ethnic elimination evidenced in the spaces and bodies of Epera women in Santa Rosa de los Epera and the River Cayapas. Epera women spoke about the processes contributing to slow death in Santa Rosa through river transect flows, participatory diagraming and drawings of everyday space included in this chapter.

This chapter, therefore, focuses on the Epera’s slow death by drawing out the complex web of factors (state abandonment, territorial replacement, cultural amalgamation and resulting insecurity) experienced by Epera women in their everyday spaces and experiences. Following this, Epera women’s interpretations of these dynamics are analysed to show how they are on the one hand naturalised by emphasising ethnic elimination as a result of mestizaje practices, and on the other experiencing structural invasion of settler colonialism. Finally, this chapter looks at the strategies employed by Epera women against the settler colonial logic of elimination through selective engagement with state services and indigenous re-bordering practices resulting in an Epera-only space.

5.1 Slow death in the everyday lives and spaces of Epera women

Feminist geography understandings of the ‘everyday’ prove useful for understanding Epera women’s context. On the one hand, a focus on the everyday life of women assures their visibility (Dyck, 2005), while on the other, everyday activities and routines reflect the power structures imposed on women (Rose, 1993). Gendered every day and structural factors are intertwined, embedded and produced through place (Nelson & Seager, 2005). This section focuses on drawing out the implications of structural factors of settler colonial biopower as experienced by Epera women in Santa Rosa de los Epera and the River Cayapas as the most important spaces where state abandonment, territorial replacement and insecurity occur. As will be evidenced, slow death occurs in these places not from dramatic one-off
events, but through the gradual pacing of ordinariness in daily life (Berlant, 2007; Povinelli, 2012).

A typical day for an Epera woman in Santa Rosa de los Epera involves cooking three meals, harvesting nearby farm land, fishing, washing clothes in the river, making artesanias (craftwork), gathering water and looking after their many children (usually between four and eight). The dock and platform in Santa Rosa de los Epera is an everyday space for all members of the community but especially, given allocated gender relations, for women and girls. Gender relations are reproduced spatially in Santa Rose. For Epera women, this is the space where they do many of their daily activities (See Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 below). And since it is women, in comparison to males, that spend the majority of their time in Santa Rosa, they are the ones who are always on the platform. In the meantime, men leave the community early in the morning as day workers and laborers in nearby African palm plantations or lumber companies. Some men leave for lengthy periods (6 months or more) to other parts of Ecuador to work on flower plantations and come back sparingly throughout the year, leaving some households in the hand of women.

Figure 5.1 Dock and entry into Santa Rosa de los Epera
River space is central to Epera women’s lives and culture. Referring to the Chocó region in Colombia, Oslender acknowledges river space as part of his larger definition of aquatic space, including high levels of precipitation, large tidal ranges, intricate river networks, mangrove swamps and frequent inundations (2002:92). The Esmeraldas region of Ecuador is similar to the Colombian space Oslender writes about and so his analysis can be extended to Santa Rosa de los Epera. Aquatic space is “the underlying spatial ordering logic of everyday social interactions” (Oslender, 2002:90) an insight valid within Santa Rosa as the River Cayapas connects the Epera with other smaller Epera settlements along the river-way. The aquatic spatiality of the river extends in Santa Rosa to the interface between the dock and the River Cayapas, and imaginatively to Colombian rivers. The river comprises the symbolic reference point of identity, and is central to identity formation and integral to everyday practices (Restrepo, 1995; Oslender, 2002). The drawings that follow are a small sample of the 21 drawings Epera women made about their everyday space; and summarise what the majority of the women discussed and highlight core themes and specific spaces, including the river.

Alicia, a member of the women’s group and a 29-year-old mother of four children, drew the importance of the river where she fishes and travels with her children (Figure 4.3). She shows herself fishing on a small canoe while her children are depicted inside the house or on the jetty by the river. Next to her is pictured a fishing net for catching shrimp. When asked about the drawing she stated,
We depend on this river for everything. I wash in it, I eat from it and I drink from it. But I also know that it is bad for me because it has caused illness and sometimes death. But it’s not the river’s fault – it’s because of everyone who contaminates it, like our neighbours with the African palm, the mining and the timber companies. The river has also been the cemetery for some of our children who go too far in and get caught in the currents. That’s why we don’t allow the children to go too far out or to bathe at night when none of the women are here to supervise. The river isn’t bad, we have to respect it (02-26-2014).

This passage and many others suggest the river is central to Epera livelihoods as a source of food and water for daily subsistence. Despite its dangers, both natural and man-made, the Epera are highly dependent on it. Epera diets are largely based on fish, shrimp, crocodile and turtles caught or bought along the river.

![Figure 5.3 Alicia’s drawing of her everyday space 02-26-2014](image)

62 The following women’s drawings also highlighted this aspect: Florinda Chirimia, Flor Chiripua, Luzmari Mejia, Neida Quintero and Sandra Cruz.
Women’s drawings and testimonies concerning the river raised issues on access to clean water and the abandonment of the state in this process. Luzmari, a 17-year-old mother of four, mentioned that families who can afford it buy large containers of water for consumption purposes whereas poorer families use rainwater or the river water for cooking. Such inequalities were not so stark a few years ago when the community had access to municipal clean water. However in 2010, because the Epera could not afford to pay the $5 monthly bills, the water supply was cut. Lorena, a 34-year-old woman leader in the village, commented how she voluntarily collected money from village members to pay for the monthly water bills. After a $1000 debt was incurred some women contested the marketisation of water arguing that clean water came from rivers in Colombia and Ecuador, and so the government should clean up the river instead of making them pay. Furthermore, water facilities were not kept up by the local government and at the moment women would not have access to the water even if they could afford it. The abandoned water plant set up by the International Migration Organisation\textsuperscript{63} sits on top of a small hill, surrounded by African palm (Figure 4.4).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{abandoned_water_plant.png}
\caption{Abandoned water treatment centre, less than 1 kilometre from Santa Rosa de los Epera}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{63} According to an Epera leader, this project was funded around 2005 and was abandoned by local governmental officials who did not maintain the infrastructure necessary to keep it functioning.
Women’s perspectives are antagonistic to water privatisation and its redefinition as a commodity, politics brought into Ecuador in the 1990s by the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and the US Agency for International Development. These institutions promoted water rights liberalisation and water institutional reform, policies adopted by several Ecuadorian governments (Andolina, 2012). From the perspective of the Epera, by contrast, women emphasised that even when the community did pay for water, it would be provided at night for only a couple of hours. Hence, it was not easily accessible, unlike the river.

Women’s narratives about their everyday spaces also recount the lack of conventional bathrooms. One communal bathroom exists yet is usually locked and open only for communal meetings, festivities or occasional visitors to Santa Rosa. According to women, ‘el monte es nuestro baño’ meaning the jungle is our bathroom, a problematic solution because of the risk of dengue, fecal-borne diseases and occasional snake-bites. The primary school lacks a bathroom and a water fountain, although the average daily temperature in Santa Rosa ranges from 30 to 40 degrees Celsius. The lack of rubbish collection systems and neighbouring communities means that trash is thrown onto the marsh land beneath the houses held up by fragile wooden stilts. Everyday trash, human waste and animals for consumption (pigs and chickens) sit below the Epera’s houses, which stand on stilts in marsh land (see Figure 4.5). During the rainy season, the mix of waste seeps into their houses. Thus the lack of basic social services, such as rubbish and sewage systems and access to clean water, comprise examples of structural state abandonment of the Epera peoples in Santa Rosa.
The lack of access to clean water and the contamination of the River Cayapas have direct effects on the bodies of Epera women, further illustrated in the following drawing made by Lucy Garrabato. In Figure 4.6 (below), Lucy Garrabato, the eldest living Epera woman, illustrates herself at home, her artesania (craftwork), the river and her chakra (small farm area). She draws herself in Epera traditional dress and with spots on her body to demonstrate the different illnesses that she and other Epera believe (with good reason) are spread by bathing in the contaminated river. In her drawing the river is depicted as a dangerous space with regards to contamination as well as a place where bandits transit.
During the discussion of her drawing, she mentioned,

I can only make a living by selling *artesania* (craftwork). All my children have left, I live alone and am very poor. I am sick but I do not have money to get well. I don’t have money to go down to Borbón because it costs $1 to get there and I can’t sell *artesania* because I have no one to sell them to here. I can’t just leave my *artesania* in Borbón, because it’s dangerous over there. So I have to bring it back and forth – even though sometimes we get robbed on our way back to Santa Rosa and there goes all my earnings! Here (in Santa Rosa) I am safe from the bandits, but I am poor and sick (10-03-2014).

In reference to this drawing, another older Epera woman, Teresa, commented how she was going blind, because of a parasite found in the river. This condition, she added, interfered with making *artesania* which then led to her not affording medical treatment. *Artesania* is one of the few income-generating activities available to women. This activity includes the production of straw vases, baskets, purses as well as beaded jewellery (see Figure 4.7 and Figure 4.8 below). The type of straw (*chocolatina*) needed to create *artesania* doesn’t grow in Santa Rosa de los Epera territory; rather they buy it from down the river past Borbón.
Artesania is usually stored in the communal day care centre and only taken out when visitors (usually governmental or NGO personnel) visit Santa Rosa.

Figure 5.7 Epera women working the material needed to make their artesanias (05-06-2014)

Figure 5.8 Epera women with their artesania
Alongside this, public boats pass by Santa Rosa de los Epera throughout the day in three shifts: between 6 am and 8 am, at midday and the last boat at 4 pm. During these times four or five public boats come up and down the river. If one wants to ride on these boats, then one must waive a piece of clothing from the small platform at the edge of Santa Rosa. These boats are long canoes in which plastic chairs are cut to fit the width of the boat. Animals, furniture and provisions are carried at the ends of these boats with 15 to 20 people in the middle. Each way on these communal boats cost US $1. If one misses the last boat, then one either has to sleep in Borbón at an Epera’s home or utilise the one communal boat belonging to the Epera village. The latter is hardly an option given that a gallon of petrol costs US $14, representing a third of an average woman’s monthly income (usually around US $50). As is evident, transportation along this space is difficult and costly for the Epera. The distance between Santa Rosa and Borbón, hampers the production and commercialisation of artesania, limiting women’s ability to access wider markets. This in turn limits economic autonomy and access to medical treatments to cure illness acquired from the river. Lucy Garrabato’s comments on her drawing and other women’s testimonies highlighted the consequences of state abandonment in not providing clean water services and adequate rubbish and sewage systems. Epera women are ill because of the contamination of the river, but cannot easily obtain treatment because, despite free-state health care services in Borbón, they do not have the money to make the journey. The possibility of making a living through producing and selling artesania in Borbón, is an option which is further complicated by insecurity associated with travelling to and from that town.

Another factor present in Santa Rosa de los Epera is the pressure for territorial replacement which occurs through environmental destruction and dispossession of native forest at the hands of extractivist industries. Lorena Grueso, president of the village women’s organisation, is a 32-year-old mother to three children and, when asked to talk about her drawing (Figure 4.9), highlighted her house, animals, crops and the river space as places where she socialises with other women.
Lorena was particularly proud of her guayaba, banana and coconut trees, and believed that the surrounding plantations generated chemicals that were seeping into her land and affecting the food for her family. Lorena stressed that the African palm plantations found on the edges of Santa Rosa de los Epera were a problem for the settlement, because of their environmental effects (see Figure 4.10 below). The spread of this crop causes irreversible damage to the soil affecting nearby crops that are crucial for daily subsistence, and have been documented to cause systemic dispossession of lands in Esmeraldas (Ramos, 2003). Lorena stated,

It’s the African palm that surrounds us. It’s all around us you see, but it’s not just the African palm. We also know that river pollution is [caused by] the dumping of large dead animals, the mining upstream [and] the timber company that you pass by when you arrive at Santa Rosa (10-03-2014).
Another woman leader, 45-year-old Lidia, added that in 2005 the community was visited by African palm owners who came with two large bags of an estimated US $70,000 to buy the land from the Epera and extend African palm into Santa Rosa. Lidia further added that in 2007 they were visited by a mining company that wanted to do soil exploration in Santa Rosa. In both cases Epera woman and male leaders resisted the monetary offers. Pressures for the dispossession of Epera from their territory occur through direct efforts to buy land from the Epera as well as from the destruction of the environment, making Santa Rosa de los Epera difficult to inhabit. According to Epera women’s testimonies, the contamination of the river and harvesting land causes chronic preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and anaemia (Interview: Carmen/Chirimia, 12/2013; Viviana Chiri, 02/2014; Alejandra Mejia, 02/2014).

The last aspect that characterises Epera everyday space and experience is insecurity caused by criminal activity related to the spill-over effects of the Colombian conflict nearby. In addition to the aquatic space directly in front of Santa Rosa highlighted in the women’s drawings above, the River Cayapas connects the Epera to Colombia via San Lorenzo and Borbón (the closest border towns). In order to draw out Epera women’s experience along the river, the women developed a joint account of their perception of security and insecurity perceptions along this river space (see Figure 4.11). Epera women express strong understandings of security issues along this space, because the river serves to connect the community with important education and employment facilities. Nevertheless, the river is
constructed by powerful actors into an unsafe and unpredictable space. Bandits steal motorboats as well as passengers’ belongings and cash when transiting through this space. A young woman shared the following story during a transect river exercise:

We had temporarily re-located down the river in order to work and save up for a motor for our canoe. However, as soon as we were using it to come back to Santa Rosa, we were attacked right under the bridge, about two kilometres from Santa Rosa. When that happens there is nothing you can do. All our work went to nothing (Viviana, 10-11-2013).

Epera women point out three areas where insecurity in terms of violent attacks or robbery occurs on a systematic basis. The first is underneath the bridge mentioned by Viviana above, where the timber company operates - an easy place to attack because of the highway a few metres from the river’s edge, facilitating the bandits’ escape. The second place is on the outskirts of Borbón town and everywhere within Borbón town, even in Epera neighborhoods. According to women’s accounts, violence is attributed to the presence of organised crime, money laundering and drug trafficking (Interview: Grueso, Ana, 11/2013; Quiji, Neida, 10/2014; Cruz Sandra, 02/2014). Borbón is particularly depicted by the Epera women as a very unsafe area characterised by the drug trade and delinquency, where women feel “unsafe”. As Carmen mentioned, “I go in and out as quickly as possible. I try not to stay too long and we always go together with other women” (02-12-2013).
Epera women make the canoe trip to Borbón for several reasons. The majority go several days a week to buy food and other supplies, or run errands, while fewer women make the daily trip to attend high school, given that school in Santa Rosa de los Epera only reaches.
the primary level. The communal boats leave passengers on the Borbón dock. Along this dock there is a market during the mornings and a slaughterhouse for cows, whose waste is thrown into the river. A petrol station is also on this dock, where contraband occurs. On a canoe trip to Borbón together, we (I, five women and three men of the community) witnessed illegal petrol transactions – with a large container going down river supposedly to distribute petrol to whom the Epera consider to be narco-African palm owners\textsuperscript{65} in the area. After the participatory transect exercises, I asked why petrol trafficking wasn’t discussed. One woman responded:

If the mayor of Borbón does not talk about this – all the illegality around us – why would we talk about it? We don’t even talk about this in communal assemblies or discussions. Because we know there is nothing we can do – it’s beyond something we can fix and we also don’t want to get into trouble. But everyone knows – the military, the government. Everyone knows about this and they receive money so that nothing changes (Florinda, 11-09-2013).

The trafficking of petrol is one example of widespread illicit activities surrounding Santa Rosa de los Epera integrated into legal activities such as African palm plantations and logging companies. At the end of the other side of Borbón along the river is a Capitania de marina (Marine base), which is an old fenced house with one boat docked in front. This is the military boat that goes along the Cayapas and Santiago rivers. According to the women, the military know what happens in Borbón but do not address the illegal activities that take place; hence, the military is not associated with making their space more secure as shown in Chapter 3. This is yet another example of state negligence in providing Epera women with protection.

For the Epera women, security is place-dependent along the river. There is a difference between the space in front of Santa Rosa de los Epera and the aquatic space that the river presents and even relative to rivers in Colombia. In this sense, I am arguing that river space in this context is appropriated in ways analogous to land dynamics. For example, the drawings above depicted the Epera women’s everyday space in which the river is central and where they feel an ownership towards that specific part of the river. Meanwhile, as is evident from the large river diagram, Epera women highlight different feelings along the

\textsuperscript{65}According to Epera male and female leaders, the owners of the African palm plantations are men involved in the drug trade.
river, dependent on who or what is present at particular moments. Like Oslendar’s notion of landscapes of fear (2008), which is part of his idea of geographies of terror for the Colombian scenario, I wish to call this the riverscape of fear.

The sum of the different factors associated with territorial replacement, state abandonment and insecurity in Santa Rosa so far mentioned are shown in Figure 4.12 (below). After doing the individual drawings of their everyday spaces, the women (a group of 40) drew the following schematic representation of perceived threats in Santa Rosa de los Epera. Epera women highlighted the effects of pollution from neighbouring African palm plantations, mining, inadequate sewage systems, large dead animals and the logging industry. In their understanding of these regular features in their everyday space, the women noted that fish and shrimp are contaminated, skin diseases are rampant, and dengue fever and diarrhoea is endemic. Finally women emphasised the existence of delinquency and crime along the River Cayapas.

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66 In this session 40 women were present, although not all of the women wanted to participate in the drawings. All women did, however, partake in the discussion that followed.
Slow death, defined as “the physical wearing out and deterioration” (Berlant, 2007:754) of Epera women has been exemplified by the effects of settler colonial bio-power comprised through state abandonment and territorial replacement, core activities that define the logic of elimination in Santa Rosa and along the River Cayapas (Wolfe, 2006; Morgensen, 2011; Rifkin, 2009). State abandonment occurs when indigenous peoples do not conform to national geographical imaginations (Rifkin, 2009), and are left out by liberal forms of governance as a way to replace indigenous territory in favour of settlers.
The lack of clean water, adequate sewage and rubbish systems, fluvial public transportation and protection provided by security forces (military and police) are flagged up in the drawings and diagrams made by Epera women to illustrate state abandonment and negligence. Pressures on Epera women for territorial replacement occur through the environmental destruction caused primarily by the African palm industry, but also from timber and mining activities near Santa Rosa. Epera women also mentioned the efforts of African palm owners and mining companies to buy and explore their territory. This research has added another element to demonstrate how the logic of elimination occurs in indigenous spaces, through gendered perceptions of spatial insecurity. Epera women live within one of the most insecure regions of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland due to important drug-trade routes and an escalation of the Colombian conflict. War and its spill-over effects literally surround women’s everyday life.

The drawings, interviews and testimonies of the everyday life of Epera women highlight the manifestation of slow death, referring “to a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life,” (Berlant, 2007:759), meaning Epera women’s illness and poverty result from efforts to continue life despite all the endemic factors constituting their elimination. It is in the very spaces where women gather and cook food, wash clothes, sleep and carry out activities essential for living that threats to life are most forceful. Whether in the space of their homes, dock or the river they transit, Epera women experience the physical attenuation of permanent place-based threats in the everyday and ordinary temporality (Berlant, 2007). It is not the result of one dramatic event or even a series of events, but rather in the ordinary, chronic and deteriorated spaces they inhabit and the preventable diseases they endure (Povinelli, 2011). Epera women suffer from preventable diseases such as dengue, diarrhoea, blindness and skin diseases that are consequences of the structural invasion of settler colonialism manifested in territorial replacement and state desertion. Similarly, Povinelli mentions how statistics on indigenous health and welfare are dramatic but that the diseases they endure are preventable, chronic, endemic and not spectacular (2011:144). The blame of what she calls quasi-events that lead to mass deaths are masked by displacing responsibility of neoliberalism onto individual created indigenous subjects. She contends that social, economic and political life is organised around the neoliberal view of individual risk and how this has infiltrated settler states to blame the indigenous individual for being

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67 Povinelli (2011) contends that neoliberalism’s effect on indigenous peoples is the formation of individual subjects in contrast to the collective nature of indigenous contexts.
poor, sick and dying a slow death. Extending Povinelli’s ideas to Epera women in Santa Rosa, explains in part how blame is distributed amongst women instead of holding the state accountable, as will be further analysed in the following section where mestizaje is considered by some Epera women as the cause of their ethnic elimination.

5.2 Epera women’s interpretation of ethnic elimination

The causes for the slow death of Epera are contested amongst the Epera women, highlighting different ways in which Epera women interpret ethnic elimination. Some women blame poverty and environmental destruction as the basis for the elimination of Epera ethnicity, while other women argue that mestizaje and sorcery within the Epera confined space of Santa Rosa are the real cause. This means that the elements that comprise the logic of elimination such as state abandonment and territorial replacement also occur alongside cultural amalgamation (assimilation) of settler’s culture (Morgensen, 2011). In this section, these different interpretations of ethnic elimination are drawn out to demonstrate how Epera women understand these processes and how these contrasting perspectives play out in Santa Rosa de los Epera, illustrated in the following anecdote.

A 7-year old girl was placed in the middle of the Casa Grande (spiritual and cultural centre) wrapped in white fabric and placed amongst candles. Her small body had been declared dead inside a communal boat making its way back from a nearby health-centre, after doctors explained that she was dying of anaemia and that it was too late to do anything about it. During the day people expressed condolences to the family who remained next to the corpse. “Uno menos” – one less of us, was repeated amongst those present, alluding to the communal sentiment of a disappearing Epera people. At night the entire community was summoned to sleep in the Casa Grande surrounding the corpse. Families slept on the floor with sheets covering the wooden planks, and mosquito nets over them. Community members of all ages were obliged to be present - even babies and elders. Sleep was not allowed all night long. Instead, the community gathered around to play cards and bingo, and though they were not allowed to drink, a few drunken men were wandering around by early morning. At

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68 According to Lina, the community health representative of the Eperara woman for the Borbón health centre in Santa Rosa de los Eperara, 80 per cent of children in Santa Rosa de los Epera have anaemia.
around 2 am in the morning, the body was put in a coffin ready for the burial in Santa Rosa de los Epera the following morning.  

