

Introduction

Environmental Justice Otherwise

The encampment lined the city block in front of Paraguay's Institute for the Indigenous (INDI) where at least one hundred people had mobilized to demand the return of their lands. Black plastic tarps tied to an orange brick wall stretched across the sidewalk and were held down at the edge of Don Bosco Street with small wooden stakes. Woven between tree trunks, a web of ropes hung above the tarps on which clothes dried in the morning sun. Plastic buckets served as seats, sinks, and storage containers. Small fires sent smoke into the air, carrying the smell of fried tortillas. Many camp residents milled about in the shade of trees watching people enter and leave INDI directly across the street. "Hai hue," muttered Gerardo in exasperation as we walked toward the building's entrance, "que barbáro," how terrible. "Mby'a pea," they're Mby'a, noted Serafin with a nod. Clemente remained silent. Members of different Indigenous communities frequently come to Asunción to demand that INDI adjudicate their land claims. The tent encampments are a regular but ephemeral sight, often appearing in the night only to be razed days later once officials or local residents grow tired of the disruptions. The itinerant residents are loaded into military cargo trucks or put on buses and taken back to the lands that they seek but do not control. Before Asunción's mayors installed fences around the city's central plazas to police their use, they were regular sites for the landless who came to the capital seeking restitution.¹ Now the dispossessed camp on the steps of an institute responsible for their care but incapable of assuaging their plight.

INDI is always busy. This day was no different. We walked up the front steps, weaving through a small crowd of people who packed into the entryway as they waited to talk with the general receptionist team to request meetings or follow up on paperwork. Clemente led the way past the crowd, around the corner, and up the staircase to the second floor, where the executive, legal, and technical team offices were located. The landing at the top of the stairs opened to a small, windowless

waiting room with an L-shaped couch lining two walls and a receptionist desk that Clemente approached. He presented his state identity card, saying, “We are here from Xákmok Kásek for an 11:00 meeting with President Saldivar about our land.” The receptionist looked over his ID, then to a registry below the counter, then closed the window and made a call. Opening the window, she gestured toward the couch: “Please take a seat, the president is running late. It should not be too long.” The room was quiet and calm. We were the only people there. Minutes passed to hours as we watched people come up the stairs. Some were INDI employees who greeted us with “mbaetekopiko” or “mbaè la porte,” how’s it going, as they passed through the room and disappeared behind closed office doors. Some of the people were Indigenous representatives from other communities who repeated the ritual of checking in with the receptionist for their scheduled appointments before joining us on the diminishing couch space; the rest took a seat on the stairs or stood against the wall. At one point, two middle-aged men dressed in blue jeans, boots, and button-down shirts, and with bellies that strained their belt lines, walked through the waiting room without greeting the small crowd. They were ushered into the executive wing of the building behind the receptionist’s desk. “Ganaderos,” ranchers, noted Serafin with a sneer. “Haè,” that’s right, Clemente responded. Another man leaning against the wall with his arms crossed plainly stated, “Patrón.” Sitting and watching, it was clear Indigenous peoples had to wait while everyone else seemed to enter and exit with ease.

The hours passed. The day grew hotter. With no windows or fan, the room was stifling. Under the weight of the humid Paraguayan summer, sweat beads formed on our foreheads as the empty water cooler taunted us. The number of people waiting increased—they were all Indigenous. We waited, talked, and checked in with the receptionist. “It should not be too much longer,” she reassured. Fortunately, two of us brought thermoses and *tereré*, Paraguay’s ubiquitous yerba mate tea consumed cold and often shared. We drank thermos after thermos until the yerba mate lost its flavor and drinking was more a shared act of connection than done for the tea’s energizing qualities. Eventually, the *tereré* got to me. Employees and special guests used locked restrooms. So I walked downstairs to the public restroom that INDI clients use. Pushing open the wooden door, I was hit with a tremendous smell. The pungent, stinging odor of ammonia, a sign of dehydration and urinary tract or kidney problems, dominated the small unventilated room, making my eyes water. Feces, urine, and a wet film covered the floor. Black mold crawled from the corners and along the grout around the sink. In stalls without doors, the porcelain toilet bowls were full to the brim and writhing with maggots, indicating that this was not a freak backup of the plumbing system but a systemic failure. This was not a latrine. It was a plumbed indoor restroom in a state institute, the only one for the constituents it is charged with caring for. There were no other options than to use the facilities.

"We always have to wait." Serafin shook his head, growing more frustrated by the time I returned. "They do not respect our time or the sacrifices we have made to be here." An older Avá Guaraní man dryly replied, "peicha che ráa," that's the way it is, my friend. Meanwhile, Gerardo was at the receptionist desk again. "We have been here since 11:00 in the morning. We arrived on time for our appointment, and it has been over five hours. We haven't eaten. We came from very far away, kilometer 346 of the Trans-Chaco [Highway] for this meeting. When will we see the president?" Turning away from the desk, he looked at the group before sitting again, saying, "Incredible." Ten or fifteen minutes later, just after 5:00 p.m., a chipper young man in dark slacks with a tie and pressed white shirt opened the door to the meeting room and invited the group in. The meeting for which we had a private appointment now was shared with twelve other people from seven different Indigenous communities who had also been waiting. The president apparently wanted to make a group intervention. With high ceilings and a large map of Paraguay overlooking the room, three rows of tightly arranged chairs lined the wall facing a large oblong table. It was remarkably cold, with air-conditioning that brought goosebumps after hours in the sauna next door. The young functionary left us in the room, "The president will be here momentarily." We sat in relative silence for the next fifteen minutes, waiting.

A door swung open and the acting president of INDI burst into the room clad in a navy-blue suit and a fresh haircut. "I am sorry to keep you waiting! I did not know we had a meeting. Thank you for coming to talk. I hear there are many matters we need to discuss." As he sat at the table, Clemente, Serafin, and Gerardo moved to join him. "Mr. President, we are a delegation from Xákmok Kásek here to follow up on how our case is proceeding, to inquire about the return of our lands at Retiro Primero," Gerardo stated.² The INDI president had only recently replaced his predecessor, who was ousted after he kicked an Avá Guaraní woman in the stomach during a protest in front of the building.³ "Yes, yes. I know your case," the INDI president reassured. He sat with no pen or assistant while the delegation reminded him about the intricacies of their case. In 2010, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) found Paraguay culpable of human rights violations against Xákmok Kásek and ruled the state should reconstitute their ancestral land. The company that owned the disputed lands was ready to sell. INDI is legally responsible for acquiring the land but failed to do so for months, despite having funds. Sixty-three families from Xákmok Kásek had reoccupied the land in February 2015 to force the state to act. "Everything is in order. Why hasn't INDI returned our land?" Clemente asked.

Instead of responding, he stood abruptly and looked around the room. "Does anyone know why I am wearing such fine clothing today, a nice suit, new shoes, and this fancy watch? I do not normally wear such nice clothes." After a moment of silence, a man sitting in the last row of chairs ventured, "Because you are the

president of INDI?” Pointing to the man, the president replied, “No! I am wearing these clothes because you are presidents, presidents of your own communities!” He pointed his finger to the seated men to emphasize the point. “I am wearing these clothes out of respect because I knew that we were going to have this meeting. I put on my finest clothes to meet you the same as if I were meeting with the president of another country.” His comments were met with silence. Sitting, he turned back to Gerardo, “I am doing everything in my power to see that the land is returned. But