Epera women in the community expressed conflicting ideas about the causes of death of this child and three children who died soon after, over the course of several months. Lina, the community health representative, suggested that the children’s deaths were due to bad nutritional habits of the Epera (mainly the mothers she emphasised), as well as a lack of clean water which causes constant diarrhea among the children. Lina flagged up state abandonment by accusing the local government for not providing clean water as well as Epera mothers for not adequately feeding their children. The mothers of the deceased children, however, blamed communal narratives that convey anti-‘mestizaje’ sentiments towards their children, who are not considered ‘pure Epera’, attributing the children’s deaths to sorcery and poisoning done by other Epera. At the heart of the latter group’s accusations is Epera’s rigid conception of ethno-racial relations, whereby ‘cultural-purity’ is valued and ‘mestizaje’ is considered to contribute to Epera physical and cultural disappearance. ‘Mestizaje’ is the interbreeding with a non-cultural pure Epera, and is the real culprit for the deaths, they argue, because they are no longer Epera but converted into ‘mestizos’, considered as peoples without culture or identity. In the latter scenario, Epera women consider ethnic elimination in terms of cultural amalgamation, or the forced assimilation of settler’s culture (Wolfe, 2006; Morgensen, 2011) as the real cause and manifestation of ethnic elimination. According to this perspective, it is the dying of Epera culture through ‘mestizaje’ that results in the physical attenuation of Epera physical life, manifested in the death of Epera children. The implications of cultural amalgamation (further reviewed in Chapters 5 and 6) for some Epera women naturalises the structural causes of ethnic elimination by attributing slow death to Epera partnerships, sexuality and women’s bodies instead of state desertion or territorial replacement. For some Epera women, having an Epera child with a non-Epera becomes a more determinant cause of slow death than drinking water from a contaminated river every day. In sum, competing narratives arise on the causes of ethnic elimination, between women who attribute structural factors of state desertion and territorial replacement and those who blame cultural amalgamation, elements constituting ethnic elimination. Moreover, what this means for all the women is that instead of demonstrating collective outrage at the deplorable health-care facilities or the contamination of the river ways by neighbouring industries, Epera women

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69 There is a cemetery next to the school inside Santa Rosa de los Epera, although some Epera prefer to bury family members in the Borbón cemetery.
distribute blame amongst themselves. The clash in perspectives further debilitates women’s social cohesion as responses to cultural amalgamation results in violence against women (further reviewed in Chapters 5 and 6).

Drawing on postcolonial critic Elizabeth Povinelli once more is crucial to situate the interpretation by Epera women of processes of slow death. Though Povinelli does not engage with cultural amalgamation amongst indigenous peoples, I extend her analysis of distributing blame amongst indigenous peoples instead of holding the state accountable, already mentioned. The slow death of the Epera is not the result of a singular event but part of the contemporary patterns of settler colonialism along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland and that the danger of cultural amalgamation or forced cultural assimilation of settler’s culture through *mestizaje* is yet another example of ethnic elimination. The interpretation by Epera of the process of elimination they endure highlights that not only do territorial replacement, state abandonment and cultural amalgamation co-exist but they also come in tension with one another. There are different views on what is causing Epera attrition, causing blame to be mainly distributed amongst themselves instead of at the structural causes of their attrition. Thus, exemplifying Povinelli’s claim that neoliberalism has succeeded in created individual indigenous subjects who blame themselves for their collective death while displacing structural causes.

5.3 Epera women’s strategies against ethnic elimination

So far this chapter has focused on how the logic of elimination occurs in the everyday life and practices of Epera women as well as the contested interpretations for causes of slow death amongst the Epera. In this section I turn to the strategies Epera women employ to deter territorial replacement, state abandonment and cultural amalgamation, suggesting that it is through the creation of Santa Rosa as an Epera-only place and selective engagement with the state that this occurs.

5.3.1 Indigenous re-bordering – move to create security

As a way to fend off the consequences of ethnic elimination evidenced above, Epera women engage in spatial demarcation practices that determine where the boundary of
indigeneity takes place along the interface between the river and the dock. This section highlights how Epera women monitor the entry of Colombian Epera and non-Epera into Santa Rosa de los Epera through their daily activities on the dock, arguing that these are exemplary of indigenous re-bordering practices dependent on safe-space representations for Epera women.

Isolated and confined Epera-only space depends on Epera women’s understandings of safe-space. As already evidenced in Epera women’s drawings, important everyday activities take place on the platform and dock making this the place most of the Epera women stated as being “their space”. During one of the many mornings we spent along the dock, Lorena stated,

This is where all the women meet every day. Every day we wash clothes and prepare food here and our children play here as well. This is also the only entrance to the village so we are the first to know who is coming in or leaving Santa Rosa. We also are the ones who can decide who comes and leaves (11-12-2013).

In many instances, I would be in an Epera home conversing with a woman and we would find out immediately who had arrived in Santa Rosa de los Epera, by word of mouth or whistle indicating a particular person had arrived. Even before a visitor set foot on the dock, the entire community knew who had arrived by way of women’s announcements. If a newcomer cannot justify his or her reason for entering Santa Rosa, then women will not permit their entry into Santa Rosa de los Epera. Since Epera women are on the dock all day every day, they can assure that this happens.

For reasons that have to do with fear as indigenous women on the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, Epera women throughout the research process constantly expressed that the only place they felt safe along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland was within Santa Rosa de los Epera. In addition to the insecurity evidenced above, Epera women fear the river people - la gente del rio (those who come up and down the river) - because of incidents in which non-Epera men have come into Santa Rosa, mocked them, and attempted to sexually assault them. As a strategy to spatially protect themselves from this violence by outsiders, women portray themselves as custodians of the platform and gain knowledge about who enters or exits Santa Rosa (gender-based violence within Santa Rosa will be explored in Chapter 6).
Another way in which Epera women create an Epera-only place, is through selecting which recently-arrived Epera from Colombia are allowed to stay in Santa Rosa. This again is related to the Epera’s notion of safe-space. Like the example above whereby non-Epera are interrogated upon their arrival to Santa Rosa because of the dangers outsiders represent, the same occurs with Colombian Epera. The reasons have to do with Epera women’s perceptions of insecurity in Colombia as evoked in the following statement:

You see, we don’t really know what the Epera in Colombia are up to. Because of where they live and what happens there – you know, the guerrilla and coca plantations. Some of our people partake in these dynamics on the other side, others don’t. So, because of that we have to know who they are before they come here. So when we hear of an Epera member that wants to leave Colombia and join us here in Santa Rosa, then we ask around. We call our family in Colombia and ask who they are. If they are recommended, they are allowed to stay. Otherwise we don’t let them stay (Neida, 10-15-2014).

Florinda further explained that several Epera have been refused entry into Santa Rosa de los Epera because of their troubled past. Women speak about how (in)security is worse on the Colombian side of the border: “No estamos, como en Colombia, acá no hay guerrilla” (We aren’t like in Colombia – there is no guerrilla here). In comparison to Epera territory in Colombia, Santa Rosa de los Epera is perceived as a safe haven by Epera women and a further idealisation of Epera space is formed. Consequently, even though Santa Rosa de los Epera is considered a difficult place to live for the reasons already mentioned, it is safer than what Epera experience in Colombia.

The two examples above draw out how Epera women control who enters and exits Santa Rosa, resulting from their efforts to create a safe-space for themselves. As a younger Epera woman, Lucero, mentioned, “I don’t wear Epera dress in Borbón because I don’t feel safe there; only here in Santa Rosa. This is where we can continue to exist and live as Epera” (20-01- 2014). Like Lucero, many Epera women define space outside of Santa Rosa de los Epera in ways that have been highlighted by feminist geographer Gillian Rose, as where “space almost becomes like an enemy itself. This fear is partly about being denied as a woman” (1993:143). Fear is triggered by male violence in space outside of Santa Rosa and as
such determines their use of space at the interface between the dock and the river, because this is the space that divides inside and outside for Epera women (Valentine, 1989). For Epera women it is not just about being a woman that triggers fear but being an *Epera* woman along the Ecuador-Colombian borderland. In the racialised and gendered spaces of the border, there are specific places where Epera women feel safe as *indigenous* women and other places where they do not. According to women’s accounts, living in an Epera-only space provides a sense of safety from sexual assault, which Epera women attribute to non-Epera men’s reactions to their ethnic attire\(^70\). As a result, in order for an Epera woman to be able to dress like an Epera woman and feel safe that she will not be sexually assaulted, then blocking the entry of non-Epera (males especially) and suspicious Colombian Epera, is one way to obtain this. Feminist geographers depict these sites as “separatist safe spaces as sites of resistance” (Roestone Collective, 2014:1352). Safe space for Epera women conjures ideas of maintaining cultural practices, as well as keeping out sexual violence inflicted by outsiders.

Creating safe space around Santa Rosa, also implies that Epera women partake in indigenous (re)boundary making, resulting in the elimination of some boundaries and the production of others (Sletto, 2009). And although the boundaries created by women are not material manifestations, as Sletto has mentioned, “often the more invisible boundaries are the most functional and hence the most influential in shaping relations of domination and resistance” (2009:272). Epera women’s resistance to sexual violence and insecurity at the interface between the dock and the river symbolises Epera women’s active struggle against insecurity, a consequence of ethnic elimination. Sletto’s indigenous boundary (re)-making insights are particularly useful for conceptualising spatial contradictions between different practices and ideas of borders and place amongst the Epera. On the one hand, the Grand Epera family is the transnational ideal of a nationless family that transgresses state sovereignty based on their notion of boundary-free indigeneity (Sletto, 2009), while simultaneously the small group of Epera promote spatial boundary-making processes in Santa Rosa. Borders exist within and around Epera territory and are also conceived in relation to Colombia. Sletto (2009) contends that the process of (re)-bordering highlights the *visibility and functionality* of boundaries in indigenous territory that can draw attention to relations of power in indigenous landscapes. Furthermore, the functionality of the Epera border around Santa Rosa challenges common conceptions that it is only the state that creates boundary-

\(^{70}\) Epera women usually only wear a cloth around their waists and a necklace, with no shirt or bra underneath.
making and cultural difference. The Epera, too, depend on boundary-making for maintaining
cultural differences between themselves and mestizos, as well as creating a safe space through
the creation of an Epera-only place. The construction of this social-spatial boundary has
created a means from which to selectively engage with certain Epera and non-Epera members alike.

5.3.2 Selective engagement with the state as a means to resist elimination

The last section of this chapter draws attention to one other way in which Epera
women maintain Epera-only space, and that is through the functionality of maintaining a
spatial boundary around Santa Rosa, done through selective engagement with state services.
The following anecdote is an example of Epera refusal of state services, which will be
followed by another scenario in which Epera women actively engage with the state. Both
examples illustrate how Epera women selectively interact with the state to survive while at
the same time fending off processes of ethnic elimination.

Throughout January 2014, during mayoral elections, several political candidates
arrived, each with the proposal of making a highway to connect Santa Rosa de los Epera with
existing local and national highways. Each candidate received an emphatic and outright
rejection from Epera male and female leaders. After candidates had left, Epera women
explained they refused because “eso nos mantiene a salvo” or (rejecting the highway
proposal) keeps us safe. Part of this sense of safety is dependent on making access to Santa
Rosa de los Epera difficult to the drug trade and criminal activity. So although women find it
difficult to make a living, the same configuration of Epera land along the border is perceived
as protection. There is only one easily accessible entry; the rest of the surrounding area is on
the Epera side dense jungle and on the outside territory owned by African palm producers.

Epera women reject a possible highway into Epera territory which they argue would
mean more than one entry into the village. Spatial boundary-making by confinement is
achieved through assuring that the river platform is the only entry and exit point from the
River Cayapas, which as shown above, is where women act as guardians. By determining the
space available for entering and exiting, Epera women ‘control’ their space and (re)make an
indigenous boundary within an already existing border space. Furthermore, the construction
of an insulated indigenous space is an act of resistance enacted through the refusal of spatial access into Epera territory. Refusing a seemingly sensible alternative access route (a highway for easier transportation) is enacting sovereignty, while at the same time *enunciating* the processes (Simpson, 2014). In the words of Audra Simpson, denying the highway offered by government representatives is illustrative of the power behind saying no; “that refusal is simply to disappear, a refusal to be … ‘eliminated’”(2014:22). A way to refuse elimination is to refuse *this* type of nation-state practice because the results of permitting a highway into Epera territory weakens Epera women’s ability to control who enters and leaves Santa Rosa de los Epera. And as has already been shown, this would put in jeopardy women’s creation of a safe place. Thus, in Simpson’s view, rejecting this type of governmental project is an act of sovereignty, an alternative to state recognition, and ultimately a way to combat ethnic elimination. Spatial control and the making of Epera-only territory is a process manifesting indigenous notions of sovereignty in the face of ethnic elimination dependent on Epera women’s role in indigenous boundary (re)-making and creating safe-space.

The Epera, however, are not entirely autonomous from outside governmental or non-governmental aid, at times rejecting governmental intervention (highway) and at other times, embracing it. To consolidate Santa Rosa as a (relatively) safe place, Epera carry out practices of selective engagement with the Ecuadorian state. Older Epera women emphasised graver poverty amongst women of their age because their income and survival depends on cash-transfer mechanisms. With the exception of six Epera women, who receive monthly salaries as teachers in the community primary school or as day care workers in the communal day care centre, most women in Santa Rosa de los Eperara depend almost exclusively on Ecuadorian government cash transfer71. One way or another, the economic stability and autonomy for Epera women is highly dependent on state programmes. During fieldwork in Santa Rosa de los Epera, the MIES annual ‘census’ occurred, with interviews of all the families in the community who receive the conditional cash transfer (50 USD per month). In July 2014 a group of four technicians came into the community equipped with an iPad on which they registered pictures of ID documents and homes, and interviewed women who happened to be at home. Women handed over all their Ecuadorian and Colombian ID cards for the people living in their homes and answered questions regarding their income and possessions. Women responded that they are all housewives with no income and that they did

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71 Cash transfers are government subsidies for Ecuadorian citizens living below the poverty line.
not own certain electrical appliances. Once the MIES technicians left, women explained that if they told the truth then they would lose the cash transfer. To avoid the possibility of being rejected from the programme, women often take the technicians to homes other than their real homes.

The possible withdrawal of the Ecuadorian government aid and women’s strategies to avoid that suspension highlighted harsh facts of economic vulnerability. Epera women depend on governmental programmes for several important services as well as for keeping the village an ‘Epera-only space’. For example, according to accounts of the Epera women, the MIES had also threatened them with the possibility of cutting funding to the communal day care centre, arguing that the centre needs at least 40 children under the age of 5 years old. At the time there were only 35 children aged 1 day to 5 years old, and the centre employs four women and assures one meal a day for children under 5. The state-run day care centre is vital for Epera women, who on average have between four and eight children. Likewise the communal school has students from kindergarten to the fifth grade, and is a priority for women who would otherwise have to leave Santa Rosa in order for their children to receive an education. Primary education also serves as a place where Epera values, language and traditions are further promoted. With funds from the Ministry of Education, the Epera have a Sia dictionary and pedagogical tool kits geared towards bi-lingual education. At the end of fieldwork women had negotiated with state agencies in order to maintain all governmental programmes (cash transfers, nursery and school), state programmes that, paradoxically, allow the spatial confinement of Epera space. If it were not for the school, the cash transfer and the day care centre then Epera women would have to, as their male counterparts already do, leave Santa Rosa de los Epera in order to obtain these services.

For life in Santa de la Rosa to be sustainable, there is a dependency on governmental programmes. Resisting a highway and controlling exit and entry through one exact point in Epera territory, while depending on governmental programmes and subsidies to exist, is a very fragile system to maintain. Although they refuse the highway as a way to keep Epera

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72 Epera women complain however, that the quality of education is deplorable, resulting in Epera children not learning either language well. Interculturalism is considered to be mainstreamed within all government projects and policies, hence only the school in Santa Rosa is considered to be an ‘ethno-development’ project. In Santa Rosa, only the village school is considered to be informed by Epera knowledge systems (mainly language). However, as Briggs and Sharp (2004) have contended indigenous knowledges have been drawn on in a limited way by development institutions and practices. Even the Epera Life Plans which are alternative development models, and as such an ideal scenario to create alternatives models of engagement, are left aside.
culture intact, they depend on governmental aid for life survival. Thus, there are implications for how Simpson’s notion of indigenous refusal as an alternative to sovereignty can be used to create more nuanced accounts of indigenous selective engagement with the state.

5.4 Conclusion

Everyday illustrations of Epera women’s space demonstrate how settler colonial biopower occurs within the everyday spaces of Santa Rosa de los Epera and surrounding aquatic space. Rifkin’s (2009) emphasis on geopolitics alongside bio-politics by addressing state abandonment of indigenous territory, has been drawn out in the Epera context by highlighting the lack of basic services from piped water to sewage systems, to name a few. Meanwhile Morgensen’s (2011) analysis of contemporary settler colonialism as a form of bio-power through territorial replacement as an attempt to disposes indigenous people’s land, has been evidenced through processes of intense pollution by African palm plantation and other neighboring extractivist industry. Epera women’s experience of cultural amalgamation, is the third element constituting ethnic elimination, and will be further discussed in the next chapter. So far, Epera women’s account of elimination demonstrates how territorial replacement, state abandonment and cultural amalgamation co-exist and are co-constitutive of one another. Berlant’s notion of slow death (2007) has defined the pace at which Epera’s attrition occurs and Povinelli’s description of deteriorated ordinary space of everyday indigenous life (2011) has characterized the spaces where this takes place. Feminist geopolitical insights on safe space highlighted Epera women’s perception of fear of male violence and how this determines the use of space (Valentine, 1998). Moreover, creating feminist geopolitical notions of safe-space (Roestone Collective, 2014) depended on indigenous (re)-bordering to create invisible functional borders. Lastly, this chapter has demonstrated how the Epera selectively engage with the Ecuadorian state as well as other multi-lateral stakeholders, in order to assure survival. Survival in the face of ethnic elimination is place-based and dependent on indigenous boundary-making. Epera women’s accounts highlight, how indigenous boundary (re)-making is a feminist geopolitical act of resistance to the slow death of the Epera, that brings about important debates on safe space and indigenous territoriality from the perspective of indigenous women.

Preserving Epera culture and unity in the face of various threats is an act of boundary-making that, as I will show in the next chapter, is also linked to ethnic boundary-making.
Despite a nomadic past and a present trans-border relationship with Colombian Epera, the Epera in Ecuadorian territory feel the need to promote spatial control as a key way to foster Epera culture. Epera women in particular feel a sense of corporal safety and security in dressing like an Epera woman that they are not able to experience outside of Epera space. In this sense, spatial confinement serves to preserve Epera culture by fostering the ability to live an Epera life in an enclosed Epera territory dependent, in part, on Epera women’s sense of place. The next chapter, explores the pressures of ethnic elimination on the bodies and sexuality of Epera women through the contentious issues around *mestizaje* and cultural amalgamation.
CHAPTER 6: **Purifying practices, gender and ethnic boundary-making**

Neida, a 38-year-old woman leader from Santa Rosa called me one day while I was in Quito. She had come to Quito to see her daughter who had been living in the city for several months as a domestic caretaker in the home of affluent Quiteños. Neida was concerned that if her daughter stayed too long outside Epera territory, she would find a non-Epera partner and have a *mestizo* child. When asked about this, she sternly commented, “If she produces a pure Epera child, then she is contributing, ensuring that we do not disappear. That is our way of resisting, from the womb” (11-11-2013).

In the face of ethnic elimination, Epera women partake in boundary-making practices reflecting the multi-scalar space in which slow death unfolds. The previous chapter drew attention to how Epera women engage in spatial processes of (re)-bordering around the site of Santa Rosa. This chapter underscores how Epera women foster ethnic boundaries against the effects of cultural amalgamation, another element constituting ethnic elimination (Wolfe, 2006; Morgensen, 2011). Cultural amalgamation or the assimilation into settler’s culture is, for Epera women, evidenced in the weakening of their cultural identity through *mestizaje*, or the breeding with a non-Epera. As shown in the previous chapter, some Epera women interpret *mestizaje* as the culprit for the ethnicity’s attrition. Building on that, this chapter further points to how Epera women’s interpretation of *mestizaje* leads them to enact purifying practices, comprising strict regulations on women’s sexuality, relationships and bodies that ensure offspring arise from endogenous heteronormative partnerships. Consequences of not abiding by these regulations lead to physical punishment, expulsion from residing in Santa Rosa and withdrawal of membership rights (access to land and studies). It is through the implementation of purifying practices that ethnic boundary-making emerges defined as the constructed role of women as symbolic border guards of ethnic and national collectives where ideological markers depend on material practices that include and exclude (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989; Yuval-Davis 1997).

The chapter is divided into four sections. First, it describes how purifying practices are employed, regulated and fomented within Santa Rosa amongst Epera women. Purifying

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73 I understand the breeding in English is usually used in relation to animals. The Epera use the Spanish word ‘parir’ which is also used for animals in the Spanish language.
practices are then shown to be conceived in relation to imagined Colombian space and culture. The chapter then describes the violence Epera women experience as a result of purifying practices, as well as how they challenge the timelessness of these gendered practices. These insights further shine light on how settler colonial ethnic elimination, through cultural amalgamation, is a highly gendered and intimate process.

6.1 Ethnic boundary production through cultural purifying practices

This section further elaborates on Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ (1989, 1997) ideas about the processes of ethnic boundary-making in relation to gender. Ethnic boundaries rely on gender signifiers that specify ethnic identity around rules on sexuality, marriage and family. Specifically, Anthias and Yuval-Davis highlight five ways in which women partake in ethnic and national boundary-making processes. They include:

- women act a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences - as a focus and symbol of ideological discourse used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories; e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989:7).

These five processes apply to the Epera women in varying degrees as will be evidenced below. Before doing so, it is important to note that Epera women’s identification is strongest with the indigenous nationality and weaker with the Ecuadorian nation state. However, given the lack of a similar framework for indigenous contexts, I am extrapolating this to adequately draw attention to how Epera women act as active agents in upholding an ideology that results in an ethnic boundary via biological and cultural signifiers of Epera membership. Therefore Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ framework should be understood in terms of indigenous nationality (Epera) and not that of the nation state (Ecuador).

Ethnic boundary-making is developed in Santa Rosa around the idea of *mestizaje*, defined as a result of bearing outside of an endogenous Epera relationship and in doing so are determining the ideological reproduction of the Epera group based on signifiers of ethnic
difference (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). Any offspring or person that cannot prove lineage amongst Epera (either on the Colombian or Ecuadorian side) is considered to be a *mestizo*. To be identified as ‘pure’ Epera both parents must be Epera and any offspring where only one parent is of any other ethnicity is not recognised as an Epera and member of the Santa Rosa community. The most valued term amongst the Epera is to be called an *Epera puro* (pure Epera), while being named a *mestizo/a* is considered a derogatory term. When a child of an Epera woman, not born in Santa Rosa, comes into Epera territory, a communal interrogation takes place to decipher the child’s lineage. This is done via intense dialogue with elders or important members of the government council who can verify lineage via contact with Colombian Epera. Furthermore, *mestizaje* is recognized as lacking an identity; while being Epera means actively having an identity, by contrast the paucity of an identity is an act that contributes towards the elimination of Epera culture. “If we do not have regulations on offspring to assure pure Eperas – then we will disappear” (11-14-13) states Soraya, a 33-year-old woman leader who supports anti-*mestizaje* practices and is amongst the most vocal woman on these issues in the village. During meal times at her house, she is often preaching to her eight children about the importance of being *Epera puro*, voicing how she will enforce village rules if any of the children disobey them. In communal settings, this view is shared by all women that partake in the women’s groups in Santa Rosa and who have occupied important political positions within the community. Female leaders such as Soraya and Neida set an example in the village in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity as transmitters of their culture based on ensuring women are the biological reproducers of Epera ethnicity (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). This is further exemplified in the dynamics between older Epera women and younger generations. Women elders (generally leaders) in the Epera assemblies are harsh on the younger women, claiming that they do not wear traditional dress, cook traditional foods, or speak Sia at home, resulting in their children’s illness and even death. According to informants, if women do not uphold these cultural practices (dress, food, and language) then Epera culture is weakening and slow death is a result. Thus ethnic elimination under this interpretation is when cultural assimilation of *mestizaje* occurs. Women in this context are then transmitters of these cultural manifestations, in which ethnicity is performed (to be further covered in this chapter) in order to deter elimination. As such, older Epera women act as what Yuval-Davis calls the cultural reproducers of the ethnic ‘nation’, as they are “empowered to rule on what is ‘appropriate’ behaviour and appearance

74 Chicano theorists in particular have represented hybridity and *mestizaje* as challenging essentialism and a unified subjectivity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Phelan, 1993). The Epera are antagonistic to this position.
and what is not and to exert control over other women who might be constructed as ‘deviants’” (Yuval-Davis, 1997:37). According to the female elders, *mestizaje* is the culprit for an eventual extinction, and women as mothers or potential mother figures can contribute to population collapse not just via childbearing but also through maintaining cultural practices.

During fieldwork, the Epera were in the midst of re-elaborating their ancestral justice system, a process which resulted in a document summarising existing Epera regulations and sanctions. An older document contained a clause on marriage and children that stated, “If an Epera woman becomes pregnant by a mestizo or Afro-Ecuadorian male she loses her right to work, scholarship to study and land in Santa Rosa” (Epera Ancestral Justice Document, 2002:un-numbered page). During community discussions regarding this issue, the underlying meaning of this clause was not questioned (Epera yearly assembly 04/2014, Santa Rosa). Rather, debate stressed how to enforce stricter regulations on the reproduction of only pure Epera children. The debate centred on what were the most effective means to ensure that women, in particular younger women, followed this regulation. Some village members proposed an increase of physical punishment, whereas others proposed working in the communal farm area as a more adequate sanction (Epera yearly assembly, 04/2014). Several male leaders were adamant about including new sanctions in the ancestral justice document that was being elaborated during my time in the village.

In the new justice document, we have to put more emphasis on this clause! I mean it! New ways to regulate and new sanctions because women, especially since the young ones are not obeying by the ethnic by-laws established! (Alvaro Chirima 11/2013)

In this way, constant discussion was had on existing regulations and future ones whereby Epera women are expected to be, and depicted as, biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities through violence (in some cases) that will be further reviewed in this chapter. Assuring pure Epera offspring and marriage is seen as the act which leads to this. Central to this is a heteronormative framework (Warner, 1993) in which sexuality is highly regulated between male and female Epera to produce offspring. Neida shared with me the story of two elder Epera lesbians who had been married to Epera men and had Epera ‘pure’ children, considered born from a male Epera and a female Epera. The decision to expel the two lesbian women from Santa Rosa was made during a government
council meeting and agreed upon by the majority of the community during an extraordinary assembly. Meanwhile, two men are suspected by the community to be gay, yet have been allowed to stay in Santa Rosa; one of the young men was given a woman’s name and the other called ‘La Niña’ (the girl). In referencing these young men, Lina, a 50-year-old woman leader and ex-president of the Epera in Ecuador states, “I tried to convince la niña to not dress like a girl – he likes lipstick and the like. The community hasn’t removed them from Santa Rosa as long as they are not a couple. Since we never see them together, it doesn’t matter” (09-08-2014). The different responses of the leadership of the community to these two cases raise several significant aspects. The perceived male cross-dressing and men’s homosexuality were not grounds for expulsion from the community, unlike the lesbians who had borne Epera children, the distinction being in which pair represented a couple. In not being a couple, the male ‘homosexuals’ are not disrupting the compulsory Epera-only heteronormative relationship that results in pure Epera offspring. This case highlights the extent to which Epera women disproportionately carry the burden as biological reproducers of members of Epera ethnicity and how this is intricately connected to their role as reproducers of the boundaries within the Epera onto other non-heteronormative expressions and practices. In doing so, Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ notions of ethnic boundary are extended beyond heterosexual dynamics of the nation state and ethnic groups to explore how other sexualities are treated in projects of ethnic boundary-making. Ethnic boundary production relies on intimate scales of normative regulation processes, a normativity prevalent within Epera culture across gender, sexuality and rigid gender frameworks. During fieldwork, homosexuality was constantly discussed as something new and resulting from either bad nutrition or pollution, never something previously found in Epera culture. Hence homosexuality appears as a negative characteristic, contributing to ethnic boundary-making through an interrelated set of exclusionary factors based on norms of heterosexuality.

However, although a heteronormative framework is upheld there is no moral obligation for keeping to traditional western notions of single partnerships. Most Epera women aged 20 to 29 have had multiple partners and children from different partners, an aspect that would be frowned up by the dominant mestizo Catholic culture in the rest of the country. Women’s relations are only problematised when they have partners and hence children who are mestizo. By contrast, this is not the case for men who have mestizo

75 The expelled women live together in another jungle area of Ecuador and are permitted to visit their children in Santa Rosa.
partnerships outside Epera territory. For example, Lina has had three partners from three different marriages (two Epera and one mestizo). At 16 she married her first husband, a Colombian Epera. Her second Epera partner deceived her by not telling her that he had another wife who was an Afro-Ecuadorian, and with whom he had three children (who were also not allowed to live in Santa Rosa because they are mestizo). He later wanted Lina to remain his mistress; she refused but by that time had become pregnant with his child. Her last child was with a Chachi indigenous man who later fell in love with her daughter from a previous partnership and she subsequently ended that relationship. She, like many of the women aged 50 and above, want to be alone now – they no longer seek any relationship with an Epera or non-Epera man.

In addition to these social norms and gender relations that police women, regulations on endogenous marriages are found in Epera documents. In addition to the justice documents (discussed above) in the Life Plan of the Epera, Interculturality is defined in the following way:

Interculturality is a community of families in our territory. We live in order and respect amongst the different families within the Epera nationality. Under our cultural beliefs, interculturism is a way of life. It means to share and respect the knowledge of other pueblos but to not marry with other ethnicities because it is our belief that we are in brotherhood and sisterhood with other nationalities. As so - marriage is only permitted amongst the Epera. (2014:undocumented page).

The Epera notion of interculturality lies in stark contrast to mainstream conceptions, generally described as a way of being in “equal interrelation between peoples, persons, knowledges and different cultural practices; an interaction that differs from an inherent conflict in social, economic, political and power asymmetries” (Walsh, 2005:45). In other words, interculturalism generally refers to a thorough engagement with difference on an equal setting, clearly the opposite of what the Epera propose in restricting marriage with other cultures. Hence, even in relation to other Ecuadorian indigenous conceptions of interculturality, the Epera are distinct in their construction of indigeneity. Ensuring

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76 Life Plans are indigenous alternatives to western development plans based on indigenous world visions. CODENPE led a Life Plan project from 2008 until 2014, which was to create Life Plans for all of Ecuador’s indigenous peoples and nationalities. The Epera created a first draft of their Life Plan with the CODENPE process and was currently finishing a final draft during research.
endogenous marriages as a purifying practice is central to producing the boundary with other ethnic groups.

The racial purity of the Epera was also monitored by male and female elected leaders and documented in records of bi-national meetings between Colombian and Ecuadorian Epera. The report on the 2010 bi-national meeting, states “47 per cent of the Epera population in Ecuador is mestizo, while there is a 53 per cent that is still pure defined as having Epera lineage on maternal and paternal sides” (2010:un-numbered page). Not abiding by strict regulations on marriage leads to physical sanctions enacted by Epera leaders. During fieldwork, for instance, the case of one young Epera woman was emblematic of these sanctions; she had returned to Santa Rosa after having migrated to another province in Ecuador for work, and received physical punishment because she came back with a mestizo child. The entire community was obliged to be present to see her punishment (50 lashes) and her family supported her punishment. The casigadores (punishers) those who give the latigazos (lashes) are chosen by the community. Communal male and female leaders asked the young woman to identify who was the father of the child – if it was an Epera or non-Epera - and when she responded the father was not Epera then it was determined that the child was mestizo. In everyday life, community members talk about such non-Epera children as mestizo children. Aside from physical punishment, the young woman was not allowed to remain in the community. So the 3.5 hectares of land she would normally receive upon having Epera children was no longer given to her. Such land is normally given to a newly-wed couple as a space to live. As communal territory can only be inherited from direct lineage, “She should go back and live with the community of the father of the child” (10-06-2014) both men and women expressed in the assembly. Masculinised ethnic sovereignty (further covered in Chapter 6) thus starts by way of the father of a child. It is not sufficient that Epera woman are the child-bearers, since the ultimate decision on membership to Santa Rosa lies on whether or not the father of an Epera woman’s child is Epera or not. The same is not true for Epera men. When men have mestizo children (which many do), they are often left outside of Santa Rosa with their mestizo mothers. In some cases the village does not even know of the existence of Epera male’s mestizo children (further explored in Chapter 6).

Village assemblies (extra official or planned assemblies) are obligatory; no one is allowed to leave the community and a canoe is sent to two Epera settlements to pick up men and women in order to ensure as many people as possible. A guard sits on the pathway leading to the river to make sure no one leaves the community during Assembly time. Erazo (2013) also documents the use of force to enforce rules decided by an Amazonian indigenous ethnicity.
According to Epera ethnic by-laws, reinforced in community assemblies, marriage is only allowed up to a certain degree of consanguinity. According to Carrasco (2010), Epera marriage regulations established by leader Tachi Nawe (discussed in greater detail below), permit up to 4th degree of blood relationship. With a lesser degree of consanguinity, the relationship is considered incestuous. During fieldwork the community president received 25 lashes for having sexual relations with his cousin, for the crime of incest and not an extramarital affair. The punishment was applied due to the possibility of a disabled child being born to close family members. In this case, the possibility of a disabled ‘pure’ child is also sanctioned, emphasising notions of Epera ‘pure’ and ‘normal’ offspring. Hence the pure Epera child is the product of an Epera heterosexual couple up to 4th degree of lineage, a process of ethnic reproduction, which is fiercely regulated in written rules and social sanctions.

Epera women personify the articulations of ethnicity and gender within the ‘Grand Epera family’ and as such take on the burdens of embodying the threshold of the politics of belonging. Belonging tends to be described by scholars with regards to legal recognition and citizenship, but as Rajaram and Grundy-Warr (2007) explain, it must also be seen as forms of social performance. “Belonging must be performed; groups must prove their cultural or social belonging through effective identity performance. The way people dress, speak and socialise all have effects on recognition at particular points in society” (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007:xiii). Epera gendered notions of belonging are exemplary of this process.

Epera women choose to perform or not perform a series of gendered practices in which their sexuality and motherhood are at stake. The regulations or norms concerning cultural purity are both resulting from and performing the Epera ‘pure’ identity. As a result, I find it imperative to look at performativity with regards to both gender and ethnicity. I understand Epera purifying practices within Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) work on the body and her theory of performativity which is understood “not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 1993:2). Identities are therefore dependent on the expressions that are said to be (their) results (Fortier, 1999; Butler, 1990). While Butler’s notion of performativity focuses on gender and sexuality, other scholars have extrapolated the concept of performativity to nationhood and ethnic studies (Nash, 2000; Fortier, 1999). In Fortier’s
words, “different displays of presence operate through the repetition of regulatory norms that produce an effect of materialisation and naturalisation of cultural belonging through the ethnicising and gendering of individual bodies” (Fortier, 1999:44). For the Epera, identity is determined by actions women undertake to maintain it, invoking a performative approach to their struggles of keeping Epera ethnicity alive. However, it is also important to note that both Butler and Fortier are explicit that performativity occurs in relation to individual bodies, and not collectivities. Therefore, I am suggesting that performativity at an individual level, while inspired by collective desires, should not be extrapolated to undermine indigenous collective identities, so crucial for their survival. The performative approach in this study draws attention to Epera women’s different perspectives with regards to the embodied regulations about ethnic purity and how they choose to fend off ethnic elimination.

Furthermore, the process of elimination of the Epera ethnic group challenges the way we understand the debates on how indigenous identities are constituted, particularly from a gendered perspective. From a decolonised perspective, one which I and the Epera community uphold, it would be both unfair and unethical to state that the Epera are indigenous only by the performativity of the constructions of place and embodied traditions. An adequate portrayal of what motivates Epera women to promote and carry out actions will be defined as part of an ethnic boundary production. It is not sufficient in the context of ethnic elimination to situate indigenous identity in binary contestations of essentialisms versus postmodern hybridised identities; when this happens something is missing from the urgency of matters concerning life and death on an individual and collective level. Furthermore as postcolonial and North American native feminist scholars have noted, the politics of reproduction have different connotations outside of western contexts and within scenarios of past genocide, slavery or present settler colonialism (Davis, 1982; Smith, 2005). In western contexts, struggles against the control of bodies, sexuality and reproductive rights by the state have been at the forefront of feminist political agendas. However they have also revealed the fault-lines of race relations within feminism (Lewis & Mills, 2003). For Epera women who desire motherhood as a means to fight against ethnic elimination, the womb is a site of resistance and as such antagonistic to dominant western feminist ideals of maternity by choice and emphasis on access to safe and legal abortions.

78 It is not meant to undermine the Epera women’s notion of who and what they consider their identity to be.
Epera women, partake in a constant process of ethnic and gendered performativity in which not only are their bodies central but also the space they call home along the Ecuadorian-Colombian borderland. The performativity of the body produces space\(^79\) and, I would add in the case of the Epera women, the creation of ethnic boundaries. Gillian Rose describes the performance of space as “practiced, a matrix of play, dynamic and iterative, its forms and shapes produced through the citation performance of self-other relations” (Rose in Sarre \textit{et al.}, 1999). In the case of the Epera, the performativity of ethnicity and gender includes the creation of an ethnic boundary based on bi-national conceptions of home or origin, which will be further explored in the following section of this chapter.

So far, this section has highlighted the existing communal regulations on the reproductive role of Epera women, regulations based on a rigid Epera-only heteronormative framework. The next section shines light on how these rules came to exist on the Ecuadorian side of the border, and when they began to become enforced. In doing so, I highlight how cultural reproduction for the continuation of Epera ethnicity is contingent on the cultural production of place and bodies, based on the imagined space-culture of Colombia. Fighting ethnic elimination, and specifically cultural amalgamation, in this scenario occurs through recuperation of perceived cultural origin.

6.2 Colombia as a culturally pure space and the creation of Epera territory in Ecuador

Women are actively involved in boundary-making as part of a politics of belonging, a process further defined by Yuval-Davis (2011) as the moment when a collectivity’s sense of home and origin is threatened. Nira Yuval-Davis (2011) differentiates between belonging and the politics of belonging. She understands belonging as an emotional attachment related to feelings about ‘home’, from hope and safety to anger and resentment. Belonging becomes political, however, only when it is threatened in some way. The politics of belonging is hence made up of particular political projects embedded in specific boundaries with the goal of fabricating belonging for particular collectivities (2011), such that belonging is multi-layered, multi-scale and multi-territorial (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Since Epera women consider themselves as undergoing processes of elimination then a politics of belonging is evoked.

\(^79\) Rose continues “the body is then entangled with fantasy and discourse; fantasy mobilises bodies and is expressed through discourse; and discourse, well, discourse is disrupted by fantasy and interrupted by the bodily. And all of these relations are articulated spatially; their performance produces space” (Rose in Sarre \textit{et al.}, 1999:258).
This in turn justifies Epera women acting as biological and cultural reproducers of Epera ethnicity. However, what this section will further demonstrate is that the politics of belonging for Epera women is based on imagined Colombian geographies of space-culture. This section will therefore draw out how ideas of women’s responsibility of cultural and biological reproduction are interconnected to the conceived Epera Colombian cultural landscape.

In the case of the Epera and in light of their continuous fear of eventual extermination, their Colombia origin plays a decisive role. The regulations on marriage and reproduction were first brought to Ecuadorian Epera through the establishment of Santa Rosa, but were not enforced until the visit of the Tachi Nawe (in 2014), an Epera Colombian woman spiritual leader. Consequently this section first reviews the process by which Santa Rosa was founded as a fixed territory and the process by which the Ecuadorian state officially recognised the Epera nationality. Then the role of the Tachi Nawe’s visit in 2014 will be explored to highlight how these two events are interconnected in terms of enforcing purifying practices to stop ethnic elimination.

Women’s land rights are dependent on “communal expectations of gendered ethno-cultural affiliation” (Radcliffe, 2014:863) amongst the Epera, but also other indigenous groups in Ecuador such as the Tsachi, where women marrying mestizo men also have to leave the community (Radcliffe & Pequeno, 2010). In the Tsachila case however, the fear is that through marriage mestizos will encroach on ethnic territory whereas for the Epera, as will be shown below, it is about cultural amalgamation, slow death through the assimilation of mestizo culture. Arturo Chiripua, the leader of international relations and member of the government council, proposed new regulations on marriage and reproduction to the community during initial meetings at the onset of the establishment of Epera territory in 2000. In his words,

when we set up the Santa Rosa community, I brought this rule from Colombia to Santa Rosa de los Epera. And we made four exceptions; each exception corresponded to one woman. The four women were exempted from this rule because they had found a partner and had mestizo children before this rule was established in Ecuador; these were the only exceptions. The younger generation always knew about the rule. So if

80 Regulations on endogenous marriages and sanctions for mestizaje offspring.
they don’t follow it they are actively choosing not to live in Santa Rosa de los Epera since they know that this is the most important condition for continuing to live in this territory (10-07-2014).

Santa Rosa, as the territory was subsequently named, was recognised by the Ministerio de Bien estar Social (Ministry of Social Well Being) in 2001, implying that the Epera benefited from the institutionalisation of state-recognised ethnic identity after the 1998 Ecuadorian constitution (Andolina et al., 2009). Obtaining fixed territory was a governmental requisite for state recognition as an indigenous nationality, giving the Epera legal autonomy in forming governmental and justice systems based on their ancestral ways. This then meant they could transfer the existing regulations through ethnic by-laws from Colombian Epera settlements onto Santa Rosa, marking the beginning of implementing cultural purity regulations and related practices whose objective was to strengthen Epera culture. According to the male and female leaders who established Santa Rosa, the end goal was to live like Colombian Epera in Rio Saija as a way to re-enforce Epera culture on the Ecuadorian side of the border.

Before we came here, we had lost a lot of our culture, because we were no longer moving back and forth between Colombia and Ecuador. This was a time when it was even more dangerous in Colombia and movement was even more restricted, so we stayed on the Ecuadorian side dispersed without much contact between the families, living amongst mestizo culture. But because of that we (women) were giving up on dressing like an Epera, the children stopped speaking Sia, (our language) and slowly our culture was disappearing …

states Viviana as a group of women and I were reminiscing about the establishment of Santa Rosa (Focus Group, 04-04-2014). After the regulations were passed, “The first thing we did was to dress like Epera again, because you know, we couldn’t do that before, because we can’t walk around naked in other parts amongst people who don’t understand,” added Lucy Garrabato in confirming that she agreed with this aspect of re-constructing Epera indigeneity based on obtaining fixed land. This and other discussions held over the course of the fieldwork evidenced that women were actively choosing to participate as key actors in the recuperation and re-organisation of Epera culture in Ecuador as a bulwark against assimilation into settler’s culture (mestizo culture). They were not passive bystanders in the
wake of an Epera patriarchal constituency. Instead, a group of older Epera male and female leaders, all belonging to particular families and with direct ties to Esmeraldas’ Apostolic Vicariate (a key actor in obtaining the territory), were the ones who, according to discussions of the women’s group, established the existing regulations amongst the Epera. Being awarded Ecuadorian territory signified for Epera a perceived return to ‘existing’ Epera traditions associated strongly with Colombia. Yet this cultural process also meant inventing new traditions and regulations, such as that for the four women mentioned above. As explained at the end of the chapter, new regulations brought opportunities for women to reject and end other gendered practices that they had endured in Colombia. The motivation behind these dynamics has been the politics of belonging as a means to confront ethnic elimination, in which women are at the centre as ethnic boundary-makers. The following section further draws the connection between the politics of belonging and the imagined cultural landscape in Colombia.

Imagined Colombian space influences Epera cultural formation in a number of ways, such as through the power of emblematic Colombian leaders like the Tachi Nawe. The Tachi Nawe, our mother, or mayorala is the leading ethical and spiritual authority recognised by the Epera. Alongside the Japiana (healer), she gives cohesion and identity to the Epera group. It is a role which the Epera believe is decided by the Tachi Akore (our god) who comes through the dreams of the Epera (Carassco, 2010). The Tachi Nawe is responsible for overseeing collective ceremonies such as marriages, baptisms and ceremonial dances as well as officiating at government council and village assemblies. She transmits the Epera origin myths and is expected to visit each community in order to teach dance, song and prayer. “She is responsible for maintaining the Epera world-view by reinforcing the internal norms of the group, their identity” (Carrasco, 2010:23). As such, her visit from Colombia in November 2013 through to January 2014 was a significant moment for the Ecuadorian Epera. Although Epera territory had been established in 2001 (as discussed above) this was the Tachi Nawe’s first visit to Santa Rosa and her second visit to Ecuador since the 1980s81. According to informants, the community extended an urgent appeal for the Tachi Nawe to visit Ecuador in order to heal a young woman considered to be possessed by the devil. Community leaders

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81 I met the Tachi Nawe briefly on several occasions, but she mainly communicated with me via other women of the community. She sent messages such that she was happy with my presence in the community because she felt I strengthened the women in the community. She also sent me a message granting me permission to enter Epera territory in Colombia.
explained that the young woman “lost her mind” (*se fue su mentalidad*). Aihwa Ong’s analysis on the production of possession amongst women factory workers in Malaysia highlights the need to interpretation spirit possession as “a complex negotiation of reality” (Crapanzano, 1977:16 in Ong, 1988). Initially, I was told that this young woman had been travelling to Santa Rosa from the Esmeraldas Ecuadorian city when something was given to her on the bus ride. A few weeks later it was discovered that she had been given a drug at a party in Borbón, a fact confirmed by military police intelligence, who informed male Epera leaders. However, this information had very little impact on how the community understood the situation and what was done to fix it. A few days after the young woman was declared possessed, Neida explained to me in a hushed tone that they were not allowed to explain what was happening because the Catholic religion had prohibited them from speaking about cultural beliefs about the devil. Nevertheless, she explained that in Epera religion the devil had the ability to take over a person’s body as had happened to the young woman. This particular young woman was described by informants as not being a “good Epera” because she did not like to participate in communal meetings and other collective gatherings. According to Viviana, 21 years old with two children, “We believe that if you don’t join with a man and have child before you are 19, then you are more prone to being possessed by the devil. That’s probably what happened to the possessed woman” (10-10-2013). Furthermore there was grave concern amongst the Epera that her possession would spread, as had occurred with other women 4 years previously. The community was visibly greatly affected by this occurrence, shutting down the school and the day care centre for over a week.

In order to bring the Tachi Nawe from Colombia to Ecuador, the Epera cut down two trees from their reserve and each family also gave a small donation in order to gather the USD$610, to pay to bring her and her family from Rio Saija, Colombia to Santa Rosa. Men and women began preparations days before her arrival, setting up the communal centre as the place where she would live and cure the young woman and anyone else who could afford treatment. Once the Tachi Nawe arrived, this area was off limits for the remainder of the community; villagers were only allowed to visit at night time when the Tachi Nawe would

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82 According to Epera male leaders, military police officials were investigating the use of rape drugs in parties in Borbón.
83 In this particular scenario only women were mentioned as being possessed by the devil. However, in other stories told by the Epera, men can also be possessed.
84 She travelled with her three children and husband.
85 Each healing process cost around USD$200-300.
gather to talk to the community about an array of topics ranging from Epera myths to the recuperation of Epera culture in Ecuador.\textsuperscript{86}

The effect of the Tachi Nawe’s opinions and viewpoints on Epera debates around \textit{mestizaje} and cultural purifying practices was remarkable. The Tachi Nawe personified a specific political project that enacts the politics of belonging by way of the social construction of an origin (mythical or real) as a unifying factor of the community for the Epera ethnicity. To the women she reminded them of their ‘common origin’ and abiding by her rules as a way to confront the common destiny of elimination. During the nightly meetings, the Tachi Nawe expressed her growing concern over what she considered critical levels of \textit{mestizaje} amongst the Epera on the Ecuadorian side of the border. According to informants she repeatedly stated, “At this rate, you, the Epera on the Ecuadorian side will disappear”. She highlighted the number of \textit{mestizo} children and partnerships in Santa Rosa de los Epera, as well as the rampant use of the Spanish language in comparison to Sia, the use of loud music instead of the sounds of nature, the spatial lay out of Epera homes\textsuperscript{87} and various other practices which were identified as a critical weakening of Epera culture. The Tachi Nawe was then perceived as identifying a series of practices that would lead to a futurity of erasure. Furthermore, she mentioned it was not the fault of the youth for wanting to migrate, but of adults and elders of the community for not creating a strong enough Epera identity. Had this occurred, she reiterated, than no one would want to leave Santa Rosa. Furthermore, the Tachi Nawe attributed what had happened to the possessed girl as a punishment to the community for forgetting their identity and belief system\textsuperscript{88}. She predicted their disappearance unless more was done against \textit{mestizaje}. Towards the end of her stay she threatened to never return unless the community, especially the leaders, undertook serious measures to prevent

\textsuperscript{86} The Tachi Nawe did not speak Spanish, only Sia and as a result, even though I was allowed to be present during the meetings, I was only able to gather what interpreters near me could tell me. My first glimpse of the Tachi Nawe was as I was waiting for a canoe to take me from Borbón to Santa Rosa de los Epera. I saw the Epera canoe come closer to the dock and to my surprise it was full of only women of all ages, except for the male driver. Neida saw me and came running to me and, almost whispering, said “That’s her. That’s the Tachi Nawe.” Neida took my hand and honored me by introduced us. The Tachi Nawe was a very small thin woman who spoke very little Spanish. That day in Borbón though, what impressed me was the human shield that formed around the Tachi Nawe; it was a physical protection of Epera woman to the most important Epera woman of them all.

\textsuperscript{87} Traditional Epera homes are built using a specific wood and there are no walls inside so as to create one single space.

\textsuperscript{88} In these meetings with the Tachi Nawe it became clear that \textit{mestizaje} was prohibited after several decades in which the Ecuadorian Epera on the Ecuador side had mixed with afro and \textit{mestizo} Ecuadorians. On the Colombian side the Epera are allowed to ‘mix’ with one other indigenous group called the \textit{wananos}. 
this. Mestizaje, from her perspective, included not only issues of reproduction and marriage but also the continuation of cultural practices such as Epera language. In doing so she spread responsibility amongst the entire community and not just on women.

Nevertheless, after her return to Colombia, the measures that were taken by both male and female leaders focused mainly on the enforcement of regulations regarding marriage and reproduction. During a communal meeting right after the departure of the Tachi Nawe in January 2014, male and female leaders stated that “this marked a turning point” for Ecuadorian Epera and that the first sanctions to be enforced were to be those regarding marriage and reproduction. Given there were at least three women who had married non-Epera males and bore mestizo children, discussions within Epera homes focused on which women would be the first to be expelled. Heightened tension within and amongst families coincided with the death of four children who passed away within a short period. Three of the four children who died were mestizo and as a result certain Epera leaders connected this to the prediction of the Tachi Nawe in which the punishment for cultural death via mestizaje is physical death. In other words, the physical death of these four children was interpreted as the result of disappearing cultural practices, according to some male and female leaders. Following this, families started to blame each other for causing the deaths of their children, in particularly the male and female leaders who were most adamant about expelling the women.

These dynamics revealed the connection between cultural amalgamation and ethnic elimination and its effect on the intimate spaces, bodies and sexualities of Epera women, further reflecting what defines cultural reproduction and biological reproduction constituting ethnic boundary-making. The threat of ethnic elimination is constant and acts as a motor towards maintaining cultural pure traditions, which for the Epera signify emulating Colombian Epera cultural practices. It is clear that the Epera today see elimination as a continuing process and regulation of bodies, sexuality and offspring onto place as their only choice at this particular time-space of elimination. This has become evident so far in this chapter, through the imposition of sanctions and rules regarding Epera women’s bodies and through women’s defence of these. The following section addresses these issues in light of different Epera women’s experience of the regulations enforced after the departure of the Tachi Nawe, focusing on their effects on the lives and bodies of Epera women.
6.3 Membership, recognition and exclusion of Epera women

Speed et al. (2009) highlight the way that indigenous women are constantly re-negotiating gender as cultures continuously change and transform. Tradition, she adds, is more about specific symbolic value than a reference to temporality, as the moment a practice is considered tradition its content is affected. This insight is exemplified by Viviana’s case who was signalled as the first woman to be expelled from Santa Rosa. Viviana is 23 years old and at the onset of this study was a mother of two children (aged 2 years and 3 months). Her first child, who passed away in August 2014, was the son of a Chachi indigenous male, and the second child’s father is mestizo. During the Christmas festivities, the father of her second child and current partner hit her as well as her mother and attempted to hit Viviana’s father (who is also mestizo). The community expelled him (for being mestizo and for gender based violence) and warned Viviana that if she took him back, she too would be expelled. Within the privacy of her home, she commented how she experienced the threat of her expulsion:

“...The community can not completely control this. I was born in Ecuador and I was part of the foundation of Santa Rosa from 2000, they cannot impose this rule on me. My first child is mestizo and my second one is as well and they will live here with me regardless of their fathers because this is my home and territory” (17-02-2014).

This passage narrates Viviana’s sense of belonging based on her participation in the cultural reproduction of Epera Ecuadorian territory. In this sense, while she and her children may be mestizo, her contributions to the cultural reproduction of the Epera, from her perspective, should outweigh the limitations of her biological mestizaje. In the conversation that followed she states, “I am more Epera than many pure Epera. I speak better Sia than the others; I always dress in Epera dress and teach my children in Epera ways. Even my children speak better Sia than those considered pure Epera” (17-02-2014). What is worth noting about Viviana’s interpretation of cultural/biological reproduction is her distinction between cultural reproduction of Epera culture and biological reproduction of Epera life. From her perspective, the latter does not automatically assume the first. In her experience, she and her children may be biologically mestizo but they are more cultural Epera than many biological ‘pure’ Epera. Furthermore, Viviana’s experience highlights the different ways in which Epera women understand notions of belonging and membership to Epera ethnicity and the possibility that cultural reproduction may be even more important for the continuation of ethnic elimination
than assuring biological reproduction of ‘pure’ Epera offspring. Hence what defines cultural reproduction is a contentious issue while suggesting that the line between cultural and biological reproduction is increasingly blurred amongst Epera women. This is highly significant as it challenges the very reasoning behind the regulations on marriage and biological reproduction. From Viviana’s perspective, having *mestizo* children was not reason enough to leave because she had gone through extraordinary means for cultural reproduction and as such proven her authenticity as an Epera. She was willing to fight against the community’s wishes for her departure.

However, as sentiments against biological *mestizaje* intensified, she changed her mind. At the beginning of August, Viviana lost her 2-year-old son, then in September her nephew died. She blames the lack of good health provision in Borbón for not saving her child’s life, but additionally she blames the killing of her child on one female and one male leader in the community. Unlike other women she blamed the death of her children both on state abandonment (lack of adequate health care) and cultural amalgamation (sorcery by another Epera member). However in the village, Viviana mainly addressed her anger towards village members and the leaders as she believes they put a spell on her, but that it bounced off her and affected her child and nephew. She bases this on the fact that the Jaipanas 89 (traditional healers) saw this on her child’s body. According to the Jaipanas, she had been given a spell because she was *mestiza* and that for that reason people wanted her out of the community. As a result Viviana told me she no longer felt that she belonged in Santa Rosa de los Epera. She explained to me:

“I received opportunities as an Epera; for example, I was given territory and the possibility of obtaining a scholarship to study was now possible. But on the other hand I am also excluded for being a mestiza. We mestizos aren’t considered people here – just animals. Now they see we are leaving the community and they want to retain us. But it’s too late – because I know that they killed my son and killed my nephew. I just want to leave now” (10-09-2014).

Viviana’s perception that the community killed her child and nephew because of their biological *mestizaje* changed her sense of belonging. A sense of deep betrayal propelled her

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89 The Jaipanas or traditional healers are made up of four elders, including one woman.
to leave Santa Rosa. Colombia is not considered an option since she isn’t close to the Colombian side of her family and because the Colombian Epera also practice anti-*mestizaje* cultural purity practices. As a result the last time I saw her, she was planning to leave Santa Rosa and relocate in Borbón or Esmeraldas city.

According to female and male village leaders who set up and implement the regulations, Viviana was given several opportunities to make up for the fact that she has two *mestizo* children by two different non-Epera males. She had been given more leeway due the fact that she is the daughter of Carmen, an important woman village leader, who is considered to have behaved in purer Epera ways than other Epera in the community. In village discussions, Viviana is applauded for having worn Epera dress in Quito and for keeping up with traditions within her immediate family (children and her non-Epera partners). According to male leaders, Viviana’s “only wrong doing” has been falling in love with the wrong men who have been non-Epera and having children with them. In this sense, Viviana’s participation in the cultural reproduction of ethnic culture in Santa Rosa de los Epera was recognised by leaders, but it was not sufficient as biological reproduction was prioritized, especially after the Tachi Nawe’s visit and influence. Highlighting that for Epera leadership biological *mestizaje* matters significantly more than any degree of cultural reproduction, even when Epera women, (the reproducers), have antagonistic perspectives, as shown above.

These dynamics surrounding issues of belonging and membership recognition are imposed by Epera leaders in communal settings but are highly contentious within Epera families and amongst Epera women. For example, Viviana’s mother, Carmen, initially supported the anti-*mestizaje* practices on her daughter; however, she too changed her mind. The following example further indicates the wider tensions created by such policies.

Viviana’s mother, Carmen, drew the picture below of her house and her children with negative energy (*mal aire*) that led to illness and death (Figure 5.1).

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90 Carmen is the newly elected president of the women’s association. She also represents one of the cases to be exempted from the rule of being expelled for having married a *mestizo* and having children with a *mestizo*. 
At the time of drawing this, Carmen lost two grandchildren in one month and blamed the community for intending to kill them and the lack of an adequate health system in Borbón for letting them die. Like Viviana, Carmen recognises the state’s responsibility in letting her children die, but focuses on the blame amongst the Epera. Carmen is 38 years old and has ten children and five grandchildren. Unlike Viviana, she upheld rules on cultural purity for a longer period of time. However, like Viviana, her perspectives changed after the death of her grandchildren. In interviews, she spoke at great length about a deep resentment towards the community and in particular the women’s group. She stated, “No one has come to see how I am – or if I need money for the coffins or to ask about my other children. Because you know they don’t like my *mestizo* children” (20-09- 2014). Like Viviana, she points out her sustained contribution to the community especially as the current president of the women’s group. Yet due to events, she no longer has the time or desire to continue being the women’s group president. She too made the decision to leave Santa Rosa because of her grandchildren’s death and fear of what could happen to her own young children. Her *mestizo* husband took the youngest three of their children (10 months old, 1.5 months old and 3 years old) to reside outside of the community for fear that the community would harm them.
This section has described the effects of anti-*mestizaje* regulations on two women, evidencing different notions of cultural and biological reproduction and discerning divergent views on how to fight against cultural amalgamation, a key element in ethnic elimination. The next section highlights dissenting women’s voices against the intensification of these regulations, as well as a glimpse into changing gendered cultural practices.

6.4 Changing gendered practices and resistance to belonging

Not all Epera women are convinced of the utility of cultural purifying practices and anti-*mestizaje* perspectives. While the majority of women support the notion of endogenous marital partnerships as the means to assure Epera future generations\(^{91}\), some question it. Amongst certain women elders and leaders, concerns are raised with regards to the ‘coherence’ of the entire community in enforcing these regulations. Many communal discussions were dedicated to these topics during fieldwork; in one of the assemblies, a woman leader said,

> We exclude Epera from our community on the basis that they are not doing what they should to continue our people and culture… but how much are we actually doing? The ones who stay here, who are supposedly pure in preserving and recuperating our culture? (Lina, 12-08-2013).

Elder women also expressed in individual interviews their disagreements with anti-*mestizaje* rules that lead to the expulsion of women. Luicy Garrabato expressed the view that as a direct result of this rule, none of her eight children live in Santa Rosa and so she lives alone in her house with her *mestiza* grandchild\(^{92}\). This view was echoed amongst all the elder Epera women. In the case of Liliana and Lucy Garrabato this also means living their old age without their children nearby and for that reason not feeling like they completely belong in

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\(^{91}\) Radcliffe and Pequeño (2010) discuss the case of the Tsachila indigenous women of Ecuador who also view marriage of indigenous women to *mestizo* men as problematic. However, the difference lies in the reason for resistance of mixed race marriages. The case of the Tsachila, as the authors point out, has to do with territorial and resource control, where as for the Epera it is about cultural preservation threatened by ethnic elimination.

\(^{92}\) She did not want her grandchild to live with her daughter (the grandchild’s mother) because she feared that her daughter’s stepfather would sexually assault her – because this happened to her when she was young.
As such, even though membership determines belonging (Simpson, 2014), regulations on membership affects members’ feelings of belonging.

Younger Epera women also do not agree with the expulsion of women and mestizo children. Epera girls whose families are able to afford education beyond the 6th grade study in Borbón, where the majority of their classmates are Afro-Ecuadorians. Consequently, interracial partnerships between Epera girls and Afro-Ecuadorian males are quite common and in some cases girls leave the ethnic territory to pursue these relationships. This coincides with the communal and family pressure for young Epera girls to marry between 12 and 19 years of age. Above that age, women are thought to be more susceptible to being possessed by the devil (as discussed above). Epera girls are meant to couple with Epera boys/men between the ages of 14 and 19. For younger Epera women, the pressure to form a couple with an Epera man is a source of tension within families and Epera leadership since they generally do not support these regulations. Furthermore, in conversations with several girls belonging to the Epera youth association, they mentioned youth migration as another main concern. They explained that there were large numbers of young people from 13 years old, both girls and boys, who had migrated to Esmeraldas city or other urban areas in search of economic opportunities, with very few returning to live in Epera communities in Esmeraldas. According to young people in Santa Rosa, migration is yet another source of conflict between adults and youth since adults perceive youth migration as the abandonment of Epera culture. Given that research did not follow the Epera youth who left Santa Rosa, it is difficult to estimate how many young women left to pursue inter-racial partnerships. However, participant observation and interviews confirmed that pressure was exerted on pre-adolescent and adolescent girls to get married and have a child before 19 and that it necessarily be with another Epera; however, migration makes this an increasingly unlikely scenario as young women’s everyday space was occurring outside Santa Rosa. This scenario shines light on the consequences of the Epera’s constant mobility within Ecuador but also transnationally on the timelessness of gendered practices.

The effects of transnationalism on gender relations are complex and at times contradictory (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003; Hernandez & Canessa, 2012). Feminist accounts oscillate between utopian conceptions of transnationalism which offer a utopian scenario for new

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93 This is not stated in communal discussions or assemblies; rather this is stated in one-to-one interviews and discussions with me.
equitable gender relations, and a pessimistic perspective in which patriarchal figures and customs persist in different places (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003). These insights provide tools to analyse gendered practices that have been outlawed and banned in Epera collective identity, some resulting from a transnational/trans-border set of dynamics. For example, there are practices in the past, such as female genital mutilation, killing babies born to single mothers, and killing ‘abnormal’ newborn children, which are no longer enacted amongst the Epera in Ecuador. Today, women consider these practices to be part of the distant past of their culture, and are rejected\textsuperscript{94}. In doing so, women directly question their tradition’s timelessness on the one hand, and on the other hand suggest not all aspects of Epera culture must be reproduced in order to fend off ethnic elimination. In part, transnational and trans-border dynamics have affected gendered practices over time. A transnational framework allows us to focus on specific locations and the importance of borders with respect to national and ethnic dynamics.

In November 2013, a delegation of Epera women travelled to Maria de Piendamó in the Cauca region of Colombia, to attended an international gathering of indigenous women organised by the National Organisation of Indigenous Peoples of Colombia (ONIC), the regional council of indigenous peoples of Cauca (CRIC) and other Latin American indigenous organisations\textsuperscript{95}. In addition to formal discussion, the Ecuadorian Epera delegation met with Colombian Epera in a more informal way. Some Epera knew one another or recognised distant family. Membership recognition occurred, what Audra Simpson describes as genealogical authority in which “dialogue rests in knowledge of another’s family, whether the members are (entirely) from the community or not. ‘I know who you are’. Pointe finale. We are done; we can proceed” (2014:9). Once family ties were discussed and settled, women exchanged updates and described what was happening on each side of the border. Throughout the event, Epera from both sides of the border met constantly. During these gatherings, the issue of female genital mutilation was debated. Colombian Epera including the leader of the Nariño Epera women’s group and an Epera reservation male governor\textsuperscript{96} narrated how in 2007 the Colombian constitutional court had ruled female genital

\textsuperscript{94} Epera women mention these practices were carried out amongst women (grandmother and midwives) and hence the involvement of men was very limited.

\textsuperscript{95} Over 2000 women met for the II continental gathering of indigenous women in which proposals on gender based violence, racism and everyday injustice and inequality were addressed, discussions summarised in the Declaration of Maria de Piendamó (2013).

\textsuperscript{96} It is worth noting that Ecuadorian and Colombian Epera have different governmental structures. The Colombian Epera have reservations and a governor who is the political authority of Epera territory and is recognised by the Colombian state. On the Ecuadorian side, there is an Epera president but he is not recognised by the Ecuadorian state.
mutilation amongst the Embera (family of the Epera) as unconstitutional because of the death of a baby girl. The Ecuadorian leaders present during this meeting confirmed that this had an immediate and transnational effect on the Ecuadorian side. This Colombian ruling was mentioned though numerous interviews with Epera women in Ecuador, suggesting that women had already been questioning these practices prior to its legal abolition in Colombia. In Ecuador, older women (above 60 years old) had female genital mutilation practiced on them in Colombia but younger generations have not partaken in this practice, because older women refuse to practice it.

Female circumcision/female genital mutilation (FC/FCM) is “illustrative of how the inequities of postcolonialism create particular and gendered dilemmas for those who resist it” (Lewis & Mills, 2003:12). Although generally analysed in African and Arab countries as well as their diasporic communities, it has also been documented amongst the Embera Chami in Colombia (Henao, 2011; Nunez, 2014). Back in Santa Rosa, after the Maria de Piendamo meeting, older women spoke about female genital mutilation and their contentment that this practice was no longer carried out. Even before its prohibition by the Colombian constitutional court, women explained they were already going against this tradition. Lucy Garrabato, the oldest woman living in Santa Rosa, said,

My sister told me when my girls were born if I wanted to have it (female genital mutilation) done on them because she could do it on them. I said “WHAT!” I will never do that to my children. It was done so that women couldn’t have pleasure and run off with other men aside from her husband. These were crazy practices that I am glad we don’t do anymore. Just as I would never force them to marry someone they did not love... like they did to me…I will die never knowing what love is. I never loved the father of my children. This is why when all my children went off and married Afro-Ecuadorians, I didn’t get involved…I didn’t forbid them. Because I would be doing the same thing that my parents did to me...and I was not going to practice this on them (02-07-2014).

Lucy Garrabato is 67 and is both a midwife and Jaipana (medicinal healer) and is one of the few women left in the village that is knowledgeable about Epera traditional music and sings in Sia (Epera language) for special occasions. Due to her role in the village, she is considered an important cultural reference and is often consulted by village members.
regarding Epera cultural traditions. As an iconic cultural reproducer of Epera ethnicity, it is therefore extremely telling that she links female genital mutilation and forced marriages with the forced endogamy of Epera women in the present. Such views originate in her personal experience she had of a forced marriage at the age of 14, resulting in eight children from 12 pregnancies (the rest were miscarriages); she speaks of her marriage in a sad and angry tone. Because of her own experience in a forced marriage with an Epera man who she did not love, she chose to not forbid her children from marrying and having children with non-Epera partners.

In the past, children born to single Epera women were killed. Lucy Garrabato told how when she was young, she accompanied a friend to give birth in the forest and witnessed her friend killing the newborn because of pressure from the woman’s family and community. In the past Epera women were not meant to be single mothers. The women overhearing this story cringed and repeated, “thank goodness we do not do this anymore” (notes on focus Group, 12-04-2014).

In conversations, the Epera president and ex-president told me, “You won’t see any abnormal children in Santa Rosa because they were left to die when they were born. That’s how we kept our race healthy and that’s why we are all normal now” (01-09-2014). The extent to which ethnic normativity is policed in Santa Rosa is illustrated here.

Epera cultural purity is depicted by lineage but also determined by notions of what is physically normal and what corresponds to heteronormative ideas of belonging (Warner, 1991; Halberstam, 2005). Certain bodies are accepted and others rejected (Butler, 1990). While gendered traditions such as female genital mutilation or the killing of babies born to single mothers have been abolished, others such as the rejection of mestizo children and partnerships are implemented in the present. Women are positioned as ethnic boundary producers and guardians, a position upheld by some women and rejected by others. As Speed et al. (2009) and others have stated, the problem of treating indigenous women as reproducers of culture shows the disproportionate effects and responsibility on women versus men in a community. The Epera case study demonstrates further the effects on women’s bodies,

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97 This is not a topic that is discussed in communal discussions and is a topic that I can talk about with few women in Santa Rosa.
sexualities and the violence this creates. The Epera discussed here suggest more needs to be done to understand what happens to indigenous women in these scenarios with regards to contexts of indigenous elimination. Moreover, the cases illustrate women’s agency even in contexts where options for agency appear so minimal. The examples illustrate a shift in gendered practices forbidden by state judiciary but which were already put in place by the women themselves. Women’s discontent with tradition eventually led to change. They utilised their role as biological and cultural reproducers to create changes within Epera society, as is shown by how Lucy Garrabato transmitted Epera gendered expectations onto her children. In some ways the womb has been a constant site of resistance and tension not only against settler colonial invasion but also amongst Epera gendered practices. Changes in gendered traditions are possible as long as belonging to the community is not questioned. Belonging becomes politicised when it is threatened (Yuval-Davis, 2011) as occurred with the presence of the Tachi Nawe in Santa Rosa who used her acquisitive gendered role as the principal cultural signifier to re-impose anti-\textit{mestizaje} regulations, in existence since 2000 yet not implemented. The measures were implemented when she threatened not to return, sending a clear signal that the Ecuadorian Epera would remain without a relationship with their most important cultural icon. The process of indigenous elimination on both sides of the border is materially real; the Epera as a unified group could perish. Still, why should the responsibility be only on women and at what cost?

6.5 Conclusion

Nuanced and complex accounts by Epera women on identity across physical and metaphorical border sites, drawn out in this chapter point to contrary conceptions on cultural hybridity and \textit{mestizaje} third space along geopolitical border-lines found in Chicano and postcolonial literature. While Chapter 4 focused on territorial spatialisation and the construction of an internal Epera border within the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, this chapter shed light on how some Epera women endorse the making of an ethnic boundary by advocating regulations around marriage and partnerships, while others oppose these rules. Indigenous gendered notions of belonging, in particular the cultural reproduction processes of the Epera on the Ecuadorian side of the borderland, are in tension with biological reproduction, causing the forced removal of some women from Santa Rosa.
Epera women are explicit in the promotion of purifying practices amongst Ecuadorian Epera and justify these practices as a way to safeguard Epera ethnicity in two fundamental ways. First is that *doing as is done in Colombia* is depicted as the way to practice cultural purity because Ecuadorian Epera are emulating a Colombian set of practices interpreted as originally and historically established. Second, ‘pure’ Epera children are expected to result from these practices, with offspring considered the only way to combat the possibility of ethnic extinction. In this chapter these processes were considered by way of analysis of cultural reproduction and biological reproduction of Epera notions of membership. Epera women stressed that these regulations and practices have a disproportionately higher impact on women than on men because of their potential as mothers and as principal care-takers of children. Gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced, stemming from a heteronormative framework such that belonging is demarcated on women’s bodies and sexuality.

Nevertheless, there is a fine line between upholding politics of resistance from the womb and acknowledging when this has been violated.

I know there is a tension between our trajectories as leaders who have promoted women’s rights. But we have also promoted rules so that the Epera do not disappear. So I think that in the next assembly when the rules are likely to be enforced with some young women then I will remain silent. That will be my strategy (Arturo Chiripua, 10-02-2014).

Arturo and Soraya, two communal leaders, acknowledge tension around the enforcement of anti-*mestizaje* and culturally pure practices for women in Santa Rosa. The following chapter will address how women’s rights are conceived in Santa Rosa as well as how they co-exist with purifying practices, by focusing on the different types of violence experienced by Epera women.
Chapter 7: Boundary-making, violence and Epera women

Leaders of the Epera community acknowledge that there is an inherent contradiction in advocating cultural purifying practices while also promoting women’s rights. There is the acknowledgement that the two don’t go together. Or do they? In this chapter I highlight how, for Epera women, women’s rights and purifying practices are not antagonistic but rather complementary. It is worth noting that purifying practices in this research are not only framed within debates between women and cultural rights but also within processes of ethnic elimination, which I have drawn attention to so far in this dissertation. As such, purifying practices pertain to cultural rights but ultimately are contemplated as a means of cultural and biological reproduction in the face of ethnic elimination. I am making a conceptual contribution in addressing cultural purifying practices to the literature on women’s rights and cultural rights arguing that while purifying cultural practices are considered cultural rights by Epera women, they are ultimately assuring the right to not be eliminated. This does not imply that Epera women prioritise cultural continuity over their rights as women but rather, as I will show, they are actively negotiating and changing gendered practices within this conundrum. Additionally, Epera women acknowledge the possibility of women’s rights within Epera notions of cultural practices and vice versa: women leaders often state, “Dentro de ese derecho esta nuestra cultura” (within that right [women’s rights], our culture lies). In their perspective, women’s rights can be adapted to their culture and are even compatible with purifying practices because they are exercising their political agency as ethnic boundary-makers, exemplified so far in this dissertation. At the onset, their identity as women and as Epera do not clash, rather one identity marker is considered essential to save the other. As one elder Epera woman stated, “Without us, (Epera women), the Epera as a people will disappear”. As ethnic boundary-makers this sentiment translates into the idea that it is women’s political agency that is saving the Epera cultural and biological continuity. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, this desire expressed by the Epera women’s group is fraught with tension and various degrees of support. This chapter further explores the challenges women face by drawing attention to the intersectionality of violence affecting indigenous women. An intersectional analysis of violence moves beyond a narrow perspective of gender-based violence because indigenous women experience violence not just for being women but also due to their class, ethnicity and history (Sieder & Sierra, 2010:12).

98 A problem encountered when addressing cultural rights in the Latin American context has been that it is limited in scope to issues relating only to the indigenous and intercultural domain (Hale, 2005).
While the prior two chapters focused on Epera women’s role in boundary-making, this chapter focuses on violent challenges to Epera women’s boundary-making. Despite women’s key roles in boundary-making to preserve Epera indigeneity, they are subject to different types of violence affecting their lives at all scales, from obstetric violence, to rape and intimidation, to political exclusion and control. This is manifested through interpersonal and political violence exerted at all levels, but especially by male leaders against women leaders. Indigenous women are also subject to violence carried out by the Ecuadorian state through the lack of adequate health provision, in particular regarding obstetric and gynecological care. Systematic malpractice towards Epera women affects their reproductive health, a condition necessary to continue as ethnic boundary-makers; meanwhile, male political violence truncates their political agency. The juncture of these different levels of violence against women exemplifies the complex web of factors further complicating their role as cultural guardians and reproducers of Epera life.

In this context, violence against indigenous women needs to be analysed from a feminist postcolonial and de-colonial perspective so as to not fall into the notion that cultural rights are incompatible with women’s rights, as has been suggested by several scholars. Susan Okin in her famous article “Is Multi-culturalism Bad for Women?”, goes as far as to suggest that minority women might have been better if the culture they were born in were either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding culture), or, preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women – at least to the degree to which this value is up-held in the majority culture” (Okin, 1999:22-23).

Okin’s suggestion that a minority culture’s extinction could perhaps be the solution for minority women resonates with the logic of elimination that Epera women already endure and actively struggle against. It also negates the agency of minority women that travel within the confines of the majority-minority culture, to know what ‘better’ is for them, since Okin assumes that this will lie inherently with the majority culture. While many of the ‘backward’ cultural practices that Okin refers to make up past or present Epera cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation, Epera women propose something opposite to Okin. Furthermore as Speed (2008) has highlighted in the Mexican scenario binaries such as individual/collective
or cultural/women’s rights do not always draw out indigenous women’s lived experience, which are more complex and nuanced.

The extent to which Epera women are engaged to fight against ethnic elimination highlights other ways to understand tensions between women and cultural rights. Instead of promoting the elimination of the Epera culture, Epera women are active cultural agents, creating change in cultural realms in relation to women’s rights, while at the same time promoting cultural continuity. The tension between women and cultural rights and indigenous women as cultural guardians has been analysed in other scenarios aside from those of ethnic elimination. For example, in the Andean and Mesoamerican context, debates on the tension between women’s rights and cultural rights in the midst of changing cultural practices has focused on ancestral justice (see Hernandez & Canessa, 2012). Meanwhile, in the Ecuadorian context, scholars have highlighted the relationship between indigenous women as cultural guardians via the oral transmission of language, wearing traditional clothing, and even preparation of food (Pequeno, 2009; Picq, 2009), but the tension between cultural and women’s rights within the context of ethnic elimination has yet to be examined. What happens when indigenous women find themselves at the interface between the collective death of their ontological indigenous identity and situations of gender-based violence, which are inversely truncating their ability to stop the latter? Surely, this puts feminists in a very difficult position, because it implies that women’s rights must always be the priority when in situations of gender-based violence. And while I am not suggesting that women accept different levels of violence in the name of culture, I am pointing to more nuanced accounts and strategies beyond binary assumptions of a good right (women) and bad right (culture). When Epera women state that “dentro de ese derecho esta cultura” – they are not separating women’s rights from cultural rights, as other scholars have already suggested (Richards, 2005; Paredes, 2008), but rather, as I am arguing, that cultural rights be interpreted as cultural continuity. I am extending Hernandez's analysis of indigenous women's groups in Mexico which as she states "paradoxically, organise to change communal traditions and structures that exclude them , while also claiming a right to their culture“99 (Hernandez Castillo, 2008:24). Epera can continue to exist as women as long as the collective life and Epera culture endure as well. This chapter wishes to draw out the tension between women’s rights and cultural rights in the context of ethnic elimination from women’s experience of

99 My translation from Spanish to English.
targeted violence. Departing from different levels of violence towards women assumes that women’s rights should be prioritised, but I am suggesting a more nuanced account in which it is not one or the other, but rather one occurs through the other.

This chapter highlights the different types of gender-based violence enacted by Epera males and the Ecuadorian state on Epera women and how these meet at the site of ethnic and spatial boundary-making. The chapter then shines light on Epera women’s vernacularisation of women’s rights in light of ethnic elimination while at the same time challenging violence within Santa Rosa, thus extending conceptual debates on women’s rights and cultural rights in indigenous contexts to those facing attrition. Finally, this chapter ends with the importance of the bi-national indigenous women’s alliance (Ecuador-Colombia) as an optimal space from which Epera women seek to further advance an Epera women’s political agenda. Though seemingly unrelated processes, I show how state, communal and transnational scales of violence are closely inter-related and foundational for the challenges Epera women’s everyday experience.

7.1 Community political violence: women and the violence of non-recognition

Epera women face a particular scale and space of violence within Epera family settings. Feminist geographers have pointed to the home as the prime site for violence against women (Rose, 1993; Pain, 1997; Warrington, 2001). It is within these spaces that constitute a gendered landscape (Monk, 1992) that non-recognition of ‘pure’ Epera children by Epera fathers takes place, thus reflecting other gendered dynamics within the communal discourses of the continuity of Epera culture. Epera men make difficult women’s efforts as ethnic boundary-makers, by not assuming their responsibilities as fathers of Epera children. The civil code\textsuperscript{100} in Ecuador addresses the child’s right from birth to ages 18 to 21 (depending on circumstances) to be given clothing, food, housing, recreation, care, and studies by both parents. In the case that one or neither parent complies with the rules, financial responsibility is placed on grandparents, aunts and uncles or siblings above the ages of 21\textsuperscript{101}. If the responsible adult does not comply with the amounts per child designated by the Ecuadorian state, then he or she faces jail time or bail. Lina and another female leader Florinda brought

\textsuperscript{100} Organic Civil Code of Process.

\textsuperscript{101} Every year the Ministry of Social Well-being publishes a table of stipend amounts that should be allotted per child, that is dependent on the amount of money that the responsible adult makes.
this information to an open session in which the women’s political agenda was presented to Santa Rosa (05-06-2014). Over the course of this research, Epera women elaborated a political agenda and it was as a result of this process, and with a preliminary draft of the document in hand, that Epera women demanded legal and social recognition of Epera children by Epera men. Given that one of the priorities of the Epera women’s agenda is the eradication of gender-based violence within and outside the community, this issue was discussed as a shared problem in Santa Rosa de los Epera in women’s group gatherings. Later villagers came to an open meeting called by the women’s organisation to debate the preliminary draft of the women’s political agenda (06-07-2014). In this context, women’s discontent was aired with the rest of the community in a political setting. According to Epera women, men do not take paternal responsibility within purifying practices. Hence, after a ‘pure’ Epera union is had, the responsibility of raising the children in practice rests on the mother or grandmother, not the father. What is problematic for Epera women, however, is when an Epera father does not recognise an Epera child as his own.

Lourdes, a 60-year-old woman leader, brought up this problem saying:

We have a real issue with Epera men not taking responsibility for the children they produce. The mothers - we as women - are left as the only responsible ones. As a community, we let this happen. Sometimes the uncle or the woman’s father will give the child the surname that the father won’t (05-06-2014).

She gave several examples of this, including her own life history. She pointed to Gabriel (an Epera male leader) and told how he didn’t acknowledge the existence of their daughter, who is now 15 years old. Their daughter in turn had a child with an Epera who is now in Colombia, and who also does not recognise his child. In Lourdes’ household alone, there are three children of six in total who are not recognised by their respective Epera fathers. Lourdes was worried that no punishment exists for Epera men who do not recognise their children even if they are with Epera women. She further commented:

It does not make any sense ; there is so much pressure to reproduce and maintain pure Epera culture by having pure Epera children. But the men are the first ones to not recognise ‘pure’ Epera children! In my case, I am old and can deal with Gabriel not owning up to his duties, but I still want punishment for him. But in the case of my
daughter – the father of her child (who is my granddaughter), well he just left for Colombia! How do I obtain justice when he is with our people over there? There has to be a way!

Lourdes’ life experiences and those of her children are exemplary of a common occurrence within the Epera ethnicity based on fieldwork. Tracing family connections revealed 15 children who remained unrecognised by an Epera male; their fathers were in Ecuador or Colombia leaving nine grandmothers responsible. Older Epera women leaders are raising their children’s children due to their abandonment by Epera men. The mothers of unrecognised children have to work and live in Borbón or migrate to other parts of Ecuador, as otherwise they do not have an income to support their children. In this sense, grandmothers are carrying the financial and care responsibility of male Epera fathers, who have chosen not to recognise biological Epera children. As a result, the Epera women’s political agenda calls for both ancestral law and statutory laws to recognise and punish this. The 2014 Epera women’s political agenda states:

We Epera women, have been victims of different types of gender-based violence (psychological, sexual, physical and patrimonial)\(^{102}\). The ancestral justice system of the Epera of Ecuador includes sanctions for the different types of gender-based violence, based on existing legislation in Ecuador, as well as based on national public policy to eliminate all forms of violence against women. As such, we demand that in cases where gender-based violence is not adequately dealt with or when the community decides it should be treated under statutory law (like rape), then we request that the case be dealt with under statutory law and national judicial counterparts (2014:un-numbered).

Scholars such as Sierra (2012) have made the claim that in indigenous contexts, indigenous women strategically make use of external justice systems to make political demands while redefining ancestral judicial systems (2012:212). Epera women’s agenda provides a clear example in which indigenous women make reference to statutory law in

\(^{102}\) Patrimonial violence is defined as when partners destroy or hide patrimony (documents, assets, etc.). This type of violence was measured in the last Ecuadorian census (INEC 2010). However, it is not within the three types of GBV (Gender Based Violence) recognised by the Ecuadorian state in the Civil Penal Code. The Ecuadorian state only recognises psychological, physical and sexual violence. The negligence of Epera fathers, therefore, is based in the Organic Civil Process code of Ecuador. Nevertheless, Epera women discussed this under patrimonial violence.
order to identify a gendered practice as gender-based violence within ancestral justice systems.

When the Epera ancestral justice system and regulations were being revised after the Tachi Nawe’s visit mentioned in Chapter 5, the women’s groups saw this as a key moment to bring forward the women’s political agenda and present it to the community. They wanted fathers’ dereliction of duty to be registered in the Epera ancestral justice system as patrimonial violence. As shown in the previous chapter, Epera women challenge particular cultural practices from their role as mothers and ethnic boundary-makers (such as the eradication of female genital mutilation and killing of newborns to single mothers). Here I focus on how women wish to utilise ancestral law to challenge the cultural practices of Epera men. Hence, when it comes to changing certain gendered cultural patterns they are key protagonists, but in order to change practices enacted by men, they then turn to ancestral and statutory law, as found elsewhere when organised indigenous women develop strategies to challenge traditions from within communal institutions (Sierra, 2012; Hernandez Castillo, 2010). Specific to the Epera context, is the question arising from Epera bi-nationalism as to how to hold men who flee to Colombia responsible for abandoning children in Ecuador. As Lourdes asked, how does she make an Epera man who left the Ecuadorian side of the border for Colombia assume his responsibility as a father? She and other women during fieldwork mentioned that they also knew of Epera men on the Ecuadorian side who had left Epera women with children in Colombia. This explains in large part, why participation in bi-national political affairs is important for Epera women (see below). Epera women’s cross-border alliance is strategic for women in Santa Rosa de los Epera, because it is a sphere in which to address to gender inequities and violence, and to hold men accountable from both sides of the border. A transnational Epera women’s alliance would address internal gender boundaries and violence.

Throughout the series of discussion on the issue of GBV only one person defended the men who did not recognise Epera children. Alicia, who participated in the women’s group and attended CEDEAL’s workshops on women and cultural rights103, stated

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103 CEDEAL is a local NGO for women’s rights that has worked in the Borbón region for over 20 years. They gave two workshops on women’s rights and cultural rights in Borbón and invited five Epera women to participate, including Alicia.
But women also provoke this. I have three sons and one daughter. And if I see later that these girls are flirting with my son – then it is the responsibility of those girls’ parents. Because their daughters are tempting my sons and so it’s not entirely their responsibility if she falls pregnant and my son doesn’t recognise them. All of the parents must look to fix this by educating our children (05-06-2014).

Though this comment did not garner significant support, it represented discrepancies amongst Epera women. Following this comment, participants agreed that parents had to be more aware of children’s actions. Thus the responsibility was placed on parents of future Epera adults and partnerships, and less on existing fathers who do not recognise their children. Nevertheless, Lourdes and several women leaders stated that if men did not start to change their behaviour as negligent fathers, then she and other women would resort to statutory law. In the context of these debates, the community agreed that, in future, accusation and punishment would be included under ancestral law and that patrimonial violence would be considered as form of gender-based violence. The exact type of punishment would be decided by the Epera government council and general assembly to be held in the coming months.¹⁰⁴

Physical gender-based violence is punished by sending the man to clean up the communal farm. How much of the communal farm and the frequency of work is determined by Epera leaders in a general assembly based on the severity of the case. This depends on women being strong enough to bring a man forward in an assembly where accusations are communicated; “The risk is that men will further punish a woman for having exposed him at the assembly. Back in their home …he will probably hit her again for having exposed him” (Angela,10-07-2014). While physical gender-based violence is addressed in general assemblies, sexual violence is not. In the ancestral justice-working document, rape is considered a penal offence to be dealt with under statutory law. Nevertheless, according to women’s accounts there has not been one case presented to the national statutory justice systems or courts. Thus, justice in gender-based violence cases enacted by Epera men, is sought via ancestral and national statutory systems. However this has yet to happen.

¹⁰⁴ This did not take place during fieldwork.
Overwhelming statistical evidence in Latin America demonstrates that indigenous women are subject to extensive violence within their communities. Significant literature addresses gender-based violence and indigenous women, focusing primarily on indigenous women’s access to ancestral/western justice systems and the resulting tensions between women’s rights and cultural rights (Pequeno, 2009; Picq, 2009, 2012; Sierra & Sieder, 2010; Hernandez, 2008, 2012). Ancestral justice systems fail to address and engage with cases of rape, and sexual violence in particular, as noted by various authors (Sieder & Sierra, 2010). While these discussions are immensely important in drawing out the challenges in access to justice available to indigenous women, addressing gender-based violence in indigenous contexts is not merely a question of which type of justice system (ancestral or western) is better equipped for indigenous contexts. Rather I am suggesting that GBV cases can be curtailed by strategies employed by indigenous women themselves via mechanisms outside the binary thinking in relation to indigenous women’s lived experience of rights (women/culture and individual/collective) (Speed, 2008). The need to contextualise GBV in indigenous contexts should not necessarily translate into asking which combination of justice systems is most effective, or how rights, be they women’s rights or collective/cultural rights, come together in the case of gender-based violence. There are other ways in which cultural practices that inflict gender-based violence upon indigenous women can change or be eradicated without, or in conjunction with, justice systems, even outside the law. Epera women’s experience shines light on how this can be done, as seen in Chapter 5, by no longer practicing certain gendered practices. During fieldwork this also became apparent with regards to strategies employed to tackle GBV where political spaces (discussed in the next section) are key to combating political violence by Epera men.

Epera women are generating change through their role as boundary-makers, whether spatial or ethnic, a perspective from which to develop a new analysis of gender-based violence against indigenous women from the commonly used framework of justice systems. By introducing the different types of violence against their bodies into communal decision-making spaces and the ancestral justice system, Epera women bring issues treated as non-political to the political domain of the Epera community, such as paternal responsibilities. Hence, Epera women have created and brought about a politics of the body from the intimate space of the home in relation to their bodies out into the communal spaces of decision-making politics. In many instances, Epera women have already created change before bringing it up in these politically-charged spaces of decision-making, as evidence in Chapter
5 (by no longer practicing FGM or the killing of newborns to single mothers). Therefore, the change that is occurring in the communal space is of a different nature than that normally illustrated through justice systems and claims. This exemplifies what Harcourt and Escobar describe as when “body politics” change the “political nature of culture” given that culture is political in that it “produces or determines meaning, and the power to produce or determine meaning is constitutive of our lived experiences as well as our analysis of them” (2002:11). Women’s political work thus shifts the politics of Epera culture in that they are creating changes in Epera culture prior to the decision-making processes of governmentality (ancestral/statutory laws). Drawing upon Morgensen’s notion of settler colonial bio-power through liberal forms of governmentality (2011), Epera women are contesting the frameworks from which indigenous elimination occurs outside of processes of governmentality in Santa Rosa. In other instances, Epera women are using communal space to target male behaviour, which they cannot control within the confines of the home.

This section has focused on the violence enacted by Epera men as fathers in not assuming paternal responsibility of children borne with Epera women, and the ways Epera women are choosing to tackle this problem. The next section focuses on Epera women’s notions of women’s rights in light of ethnic elimination and the political violence inflicted by Epera men, extending the scale of violence from the home to the political sphere. The political arena for Epera women, as mentioned in this section, is crucial because it is in spaces of women’s political organisations that priority issues for Epera women are addressed, confronted and changed.

7.2 Political violence of exclusion: women’s organisations and women as leaders

The Ecuadorian Epera women’s organisation was founded shortly after the acquisition of Epera territory, Santa Rosa, in 2001. The nun, Veronica Carrasco, who was key in channelling funds from counterparts in Belgium to acquire the territory today recognised as Santa Rosa, was also vital in promoting women’s rights and the creation of the Epera women’s organisation. These events occurred during a time whereby women’s rights paradigms came to Santa Rosa in the form of development or aid projects. Gender and Development (GAD) programmes were key aspects of international funding and, as such, both Ecuadorian and international programmes from the mid 1990s promoted indigenous women’s leadership (Lind, 2005; Zaragocin, 2007; Radcliffe, 2015). At the same time, the
Plan Colombia generated significant international aid for the northern border of Ecuador (Zaragocin, 2012), which according to Epera women leaders brought numerous projects from international and national NGOs which required a gender component. This section further details how Epera women shaped their own notions of women’s rights, influenced by women’s rights frameworks brought to Santa Rosa via development projects but also through the political violence inflicted on them by Epera men.

In 2002, after state recognition of the Epera as an Ecuadorian indigenous nationality by CONAIE and CODENPE (chapter 3), Epera women attended gatherings called by the CONAIE women’s representative. The Epera also joined the CONAICE\(^{105}\), and one young Epera woman, Diana became the regional representative on health and well-being. NGOs such as the Antropico Foundation and CEDEAL\(^{106}\) introduced a women’s rights framework from a western perspective. In the meantime, Epera women have also received CODENPE training on indigenous collective rights, indigenous governmentality, notions of Buen Vivir, and Indigenous life plans. Between 2010 and 2014, CODENPE carried out two programmes involving the Epera; an indigenous governance project (2011) and indigenous life plans of Buen Vivir. The first sought to recuperate indigenous governance mechanisms, while the second arose from a lack of participation of indigenous peoples and nationalities in post-2008 constitution territorial debates, which resulted in the Organic Code of Territorial Organisation, Autonomy and Decentralization (COOTAD). As part of the reform of the Ecuadorian state, territorial planning is now developed through decentralised units such as parishes, cantons and provinces, directed by SENPLADES (National Secretariat for Planning and Development). Each unit is required to have a territorial development plan (PDOT), which according to CODENPE officials, did not systematically involve indigenous peoples and nationalities. As a result, in 2013 CODENPE started a pilot project to create what were called ‘indigenous life plans of buen vivir’ (planes de vida de buen vivir) for eight indigenous nationalities, including the Epera\(^{107}\). Thus Epera women have participated in cultural and women’s rights based training through different processes since 2002.

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\(^{105}\) CONAICE is a branch of the CONAIE for indigenous peoples and nationalities of the Ecuadorian Coast.

\(^{106}\) Both are Ecuadorian mestizo-led NGOs that have worked in the province of Esmeraldas since the mid 1990s. CEDEAL is financed mainly through international aid agencies such as UN WOMEN, who has financed several of their projects.

\(^{107}\) Two mestizo physical geographers were hired to do the Buen Vivir life plans in the eight indigenous nationalities. I was present for three of their presentations in Santa Rosa de los Epera.
During fieldwork, CEDEAL had a year-long process including three male and three female leaders addressing cultural rights and women’s rights, meeting monthly in CEDEAL offices in Borbón. Male and female participants were meant to repeat these training sessions in Santa Rosa. However, during fieldwork, the participants were unable to obtain the necessary funds to hold a village assembly to disseminate the training from CEDEAL. Neither did the Epera participant mention or make reference to the project during communal discussion. Hence, the transfer of these rights frameworks to Epera in Santa Rosa did not occur. Nevertheless, it is illustrative that Epera women, along with other Andean indigenous women, experience gender ideologies and practices that originate outside their places of origin (Radcliffe, Laurie & Andolina, 2002). As notions of indigenous collective rights, these processes reflect the vernacularisation of rights frameworks which become indigenised, with “shifts in meaning – particularly in the way new ideas are framed and presented in terms of existing cultural norms, value and practices… it is the symbolic dimension of vernacularisation” (Merry, 2006:39).

Currently the Epera women’s organisation reflects a combination of external and internal factors. The global economic crisis, as well as policy changes in Ecuador’s political regime, have meant the Epera are no longer recipients of direct international aid and receive only Ecuadorian state-funded social assistance projects. The gender component of international NGOs or bilateral agencies’ programmes, and the funds that came with them, are no longer present. International aid to the northern border has become scarcer after major changes occurred in international cooperation between Ecuador and multi-later and bi-lateral organisations in light of the 2008 constitution. The Epera leader of international affairs stated:

There are no more NGOs. Before, we used to be able to pick who we wanted to work with. They would come to Santa Rosa de los Epera and we would say what we wanted, then we would write a project, and then we would receive funds. The last

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108 International Cooperation defined by SETECI (Technical Secretariat of International Cooperation) draws on indigenous notions of ‘minga’ to define its internal and external cooperation policy. Its institutional brochure states “the minga is joint work for the benefit of the community highlighting values of belonging and commitment with the other” (Institutional brochure, pg. 6). In relation to cooperation it states, “Cooperation is understood as mutual exchange and learning to give and receive experiences, resources and knowledge” (Institutional brochure, pg. 6). Part of the government’s foreign policy sovereign matters are to be dictated by the government not outside governments, a stance that led to the expulsion of the World Bank and the US military base are other examples (Becker, 2013).
A major project was with UNHCR and the German Development Agency. Now with the Citizen’s Revolution, some organisations have been expelled from the northern border, such as the International Migration Organisation which had an office in San Lorenzo. This happened around 2010 (11-10-2013).

Additionally, Epera male leaders have reacted against vernacularization of women’s rights by Epera women. Epera women have been affected by systematic male violence exerted by male leaders on Epera women. According to women’s accounts, male leaders pressure their wives and families into dissociating themselves from the women’s organisation and demand that they not vote for women candidates for important communal political positions. Women leaders mention that the previous male president had beaten his wife after she received training by the CEDEAL NGO. Women also spoke of an incident in which a different Epera leader was in charge of bi-national affairs and known to hit his wife. “We were surprised to see her at some of our meetings lately – that he would have let her come” stated Angela (13-04-2014). Male leaders use force against their wives to limit women’s political reach. In this way, a specific use of gender-based violence towards women’s leadership prevents them from participating or taking up leadership. This type of political violence has been documented for other indigenous communities in Ecuador, so it is not particular to the Epera (Pequeño, 2009; Picq, 2012).

From 2004 to 2008, two women were elected presidents of the national Epera organisation (NAESE) for two consecutive periods, reaching the highest political positions in Santa Rosa de los Epera. Epera women leaders refer to that period as among the most important moments of their lives: they ran income-generating projects, including a communal bank, which at one point managed up to US$20,000 for the entire community. They attribute their political and economic downfall to male leaders’ jealousy and wish to appropriate the women’s economic resources and political power. Women narrate how their organisation has weakened since then, as village men have co-opted their financial resources and purposely defamed political achievements. In some instances, male Epera leaders stole the women’s livestock and sold them in Borbón. The Epera women’s association had bought pigs with money earned selling craftwork, and intended to raise pigs for profit or consumption. Left with one pig, male leaders demonstrated an interest in confiscating it. However, four women leaders got in the way (Lorena, Florida, Carmen and Neida). The men backed down and did
not take the pig at that time. However, days later when none of the women were present, the men took the pig and sold it for around US$600; no one knows where the money went.

In March 2014, the national Epera yearly assembly was held. During this meeting male Epera leaders expressed a wish to control the women’s organisational funds, arguing that women’s groups did not have statutes\(^{109}\) or a bank account, and that all of the proceeds to the community should be deposited in the bank account of the NAESE. Furthermore, they argued that by managing money and resources on their own, the women were going against Epera principles of prioritising the community over the individual. Women countered that they did not trust male leaders to manage their funds. Lorena stated:

> When we had funds, you took it and did not let us use it the way we wanted to, saying that in doing so we were dividing the community. The leadership used us in order to get funds and then when we received the funds, we were not able handle the money on our own. This is why we want statutes now, even if there aren’t any projects (04-05-2014).

For the women leaders, the main problem has been political jealousy due to the leadership positions formerly held by Epera women. The men agreed that this was the case, stating that it was not fair that the women kept winning the most important leadership roles in the community: “Back then, they used their votes to only vote amongst themselves. That was not fair for us!” (Salvador Chirimia, ex-president). The current president of the Epera National Association (NAESE), David, shared this view, and declared at the national Epera assembly: “What type of election is it when only women from the women’s group wins. It isn’t fair!” No mention was made of the fact that since a woman was elected president in 2008, only young Epera males have been presidents. Women at the meeting were not interested in the election of another woman president in the future, but rather that the assembly approve the motion that would allow the women’s group to obtain their own statutes to be organised as a separate political entity from the NAESE. This shift from forming part of the NAESE to establishing their own entity would allow complete financial and political autonomy. For example, funds would no longer come through the NAESE but directly to the women’s association. As one female leader stated,

\(^{109}\) Any type of civil society association must be legally recognised under Ecuadorian Law through what are known as statutes of association.
We were presidents of the NAESE. We did run communal banks. We have done all of that. But then the men get angry because we have too much power and so now we just want to manage our own political organisation where we can control resources and everything and not have to deal with them (06-07-2014).

As a result, during the national assembly, several women confronted the NAESE’s president for not agreeing to women’s groups obtaining their statutes as a separate organisation within Santa Rosa. They argued that the president was against Epera women having power. Despite his resistance, the communal resolution was that the women would go ahead with obtaining statutes. However changes under the present government, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) ruled that associations can be recognised in two forms: foundation and corporation. A complicated online application process costing between US$400 and US$4,000, created conditions which make it nearly impossible for the women’s group to obtain legal status and a RUC. They simply could not afford the bureaucratic process involved in being recognised as a separate political entity than NAESE. At the end of fieldwork, the Epera women’s organisation remained politically weak with no funding. Had it been implemented, legal status would have allowed the Epera women’s group to be independent of the ethnic organisation, giving them direct control of resources and permitting negotiation with funding bodies.

As a result of the dynamics mentioned above, over the past decade in Santa Rosa the Epera women’s political groups have articulated an indigenised (Merry, 2006) notion of women’s rights within what can be considered as indigenous communitarian feminism. Paredes (2008) locates indigenous communitarian feminism in its emphasis on the collective, instead of the individual, basis for women’s rights discourse. Richards (2005) contends that Mapuche indigenous women emphasise the collective rights of their people with their individual rights as women because Mapuche women are not separating gender from the rest of their identity. Like the Mapuche women, Epera women’s notions of rights, both as indigenous and as women, have been centred on collective concerns. For example, Epera women’s discussions explicitly appreciate communal women’s rights and a resulting communal benefit from the few resources obtained by the women’s organisation through craftwork, for example. While individual women’s rights are recognised, such as the right to a life free of gender-based violence, emphasis is placed on the female communal experience;
gender relations are tied up with the well-being of the entire community\textsuperscript{110}. This is related to primary concerns articulated by the women’s political agenda, the first being the right to clean, drinkable water, which affects everyone in the community, in particular children (Epera Women’s Political Agenda, 2014). At women’s group gatherings, critiques were made consistently against \textit{mestizo} notions of gender, mainly highlighting their disagreement with focusing exclusively on the individual and not enough involvement of the men (not leaders but the role of men as fathers, for example). Epera women promote both collective and individual management of resources around the production of craftwork. For example, when the women’s group receives an order over a certain price, the income is distributed independently of the relative contributions. For smaller orders, the money is kept for communal emergencies\textsuperscript{111}. However, much of this communal women’s rights discourse is changing for Epera women, as shown above. Epera women leaders are now considering the benefits of restricting resource distribution and decision-making to members of the Epera women’s group. This is an important shift, reflecting the dire recent political dynamics amongst male and female Epera leaders. It also draws attention to the ever-changing nature of gender dynamics in Santa Rosa and its political manifestations. An escalation of political violence by Epera males results in a change in how women’s rights are exercised within the community. Whereas before, funds obtained through craftwork were equally distributed to the entire community, a shift for only women to benefit from the funds and to manage them marks an ideological shift away from what has been called communal indigenous feminism (Paredes, 2008)\textsuperscript{112}. The best way to describe the present scenario for Epera women’s rights is “indigenous women’s gender demands, constructed in active engagement with discourses at the intersection of individual and collective rights, contributes to an alternative way of thinking about rights that is consistent with local understandings and underpins local forms of resistance” (Speed, 2008:119).

Furthermore, Epera cultural practices which uphold women as cultural guardians responsible for the continuance of the Epera ethnicity have not, in these circumstances translated into support for women’s political involvement with the NAESE. According to the Epera ethnic by-laws, the Epera governing council should comprise male and female leaders

\textsuperscript{110} It is worth noting that the Epera never mentioned complementarity which is a cosmic order that attempts to characterise the relationship between men and women in meso-American/Andean indigenous cultures.

\textsuperscript{111} Under Harcourt and Escobar’s framework of women’s politics of place, these transactions would be considered “ethical spaces of interdependent economic activity” (2005).

\textsuperscript{112} Communitarian Indigenous feminism has emerged in the Bolivian context, and has received considerable academic attention in Ecuador and other Andean contexts.
in equal members. As such, Epera women are officially guaranteed membership in Epera political affairs, yet male Epera leaders fear women’s political power. As evidenced, this fear plays out through various forms of physical and political gender-based violence. In Yuval-Davis’ words, Epera women are “excluded from the collective ‘we’ of the body politic” (1997:47), despite symbolising the future of the Epera collectivity. In the context of the Navajo Nation, Denetdale (2006) has asked “how are women signifiers of culture and tradition in the construction of the Navajo Nation and, at the same time, denied full political participation in the Navajo government?” Denetdale’s question for the Navajo can be extended to the Epera context where women have been excluded from political affairs, but are encouraged to continue as cultural and biological reproducers of Epera ethnicity.

This section focused on the exclusion of Epera women leaders within the Epera Ecuadorian national organisation. I turn in the next section to focus on violence enacted by the Ecuadorian state.

7.3 State endorsed obstetric violence: Boundary-making in intimate space

In this section, I want to highlight an additional and distinctive scale of violence that Epera women endure, which is generated by the poor quality of healthcare provision in areas where they live, reflective of structural state violence covered in Chapter 4. Postcolonial feminists (Mohanty, 1991) examine regulation of gender and sexual relations via institutional policies on a range of issues from the family to healthcare to the state, highlighting the history of race-based and class-based abuses of population control and sterilisation. Such abuses by a racist state relate to poor women of colour’s subsequent ambiguous relationship to the ‘abortion rights’ platform. Smith (2005) highlighted how the state enacts violence on the reproductive health of indigenous women in gender-based but also race-based ways. She views sexual and reproductive violence towards indigenous women as a tool primarily used for genocide in the Native American scenario, enacted through particular state policies, to

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113 Mohanty (1991) makes the claim, therefore, that the discussion on abortion rights cannot be defined as women’s rights versus men’s familial control in the US context. During fieldwork, the Ecuadorian state was undergoing an intense battle regarding the national strategy of eradication of teenage pregnancy; reflective of the government’s stance on gender issues and abortion in particular. Ecuadorian feminists claim that the policy area has been illegally put under the executive branch, and the current gender advisor to the government is firmly against depenalising abortion and has strong religious affiliation to the Opus Dei. According to recent studies carried out by the National Office of eradication of teenage pregnancy, indigenous women are the most vulnerable, having the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Ecuador.
create “a strategy designed not only to destroy peoples, but to destroy their sense of being a people” (Smith, 2005:3).

In the case of the Epera, prevalence of obstetric violence became apparent during the process of elaborating the women’s political agenda (with the other violence above). Lucy Garrabato shared:

They cut my daughter in half. They cut her vertically. Everyone knows that a caesarean is horizontal, but the doctor, if you can call him a doctor… cut her in half and stapled her stomach together. She was so ill; she couldn’t even go to the bathroom properly. She still can’t go to the bathroom properly. And I, her mother, am a midwife. I know what to do, but they didn’t let me in to the birthing room …They didn’t listen to me. I told them ‘I am her mother and I am a midwife - I know what to do!’ But they don’t honour our medicine. She should have had her baby here in Santa Rosa de los Epera, not in Borbón (13-03-2014).

This horrific example of medical negligence by a doctor at the Borbón health centre is one of many examples that women shared during conversations. Women acknowledge that in general the quality of healthcare is poor in Borbón, and although they depend heavily on ancestral health systems, they go to the nearest state-run health facility when this does not work. Furthermore, because of the lack of competent obstetric care many women have to travel to better healthcare facilities in Quito. Such was the case of Alicia, who had to take out a loan from the IESS (Ecuadorian Institute of Social Welfare) in order to pay for travel to Quito and medicine to cure problems caused by medical malpractice carried out in the same Borbón health facility. Ironically she had to take out a loan from the social security of the Ecuadorian state in order to save her life from the malpractice of state endorsed free health facilities in Borbón. As she states:

That alleged doctor left a gauze in my uterus. I had to go to Quito urgently; I thought I was going to die. In Quito they told me that it was due to malpractice during my miscarriage in Borbón, that doctors here had left a gauze inside. I was swollen for days, fevers – I can’t believe I survived that (05-08-2014).
Obstetric violence has been experienced by several Epera women. Not until Lucy Garrabato shared this experience, did women realise quite how common it was. Flor stated,

Until today, I didn’t know that so many of us have been going through this. We stopped meeting and we stopped talking about what affects us as women. Now, after listening to all of us, I recognise how we have all been treated badly (05-08-2014).

As we spoke, Epera women were surprised to see how rampant obstetric and gynaecological malpractice was for them and their children. Due to political violence inflicted by Epera men and the subsequent debilitation of the women’s group, women had not met systematically in over one and a half years. Hence, they had not discussed the violence they were all living with as an organised group; their slow death was made invisible.

At a national level, limiting the political reach of the organisation of Epera women within Santa Rosa de los Epera and the NAESE has restricted social cohesion amongst Epera women. As a result, women seldom meet formally to discuss issues of critical importance to their well-being. Despite the Epera women’s organisation, it was only through the communal exercise of sharing stories of violence against their bodies that its effects on all their bodies as Epera women became apparent\textsuperscript{114}. Obstetric violence created by the nearby public health facility demonstrates the lack of adequate health provision, particularly with regards to the reproductive health of Epera women. They also highlight the rejection of ancestral health systems within national state run health centres in denying the entry of Epera midwives who could have ultimately prevented some of the malpractice, invoking the idea that western-centred ideas of health are valued over indigenous/ancestral ones.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, women are subject to state-endorsed violent activity along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. This section illustrates the effects of structural violence on women’s sexual and reproductive health. The Ecuadorian literature on violence against indigenous women has failed to address processes of ethnic elimination. Hence, I utilise native scholar-activists’ work on gender-based violence as a way to address Epera women’s problematic agency as ethnic boundary-makers and their access to reproductive healthcare. Addressing the North American context, these scholars address

\textsuperscript{114} Exemplary of PAR (participatory action research) in action.
gender-based and race-based violence in the context of settler colonial bio-power and modern state violence that link ethnic elimination, genocide, and gender-based violence as interconnected forms of regulation of indigenous women’s bodies (mostly by the state) (Smith, 2005; Simpson, 2014; Paredes, 2008). As Smith has suggested, state-endorsed violence towards indigenous women arises from the colonial desire to stop them from reproducing (2005). Native women are particularly threatening as they have the ability to reproduce future generations of native communities and assure the continuance of their people (Smith, 2005:15). Hence with the aim of eliminating indigenous and ethnic groups, settler colonial states and other non-state actors competing for territory have targeted women as biological reproducers of native communities (Smith, 2005; Stoler, 1995). Although I did not undertake research in Borbón health facilities, the number of cases I witnessed, which totaled seven Epera women during a 12-month period, suggest that it is a systematic affair.

Furthermore, a reflection on bodies is imperative in order to fully engage with Epera women’s lived experiences of violence in this scenario. Epera women’s bodies are intensely lived, performed, altered and violated (Grosz, 1994); even more strikingly they are communal and individual at once. Epera women’s bodies cannot solely be understood from a western perspective of the autonomous individual but must also be seen in relation to the community (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002). In processes of ethnic elimination, Povinelli (2011) suggests that slow death goes beyond empathetic forms of grief and instead constitutes socially co-substantial corporeality in contrast to the social imagery of individuated bodies. For the Epera, the body and the control of bodies is a communal affair. If the state impedes an Epera woman from being a biological and cultural reproducer of Epera ethnicity because of malpractice then the state is further obstructing Epera ways of fending off ethnic elimination. Harcourt and Escobar’s, as well as Povinelli’s, perspectives aid understanding of how Epera women conceive of their bodies, and hence how Epera women perceive violence on their bodies, the political organising around their female bodies, and ultimately ideas of ethnic elimination.

An indigenous notion of communal body as life is rejected by entities such as the state, which ultimately have the power to decide between life and death over indigenous populations through state abandonment, such as that which occurs through obstetric violence on Epera women. Negating Epera women’s access to quality healthcare services, in particular obstetric care, challenges their ability to position themselves as ethnic boundary-makers.
Hence, by not providing Epera women with adequate state services, I suggest this precludes attention to processes of ethnic elimination. Statistics on indigenous health, in particular indigenous women, are dramatic; malpractice is common. As Povinelli (2011) has stated, the illnesses that afflict indigenous people are not catastrophic, rather easily preventable. They are the “uneventful forms of misery and dying that characterise indigenous life” (2011:146). Indigenous slow death is uneventful and thus disguised, even with dramatic statistical evidence of state abandonment and negligence, as is the case for Epera women with regards to obstetric violence enacted by the Ecuadorian state. Extending Povinelli’s argument that the state and market forces have won over the communal notion of the body to promote western individuated bodies, we can understand how the Epera were ‘accustomed’ to dying slowly. It is telling that Epera women only understood how the communal Epera woman’s body was being affected by state abandonment when collective discussions were held on this issue. Prior to that, women thought they were individually experiencing obstetric violence. Ultimately, this strikes at women’s ability to uphold their role as ethnic boundary-makers. If the Epera are preoccupied with their ability to procreate and keep the ethnicity alive, then the lack of adequate health provision and the different levels of obstetric malpractice directly affect this. In this sense, deplorable healthcare provision combined with the weakening of the women’s group are fomenting elimination rather than challenging slow death.

7.4 Violent exclusion from the transnational *Gran Familia Eperara*

There is yet one more important way in which Epera women experience violence in the everyday border experience, in that political violence of male Epera leaders towards organised Epera women limits the extent to which women can forge bi-national interactions with Colombian Epera. The act of border-crossing also creates and enacts the ‘bi-national’ political alliance of the Grand Epera Family. Nevertheless, within bi-national political gatherings, Epera women are excluded. Although Epera women are border-crossers and go on *paseos* from one side to the other, their transnational *political* participation has been sidelined, making the bi-national meetings mostly male-to-male affairs. As discussed in prior chapters, Epera women’s position as cultural reproducers of Epera indigeneity depends on a constant relationship with Colombian Epera. Many women also argue that they would benefit from a closer political relationship. However, they are again subject to political violence by male Epera leaders, violence that has resulted in limited bi-national women’s political exchange and coordination. This issue is of critical importance with regards to cross-border
security and obtaining justice for cases of transnational gender-based violence. Thus, limited and strained bi-national political alliances with Colombian Epera and particularly with Epera women on the other side of the border results from political violence inflicted by male Epera leaders.

According to lengthy discussions, Ecuadorian Epera women long for a closer relationship with their Colombian counterparts but men’s control of transborder formal politics has not permitted this. The political violence which Epera women endure within Santa Rosa acts as an impetus for wanting to create a women’s alliance with Colombian Epera women (focus group meeting notes: 11-07-2013 ; 12-06-2013 ; 09-12-2014). Neida expressed this viewpoint during one of the women’s group sessions:

We want to be closer to our Colombian Epera sisters. We have so much to learn from each other. For example, we want to know how they do their craftwork. Since there are more Epera there than we are here, we want to know how they deal with gender-based violence over there. We have heard that they are not as empowered politically as we have been here. And even though we have lost power – we could at least join forces with them. If men from both sides want to exclude us, then we will unite (07-07-2014).

The reasons for wanting to further strengthen political ties rests on the active exclusion by men as well as the exclusion women face in participating in bi-national gatherings. Three bi-national gatherings (2009, 2010 and 2012) were organised by the Ecuadorian Epera in the hope of creating political alliances with Colombian Epera115. At these meetings, held on the Ecuadorian side, the overwhelming majority of participants were men. Leaders in charge of bi-national affairs for the Ecuadorian Epera have always been male and are the ones who go to Colombia to promote ‘bi-nationalism’ in the name of the Grand Epera Family116. It is likely that those coming to the bi-national Epera gatherings represent

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115 At the II Gathering of Indigenous Women in Colombia (2013) all conversations between Ecuadorian and Colombian Epera reflected on why the bi-national committee had not taken off (this committee was in charge of following through the resolutions of the three prior gatherings). According to some Ecuadorian Epera women elders, the reason is there isn’t a national Epera organisation on the Colombian side. Each region (Cauca, Nariño El Valle de Cauca and Chocó) has a separate Epera organisation but there is no national organisation.

116 One bi-national leader of the Ecuador-based Epera went to Colombia for one of these bi-national missions and started a family in Colombia, bringing a Colombian Epera woman to Ecuador and leaving the Ecuadorian based Epera wife aside.
only a fraction of the Epera on the Colombian side. As Colombian reservation authorities only hold yearly appointments, political instability makes it difficult to assure sustained political work. For the women’s association, it is particularly difficult because women on the Colombian side are not organised in women’s groups at the reservation or departmental level, and most definitely not at the national level. In other words, no equivalent to an Epera women’s organisation exists on the Colombian side. Fieldwork in Colombia pointed to the limited political involvement of women in Colombian Epera politics. An ex-United Nations official interviewed in Nariño province, who had worked closely with Epera women in the Nariño Epera association, commented how women were not allowed to fully participate in reservation meetings and assemblies. Only in 2013 did an Epera woman get elected as governor of a reservation.

Despite the obstacles that Ecuadorian-based Epera women perceive among women in Colombia, they express a very strong desire to make contact with them. At every women’s gathering or meeting, this goal was mentioned from an array of perspectives, reflecting, in part, Colombian Epera territory’s role as a cultural reference point (Chapter 5). In part it reflects the existence of political alliances amongst the Epera through which women wish to be coordinated with Epera on the Colombian side. Imagined geographies identify where these alliances might be most likely: As Carmen stated,

> Pure Epera culture – exemplified by our woman Tachi Nawe and her sisters – are closest to us in Nariño, Colombia….they suffer the same problems as we do such as mestizaje. So if we want to learn more about our culture, we shouldn’t go to the ones in Nariño because they are just like us. We need to go further…. In Saija [further away from the border] our people still speak only Sia, for example (24/03/2014).

Women’s perception of the Epera in Nariño contrasts with their perception of ‘pure’ Epera culture in Cauca. “If what we want as women is to make sure we preserve our culture we need to go where our culture is strong” (Maria, 24/03/2014). As such, these two statements concur as cultural reproduction is conceived as politically dependent on a bi-national alliance amongst women.  

117 Most of the Epera reported to come for the bi-national meetings are from the Narino province and not from the Cauca and Valle de Cauca regions.
As an organised political group, Epera women have important reasons to create a women’s bi-national political alliance. Although Ecuadorian Epera women are not legally recognised, they still organise and meet as the Epera women’s association. By the end of fieldwork they had written their first Epera women’s political agenda. At every assembly of the women’s association, the Colombian women’s practices – from cooking to making crafts to ancestral medicine – are first on the list of priorities. The women’s association thereby acts to strengthen women’s position as ethnic boundary-makers. Since Colombia is seen as the cultural reference point (Chapter 5), it is considered as the place to go for answers regarding Epera ways, becoming a place-dependent way to maintain culture and promote purifying practices. However, just as Epera women are considering a shift from communal gender politics to women-only politics within Santa Rosa de los Epera, so too they propose a women only bi-national political alliance. Epera women’s desired bi-national alliance is in part what Harcourt and Escobar (2002) have described as place-based transnationalised struggles.

Material consequences arise from the limited and strained relationship with Colombian Epera leaders, in terms of access to resources, care and justice. Women, for example, do not benefit from bi-national dynamics to the same extent as male Epera leaders. Those who have stronger political relationships with Epera governors in Colombia can obtain better quality, free healthcare in Colombia. Strategic relationships are forged with Colombian leaders in order to receive these benefits via recognition from Epera governors as Epera by providing a letter stating such. Epera who already have strong relationships with governors in Colombia are mostly male. Yet, as discussed earlier, ironically, it is Ecuadorian Epera women who suffer the burden of biological and cultural reproduction and have the least contact with Colombian Epera political leaders who could benefit most from health systems in Colombia.

For Ecuadorian Epera women, another important aspect of bi-national contact concerns obtaining transnational justice in gender-based violence cases, particularly cases of Epera Ecuadorian men not assuming responsibility for children whose mothers cross to the Colombian side (and vice versa) (see section 6.1 above). Epera women on each side want the chance to call for justice in the transnational setting, but this is impossible given their exclusion from Epera bi-national politics.
Epera women desire participation in a variety of scales of the boundary-making process, as we have seen throughout this study. At the transnational level and with regards to the Grand Epera Family, the Epera are ‘unmaking’ the national boundary in their challenges to settler-state sovereignty by creating transnational indigenous networks and political spaces. Crossing an ethnically unmarked border creates other kinds of gendered borders around the Grand Epera Family, in that male-to-male transnational political leadership creates internal gender boundaries. It also highlights how the geopolitical boundary has different meanings for males and females, and this internal border impedes a transnational women-to-women political alliance. Herein lies an important correlation between boundary-making and boundary-crossing that makes up part of Epera women’s political desires and lived experiences. At the transnational level, transborder mobility and political engagement is limited for Epera women. Carefully guarded male-to-male bi-national political partnerships are at the root of this, partly created through information exchange operating across informal security networks between Epera in Ecuador and Colombia. For border-crossing, the Epera do not rely on official security forces to know when or where it is safe(r) to cross; rather they phone male Epera governors of Colombian reservations. Since bi-national political relationships are male-to-male, Epera women are often dependent on male leaders to cross the border. Consequently, border-crossing is tied up with boundary-making. In the case of male-to-male political bi-national organising, Epera men are challenging national boundaries through transnational political alliances. However, through the same act they limit the participation of women in transnationalism and create an internal gender-determined border within Ecuadorian Epera.

Indigenous women are all too aware that being part of the Grand Epera Family defines what it means to belong to the Epera. Consequently, when Epera women desire a bi-national political alliance under the umbrella of the Grand Epera Family, they are transcending multiple ideas of sovereignty. As Simpson has rightly suggested, “indigenous bodies, indigenous sovereignties and indigenous political orders prevail within and apart from settler governance” (2014:10). Simpson calls this a type of “nested sovereignty”, which questions nation state sovereignties in light of defining political membership. However, sovereignty is not just upheld by Ecuadorian and Colombian nation states, as discussed in Chapter 3, but also by Epera male-to-male bi-national leadership activities which create a masculinised ethnic sovereignty. Epera women are not just fighting back against ethnic elimination via their roles as ethnic boundary-makers, but also the political violence they are
subjected to by Epera men. Political violence has not only caused a deterioration in the women’s association’s cohesion, but also destructured the possibility for Epera women to further challenge sovereignty as enacted by two settler states and ultimately conditions that result in their elimination. Epera women’s desire to mobilise politically across borders questions both settler-state sovereignty as well as male-to-male political power.

7.5 Conclusion

Tovar-Restrepo and Irazabal’s (2014) work on indigenous women in the Colombian context highlights they are producing new forms of territoriality due to the armed conflict. “Conflict has obliged women to relate to their environments and the other co-producers of territoriality in ways that problematise normalised ethno-gendered and cultural roles” (2014:50). Likewise the Epera desire for a women-only bi-national political alliance questions internal male-to-female political leader dynamics as well as nation state sovereignty through the creation of a new place for Epera women’s politics at the bi-national level.

Postcolonial feminist writing has cautioned against the tendency to present indigenous women as victims of patriarchy since this is a form of colonial discursivity (Mohanty, 1991) that negates the spaces that indigenous women have opened in their own cultural dynamics (Hernandez & Canessa, 2012). Indigenous women are often essentialised as triply marginalised for being poor, female and indigenous (Sieder & Sierra, 2010), furthering their portrayal as hopeless victims of an ethnically-charged male power. In order to combat this in the Latin American setting, Hernandez and Canessa (2012) propose extending the concept of domestic violence in indigenous settings in meso-America and the Andes, beyond cultural analyses of indigenous groups to include state violence and the structural context in which violence occurs against indigenous women. Linking gender-based and race-based violence beyond indigenous gender relations and onto structural causes is what this chapter has attempted. Epera women have made the case for these perspectives to be strongly considered whereby indigenous women are actively fighting against an overarching structural force of violence; that of ethnic elimination.

Epera women experience the different scales of violence exerted by the Ecuadorian state and male Epera leaders. Ranging from obstetric violence and intimidation to political exclusion
and control, the progressive levels of violence and power embodied by Epera women are highlighted in order to draw out the political implications in national and transnational registers. Male violence, as Hoffman (in Kuokkannen, 2008) has suggested, is part of the state, not just like the state. In this sense there is an intrinsic link between the violence perpetrated by Epera men and that carried out by the Ecuadorian state. This chapter focused primarily on the strategies employed by Epera women. Epera women adopt different approaches to the different types of violence to which they are subjected. In the case of violent Epera cultural practices, Epera women are changing these incrementally within the intimate spaces of home and through the politics of the body, thereby challenging the need to always turn to ancestral or western justice systems for solutions to gender-based violence in indigenous settings. Nevertheless, ancestral and western justice systems are important and vital when engaging with Epera men’s violent actions, such as the non-recognition of Epera children. The slow death of the Epera is recognised by Epera women through the challenges that they face as ethnic boundary-makers, a role they have chosen to take on as active agents of cultural and gender politics. In this sense, the chapter draws out the settler colonial biopolitics of being an Epera woman in the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. While exploring the processes of gender-based violence against Epera women, it highlights the vernacularised notions of women’s rights that the Epera political women leaders uphold. Through their political and ethnic boundary-making roles, Epera women are not only changing gendered cultural practices but also striving to create new places for these practices to be carried out, such as the bi-national women-to-women political alliance.
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

The study set out to explore the colonial conditions under which indigenous women’s mobility and life were constituted along geopolitical boundaries; focusing on a border site where the geopolitical boundary divides an indigenous transnational territory. Twelve months of fieldwork identified that ethnic elimination constitutes the main threat for Epera women’s everyday lives and futures. Thus, the dissertation focused on what constituted the attrition of the Epera, Epera women’s interpretation of their ethnicity’s elimination, and lastly how Epera women strategise, mobilise and respond at the everyday scale. Aside from gathering unprecedented ethno-graphic data, this dissertation has also employed theoretical frameworks rarely used in the Latin American context, such as settler colonialism, to explore indigenous elimination. Settler colonialism then was connected to feminist geopolitics at the everyday scale of transnational indigenous women and analysed from postcolonial and decolonial feminist perspectives to draw out nuanced accounts of indigenous women’s agency, caught at the interface of ethnic attrition and cultural continuity. This final chapter sets out to: a) bring together the answers to my research questions from the empirical findings presented in previous chapters; b) highlight how these findings and the analysis of them impinges on existing theories or understandings; c) make recommendations regarding border and military policy; d) address the limitations of the research undertaken; and e) make recommendations for future research.

8.1 Summary of findings

Though the doctorate initially set out to investigate the relation between the militarisation of the Ecuador-Colombia borderland and bi-national indigenous women’s mobility, the study revealed that militarisation is just one aspect of the pressures placed on Epera women, enhancing Epera women’s sense of insecurity and compounding fear of elimination. Everyday fear of the disappearance of Epera ethnicity determined women’s experience along the Ecuador-Colombia borderland, and in particular within Santa Rosa and its surroundings. State abandonment was evident by the lack of piped water and sewage systems, persistent medical malpractice, and lack of protection by security sectors from rampant criminal activity. In addition, territorial replacement was evidenced through the contamination of the Epera farmland and river ways by surrounding African Palm plantations and mining, oil and timber industries. In other cases, the Epera were approached by mining and oil companies’ representatives in efforts to explore and exploit Santa Rosa. Territorial
replacement and state abandonment are only two ways in which ethnic elimination were evidenced by Epera women through descriptions of their everyday space and activities (Chapter 4). Cultural amalgamation, or the assimilation of settler’s culture (mestizaje), was also identified as comprising ethnic elimination. Some Epera women attribute the possible disappearance of Epera ethnicity to mestizaje, or bearing a child with a non ‘pure’ Epera. Fears of mestizaje eventually diluting Epera culture to extinction led some women to identify cultural amalgamation as the sole reason for ethnic elimination, while others also pointed to the effects of state abandonment and territorial replacement. Thus, the process of interpreting and identifying ethnic elimination amongst Epera women themselves suggests that ethnic elimination is not a homogenous experience for all members, but that it is a diverse and highly gendered process. Moreover, state abandonment and territorial replacement can be naturalised in emphasising ethnic elimination as a result of mestizaje rather than attributing it to structural factors.

Once the study identified how Epera women recognise and interpret their ethnicity’s attrition from everyday space, their strategies, mobilisation and responses were drawn out. Two fundamental ways were highlighted; spatial boundary-making around territory and ethnic boundary-making between themselves and mestizos. Epera women engage in spatial demarcation practices by controlling who enters and exits Santa Rosa. This is based on how safe-space is defined for Epera women, which includes the exclusion of outsiders such as the Colombian Epera and mestizo men. Another way which Epera women create a spatial boundary between Santa Rosa and the outside is through a selective engagement of the state; refusing a highway from entering Epera territory while accepting cash transfers and other state services (Chapter 4). Meanwhile, Epera women also foster ethnic boundary-making through enacting purifying practices comprising strict regulations on Epera women’s bodies and sexualities to ensure pure Epera offspring resulting from Epera-only heteronormative partnerships. Violation of these rules has direct consequences on Epera women in the form of physical punishment, and the removal of membership status to Santa Rosa de los Epera and Epera ethnicity. Halting cultural amalgamation through purifying practices is a contentious issue amongst Epera women, who either support or disagree with the measures taken against mestizaje. In summary, ethnic and spatial boundary production reflects the multi-scalar space in which ethnic elimination unfolds. Ethnic boundary-making is used to counter cultural amalgamation while spatial boundary-making addresses territorial replacement and state abandonment, suggesting that ‘pure’ Epera bodies and Epera-only space are strongly related.
The latter was further evidenced through the creation of the Santa Rosa space based on the imagined geography of Colombian Epera territory, considered more dangerous than Ecuador while also more Epera ‘pure’ in cultural terms. Purifying practices on Epera women’s bodies, in turn, were based on Colombian cultural practices. Thus, the notion of purity is both embodied and embedded in imagined geographies.

Finally, the study set out to identify the struggles that Epera confront as they strategise against ethnic elimination. Gender-based violence within Santa Rosa and the surrounding space was an important element recognised by Epera women impeding their everyday roles as boundary-makers on the different spatial registrars documented; from the body to the dock between the river and Santa Rosa. Epera women endure different scales of violence exerted on them by Epera male leaders and the Ecuadorian state, exemplifying overlapping geopolitical forms of violence resulting from a masculinised ethnic sovereignty which is further installed through a male-to-male relationship between Epera and military men along the border. Meanwhile Epera women are also excluded from the transnational level of Epera politics following political violence already experienced within Santa Rosa. A bi-national indigenous women’s alliance (Ecuador-Colombia) is a desired space from which Epera women seek to further advance an Epera women’s political agenda. What is evidenced is that the state and communal and transnational scales of violence are closely inter-related and foundational to the challenges Epera women experience every day.

8.2 Theoretical contributions

The findings mentioned above invoked the need for a theoretical framework that addressed ethnic elimination in contemporary indigenous contexts; settler colonialism’s focus on elimination of indigenous peoples being that framework. Settler colonialism’s approach to indigenous peoples is that of continuous elimination through amalgamation and replacement as central to structure; as invasion not a singular event (Wolfe, 1994, 1999; Morgensen, 2011). Two key analyses of settler colonialism proved essential for the dissertation: Morgensen’s (2011) analysis of settler colonialism as a contemporary form of bio-power, through liberal forms of governance that attempt to dispossess indigenous peoples of their land, identified as territorial replacement; and Rifkin’s (2009) emphasis on geopolitics alongside bio-politics by addressing state abandonment of indigenous territory. I have added a third element to Morgensen’s (2011) territorial replacement and Rifkin’s (2009) state abandonment by addressing yet another form of settler colonial bio-power; cultural
amalgamation, through the assimilation of mestizo culture. Wolfe (1994, 1999) contends that settler colonialism’s logic of elimination depends on territorial replacement as well as amalgamation, and this dissertation has extended his ideas on what amalgamation means. Amalgamation and mestizaje have been linked throughout the dissertation in ways that can be connected to postcolonial theorisations on hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Mitchell, 1997). Ambiguous relations amongst the Epera but also in relation to the Ecuador and Colombian states change constantly, making the Epera case study exemplary of hybrid colonial relations on multiple scales. While several scholars have made the distinction between indigenous elimination through killing indigenous life and killing indigenous culture (Smith, 2005; Rivera Cuiscanqui, 2010; Paredes, 2012), I have extended this to a contemporary grounded and trans-local feminist account. Hence, I have made the case that settler colonialism offers feminist geopolitics, in particular, a specific context from which to discern indigenous women’s struggles against contemporary forms of elimination. Other colonial frameworks, do not engage with contemporary conceptualizations of territorial replacement, cultural amalgamation and state abandonment that ultimately lead to the biological and cultural death of indigenous peoples. Hence, in order to apply feminist geopolitics to contexts of biological and cultural collective death of indigenous peoples, then settler colonialism is a necessary framework. Moreover, what this does do feminist geopolitics, is that it ultimately brings into question other conceptions of collective death. As such, the logic of elimination provides insights on intimate geography literatures which focus on women’s reproductive bodies defining territory, conceptions of home and belonging (Brickell, 2014; Smith 2009, 2012). Epera women’s interpretations of ethnic elimination demonstrate that cultural amalgamation, territorial replacement and state abandonment co-exist in tension with one another. In doing so, Epera women are conceptually doing two things. The first is that Epera women’s ethnic and spatial boundary-making mechanisms highlight that elimination and therefore survival is riven with a series of ambiguous relationships and embedded within unstable and contradictory notions of space. Second, that survival in the face of elimination means that Epera women have learned to acknowledge and strategize between a geographically communal identity that is both inclusionary and highly exclusionary; a nomadic Epera sense of identity within a transnational spatial imaginary (Grand Epera family) and a recently established community in Ecuador (Santa Rosa de los Epera); ideas that inform already controversial and contested notions about what comprises ‘pure Epera’ identity. In doing so, this dissertation expands existing postcolonial and feminist literatures that eschew binary logics in emphasizing that where indigenous women’s struggles occur, influence how
hybridy, is embraced and understood (Mitchell, 1997). Lastly, what the Epera case study has contributed to is a unique analysis on mestizaje from the perspective of indigenous women, contrary to the largely written political use of mestizaje, by Latin American top-down state policies onto indigenous peoples.

Maddison (2009) has made the case for conceptualizing settler colonialism’s logic of elimination as a form of structural violence. In this dissertation, I applied ideas concerning the pacing from which elimination unfolds by emphasizing slow death (Berlant, 2007) and slow violence (Nixon, 2013) in the everyday scale of Epera women’s lives. As such, the dissertation moves forward ideas on the relationship between forms of structural violence and elimination by emphasizing its temporality and normalcy. Feminist and intimate geopolitics promote understanding the connection between the global and intimate scales of violence, hence attention was also placed on GBV. Different manifestations of GBV are drawn out in each element of ethnic elimination, thus extending the link between sexual violence and the placement of settlers on indigenous land. For it is not only sexual violence that occurs but an intersectionality of violences thus demonstrating the extent to which women’s bodies experience the burdens of colonisation and taking the equivalence between land and gender to a new level (McCintock, 1995; Smith, 2005; Rivera Cuiscanqui, 2010; Paredes, 2012). Moreover, I contend that it is at the multiple sites of the intersectionality of violence experienced by Epera women where settler colonialism’s consequences on Epera women meet with feminist geopolitics. This means that ethnic elimination’s effects on Epera women are experienced through different levels of continuous and structural violence (including physical and epistemic), and through different boundary-making processes (spatial and ethnic boundary-making) that comprise women’s everyday political responses to the multi-scalar effects of ethnic elimination. Feminist geopolitics in this dissertation depends on understanding that ethnic attrition occurs at the pace of slow death (Berlant, 2007), and in the deteriorated ordinary spaces of everyday indigenous life (Povinelli, 2011). Feminist geopolitics allowed for a detailed grounded account from the everyday space of Epera women; without this theoretical framework, ethnic elimination could go un-noticed or, worse yet, be normalised. Moreover, I am implying that ethnic boundary-making (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, 1993; Yuval-Davis, 1997) in the case of Epera women is exemplary of feminist geopolitics in that it questions power structures from intimate spatial registrars through purifying practices (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Brown & Staeheli, 2003; Hyndman, 2003). Given the postcolonial and decolonial set up of this dissertation purifying practices embodied
by Epera women are illustrative of feminist geopolitics because Epera women use their bodies in ways that are political defined by the all women’s political platform in Santa Rosa, to challenge elimination. Nevertheless, the dissertation has drawn out the complexities from which these dynamics unfold. Regulations on sexuality and women’s bodies amongst the Epera are not timeless and are challenged on a daily basis, demonstrating that co-constitutive postcolonial feminist and feminist geopolitical conceptualizations are necessary to highlight how this case study is a different inflection to discourses on racial purity. Conceptions on contemporary forms of indigenous elimination; where and how this occurs, as well as, its gendered consequences allow us to understand the context of ethnic attrition. Ideas on empowerment (Kabeer, 1994, 1999) and bargaining with patriarchy (Kandyioti, 1988) enable us to understand why Epera women choose to embrace practices that maintain their subjugation. Claiming that ethnic-boundary making is a feminist geopolitical practice is a productive way to make use of an uncomfortable theoretical premise. Creating safe-space through ethnic boundary-making and spatial boundary-making is exemplary of feminist geopolitics because both processes are attempts to develop a ‘politics of security’ from the body (Hyndman, 2003) and from below (Koopman, 2011). Alter-geopolitics (Koopman, 2011) is important to further emphasize that empowerment, roughly speaking the ability for women to make choices, is defined by disempowerment, in the first place (Kabeer, 1999). In this sense, I have started to allude to the notion that indigenous (re)-bordering is a form of feminist geopolitics. Though this would need substantive further theorization, it is a start towards an indigenous feminist use of borders. Following Sletto’s definition of indigenous (re)-bordering as cultural productions of functional and (in)visible boundaries to resist domination, I have extended the site of indigenous (re)-bordering to spaces of ethnic elimination. There is a feminist use of the indigenous (re)-bordering process that occurs in Santa Rosa by Epera women, in the making of ethnic and spatial boundaries, that engages with national, bi-national and the Grand Epera transnational spaces. Theoretical conceptualizations on gender and nation used in this dissertation have not engaged with these other notions of national and ethnic space (in particular bi-national and grand ethnic families). Hence when Epera women create boundaries (ethnic or spatial) resulting from indigenous (re)-bordering to assure cultural survival, they reproduce a narrative that links ‘authentic’ indigienity with boundary-free space, and in doing so are challenging nation-state spaces and sovereignty. Native studies critiques of bio-politics are confirmed within the Epera scenario. In particular, Rifkin’s (2009) claim that indigenous notions of territory, which do not abide by the nation-state imaginary of confined territory and corresponding
territories, are abandoned. Bi-national and the Grand Epera family are exemplary of the latter. Thus, when Epera women create spatial and ethnic boundaries they are also engaging with these other conceptions of ethnic-national space and take it further by employing a particular feminist geopolitical use of metaphorical and physical boundaries. The latter can further allow critical geographers to expand on postcolonial critiques of sovereignty from the perspective of marginalized indigenous women.

As I have previously mentioned feminist geopolitics, however, was not sufficient in further explaining the contentious issues that arise from Epera women’s involvement in promoting purifying practices, ethnic boundary-making and indigenous group membership that often resulted in violent practices towards Epera women. It was important therefore to address what type of feminism was being politicised when Epera women were taking on the position of cultural guardians and enacting gendered purifying practices. In order to address Epera women’s agency and the inevitable questions that arise in relation to women/cultural and individual/collective rights, postcolonial feminism and Latin American decolonial feminism offered crucial insights. Postcolonial feminism allowed Epera women to not be seen as an oppressed woman dominated by ethnic patriarchy (Spivak, 1990, 1993), an easy interpretation from a liberal, western feminist perspective. By contrast, postcolonial feminism permitted a more nuanced account whereby Epera women’s experience pointed to how tensions between gendered and ethnic signifiers are negotiated, changing communal traditions while also claiming a right to their culture (Richards, 2006; Hernandez Castillo, 2008; Speed, 2008; Paredes, 2008). I extend the literature on women’s rights and cultural rights in indigenous contexts firstly by bringing it to an analysis of ethnic elimination, and secondly by suggesting that the purifying cultural practices are considered cultural rights by Epera women. ‘Purity’ and ‘mestizaje’ are co-constitutive of a complex and nuanced narrative of what elimination signifies for Epera women, one that is neither timeless nor unchallenged.

Latin American decolonial feminism challenges the colonial structural of modernity (Lugones, 2010; Espinosa et al., 2014) and as such is in line with settler colonialism’s theory emphasis on the structural elements of colonial invasion (Wolfe, 1994, 1999). Furthermore it is Latin American decolonial feminism that places racism and coloniality at the centre of its critiques of modernity (Espinosa et al., 2014), creating a more relevant account of Epera women’s experience, particularly with regards to intersectionality involving not only race,
class, gender and sexuality, but also colonialism (Lugones, 2008). Finally, what was most relevant about decolonial feminism for the dissertation is that, unlike other critiques of coloniality, it brings together native critiques, postcolonial/post-coloniality, modernity/coloniality/decoloniality, all of which have been drawn into this dissertation to explain why Epera women promote regulations on their bodies and sexuality in the face of ethnic elimination. This dissertation is a theoretical contribution in the application of postcolonial/decolonial feminist analysis in contexts of ethnic elimination by suggesting that ethnic attrition is also part of the contemporary colonial modernity project in Latin America, which needs to be further analyzed.

Another theoretical contribution is the analysis drawn from the intersections between feminist geopolitics and postcolonial decolonial feminism. As evidenced, Epera women rely on feminist geopolitical strategies to fend off the effects of settler colonialism in Santa Rosa. However, it is the analysis done through a postcolonial/decolonial feminist perspective along with conceptions on empowerment and bargaining with patriarchy that allows for a more nuanced account of Epera women’s contradictory roles as cultural guardians and spatial boundary-makers. Postcolonial/decolonial feminist perspectives explain what is feminist about Epera women’s feminist geopolitics which I have suggested is that Epera women are active cultural agents, creating change in cultural realms in relation to women’s rights, while at the same time promoting cultural continuity from the everyday spaces where power manifests itself.

Lastly, the dissertation has also proposed settler colonialism as a key area for political geography. By engaging with theories of settler colonialism, political geographers can extend their primary interest in the spatial dimensions of power to colonial settings they have not previously considered. I suggest analysis of settler colonialism extends and deepens political geography’s engagement with postcolonial geographies to a futurity of settler colonist’s spatial imagination comprised of empty spaces dependent on the annihilation natives (Bateman and Pilkington, 2011). Secondly, the connection between settler colonialism and political geography allows for decolonized accounts of spatial manifestations of power. Following Morgensen (2011) and Rifkin’s (2009) suggestion that settler colonialism is a contemporary form of bio-power in indigenous contexts suggests another geographical area (indigenous contexts of elimination) from which to carry out political geography. It also draws attention to the ways indigenous peoples are questioning state-sovereignty (indigenous
passports, ancestral notions of mobility and territoriality) and thereby are changing political
dynamics of resistance and domination (Simpson, 2014). The dissertation drew on the
imagined geographies of Colombian Epera space, from which Epera women are longing to
create structural change within Epera transnational culture in the future and in gendered
ways. Settler colonialism is here to stay and with it, forms of political resistance highly
dependent on imagined spaces that directly question state-sovereignty. Lastly, this study has
pushed political geography beyond postcolonial geographies and bio-political analysis at the
site of the border. The case study of the Epera, provides insight on bordering not outside of
the border – as Balibar (2002) has rightly suggested – but in peripheral borders. It shows that
other bordering processes occur in marginalized borders and imagined boundaries, which
fundamentally question territorial manifestations of sovereign power.

8.3 Policy Recommendations

The policy implications of this study address the Ecuadorian government, United
Nations and Ecuadorian military. The first policy recommendation is for the Ecuadorian
government to recognise indigenous groups in danger of physical and cultural extinction.
Under the Ecuadorian constitution the concept of ethnocide is only relevant for groups in
voluntary isolation, leaving indigenous groups like the Epera without legal recognition and
hence state protection. As evidenced in this dissertation, governments play a pivotal role in
settler colonialism’s effects on indigenous groups like the Epera, where state abandonment is
central to their elimination. State protection for the Epera would involve ensuring clean
water, sewage systems, adequate healthcare, and protection from encroaching security and
extractivist industry (the latter of which is protected by the Ecuadorian military). There are
specific measures that alleviate processes of ethnic elimination on indigenous groups that are
and should be context specific. This means that state protection of indigenous groups like the
Epera will not benefit from a ‘one-size fits all’ policy, but rather policies catering for specific
measures against processes of ethnic elimination. In this sense, indigenous groups undergoing
a process of ethnic elimination should also be able to refuse specific state measures and
continue to selectively engage with the Ecuadorian state, as already done by the Epera.

The next policy recommendation is for the Ecuador and Colombia governments in
relation to bi-national border policy. This research has shown that at the bi-national level
governmental efforts focus on military engagement, with the demarcation of the border being
a result. Therefore, it is important that human security policies are at the forefront of bi-national governmental presence on Ecuador’s northern border in order to ensure efforts towards alleviating structural poverty and illness rather than a sole focus on bi-national military demarcation processes. The bi-national political agenda for development 2014-2022 is an important scenario where human security policies can be addressed in greater depth.

Another policy recommendation is for the Ecuadorian armed forces. Further work needs to be done to change racialised and gendered stereotypes of indigenous populations along Ecuador’s northern border, but also within the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. Change in this direction goes beyond having gender policies, though that is a good start. More military women must be deployed to the border, and commanding officers must be held accountable for not creating the necessary infrastructure that allows women to serve in this area. The three branches of the armed forces must also address gender issues outside of the institution, especially relations between military personnel and civilian women (indigenous women).

The last policy recommendation is for the United Nations, and specifically UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). Towards the end of the dissertation process I was contacted by UNFPA to attend a meeting in Panama with UN officials and Epera women (from Panama and Colombia) to discuss FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) and other Epera gendered cultural practices. The meeting was to define an adequate methodology for a study on FGM amongst the Epera in Ecuador and Colombia. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend this meeting because it coincided with PhD submission time; however, what I have informally advised UNFPA officials is the following. First, that the study not center on FGM as a framework from which to analyse gendered cultural practices because it would predetermine and limit how the data is collected. Second, that the study adopt a postcolonial feminist perspective so that the liberal, western feminist perspective at the heart of UN gender discourse and practice are not imposed on Epera women’s participation in the study. And lastly, that the Epera be informed of the study before its implementation, so as to allow a refusal to participate. UNFPA’s study will be the first of its kind, as limited research has been done on the Epera, especially involving Epera settlements in all three countries (Colombia, Ecuador and Panama).
8.4 Limitations of research

An important limitation to the research was rampant insecurity along the Ecuador-Colombia boundary due to the spill-over effects of the Colombian conflict. This prohibited my ability to cross the border with Epera women, as initially planned. FCO (Foreign Commonwealth Office) regulations further impeded my work in Colombian rural areas, hence I was not able to do fieldwork with Colombian Epera either. As a result, my research focus changed from an analysis on both sides of the border to only the Ecuadorian side. In the end, this proved to be a positive drawback because I was able to do an in-depth ethnographic study of 12 months on the Ecuadorian side, instead of 6 months as initially planned. Given the contentious issues drawn out in the dissertation, trust was key and that took time to develop. Thus the analysis I have done is a direct result of the time spent cultivating trust and friendship.

Another limitation to the initial research plan was the limited interaction between military men and Epera women, which proved my initial research questions irrelevant. Contrary to my initial research plan, the military was not the only factor, nor the most important element influencing Epera women’s mobility around the Ecuador-Colombia borderland. This drawback changed the focus and initial research questions. However, given the extended fieldwork time in Santa Rosa, I was able to delve into what was not only influencing Epera mobility (or lack of it) but everyday fears. This allowed for the research to move beyond methodological nationalisms (Amelina et al., 2012) as intended, because emphasis was displaced from the Ecuadorian military to mainly concerning the experience of Epera women.

8.5 Recommendation for future research

Feminist geopolitics has increasingly turned to emotional geographies to capture fear at the everyday scale (Pain & Smith, 2008), highlighting an ‘emotional turn’ to geography (Bondi, Davidson & Smith, 2007). Future research with Epera women must engage with a spatiality and temporality of emotions and how these come together in places not covered in this dissertation. Further work on border-crossing and the paseos (fieldtrips) taken to Colombian Epera territory can be insightful places from which to carry out feminist geographical methodologies with a focus on emotions. The dissertation has initiated work in this regard; however, more analysis can be done in this direction to address how places are compounded by emotions and from a socio-spatial mediation (Bondi, Davidson & Smith,
This would necessarily have to be done from a decolonial feminist perspective, so further work can deepen our understandings of the interconnections between feminist geopolitics and decolonial feminism.

Another area for future research is proposing settler colonialism as an area for feminist political geography. Feminist political geography already deals with the crucial issues at stake under settler colonialism including embodied (in)security (Hyndman, 2003; Koopman, 2011) and geopolitical notions of the everyday (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Brown & Staeheli, 2003). This dissertation draws on the interconnection between settler colonialism and feminist political geography, but more needs to be done to shine light on other aspects of settler colonialism and feminist political geographical concerns. Settler colonialism can offer feminist political geography a way to further its analyses by adding aspects such as race and coloniality that Fluri (2015) has highlighted feminist political geography needs in order to move beyond the common intersections of gender and politics.

8.6 Conclusion

This study is a step forward in understanding how indigenous women live processes of ethnic elimination under settler colonialism in Latin America from their everyday spaces and lives. I am fully aware that what has been developed in this dissertation is just the tip of the iceberg. My experience in Santa Rosa de los Epera was complex, uneasy and challenging, but it has also remained inconclusive. While I am no longer living in Santa Rosa, the emotions and insights co-constitutive of one another are still with me. I hope that the peace process in Colombia will prevail and the conflict that impacts the daily life of the Grand Epera Family will be dissolved. One day, I wish to cross the border to Rio Saija Cauca Colombia. In this way I hope to finish the journey I have just started with them.
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DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency): www.justice.gov/dea/


Appendix A: List of Interviews and Focus Groups

1.A) Epera

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<th>Location</th>
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<td>Arturo</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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<td>55 years old Born in Cauca, Colombia Epera Leader of international Affairs. In the past has been a national leader of CONAIE Married and has five children</td>
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- **Cruz Sandra**: Born in Nariño, Colombia, 45 years old, 6 children, 8 grandchildren
- **Chirimia Florinda**: Born in Saija Colombia, 50 years old, 9 children, 13 grandchildren
- **Mejia Luzmari**: Born in Nariño, Colombia, 28 years old, 4 children, Women’s group leader
- **Moya Maria**: Born in Guapi Colombia, 45 years old, 5 children (1 deceased)
- **Silfredo Lina**: Born in Rio Saija Colombia, ex-President of the Epera
- **Chiri Viviana**: Born in Borbón, Ecuador, Women leader, 1 child (1 deceased)
- **Quiro Carmen**: Born in Rio Saija Colombia, 43 yrs old, Current Women’s group president, 6 children, 4 grandchildren
- **Chirimia David**: Born in Nariño Colombia, 28 years old, 2 children
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<td>Rank</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Number of women attended</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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<td>Quintero</td>
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<td>Santa Rosa de los Epera</td>
<td>May 23, 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiroz</td>
<td>Angel</td>
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<td>Santa Rosa de los Epera</td>
<td>November 16, 2013</td>
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Focus Groups with Epera Women

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<th>Name of Focus Groups</th>
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<th>Number of women attended</th>
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<td>2 Women’s Meeting concerning the River</td>
<td>02-25-2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>02-26-2014</td>
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<td>3 Village meetings on Purifying Practices</td>
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<td>12-08-2013</td>
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<td>11-08-2013</td>
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<td>3 Women’s meeting on the Epera women’s political agenda</td>
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<td>07-07-2014</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10-09-2014</td>
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<td>3 Women’s meeting on everyday space</td>
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<td>09-09-2014</td>
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Appendix B: Ecuadorian Military and Ministry of Defense Interviews
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>Carrasco</td>
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<td>12-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Guayaquil</td>
<td>12-2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solano</td>
<td>Official</td>
<td>Guayaquil</td>
<td>12-2013</td>
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<td>Gonzalo</td>
<td>Official</td>
<td>Esmeraldas</td>
<td>01-2014</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Coronel</td>
<td>Esmeraldas</td>
<td>01-2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrillo</td>
<td>Human Rights Officer</td>
<td>Quito</td>
<td>04-2014</td>
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<td>Official</td>
<td>Esmeraldas</td>
<td>12-2013</td>
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<td>Carvajal</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>Esmeraldas</td>
<td>12-2013</td>
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<td>Espinosa</td>
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<td>12-2013</td>
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<td>Sucumbios</td>
<td>01-2014</td>
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Focus Groups with Ecuadorian Armed Forces

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<th>Force (Navy, Army or Air force)</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>Navy and Army</td>
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<td>Officials</td>
<td>Marine Infantry #12</td>
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<td>Navy and Army</td>
<td>06-12-2013</td>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>Marine Infantry San Lorenzo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Navy, Army, Air force</td>
<td>19-12-2013</td>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>Centre of operations northern command, Esmeraldas</td>
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<td>Army</td>
<td>01-12-2013</td>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>Battalion Tungurahua</td>
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<td>Army</td>
<td>18-12-2013</td>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>Special armed forces of Ray 53</td>
</tr>
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<td>Air force</td>
<td>10-12-2013</td>
<td>Airman officials</td>
<td>Air force School in</td>
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## Appendix C: Colombian and Ecuadorian NGOs/International Aid Agencies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
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<th>Location</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Otoya</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Jesuit Refugee Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garcia</td>
<td>Leo</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>International Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martinez</td>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>March 11</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>International Red Cross</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cruz</td>
<td>Alvaro</td>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>United Nations Refugee Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gonzalez</td>
<td>Clara</td>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Foundation for research, pedagogy and education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davila</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>March 11</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Catholic Relief Services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Indigenous Authorities of Colombia</td>
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<td>Murillo</td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>March 12</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Nariño Municipality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Almeida</td>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Pasto</td>
<td>Consultant: In charge of first humanitarian project with the Epera women in Nariño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quintero</td>
<td>Berenice</td>
<td>March 04</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Popayan</td>
<td>Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rativa</td>
<td>Anabel</td>
<td>March 02</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Cali</td>
<td>NOMADESC (Association for research and social action)</td>
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<td>Carvajal</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Quito</td>
<td>CODENPE</td>
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## Appendix D: Maps used in focus groups with Ecuadorian military.
Ecuadorian Nationalities and Pueblos. Source: CODENPE 2013


Appendix E: Photos used in focus groups with Ecuadorian Military.

Source: Los Andes News Paper (10-08-2013)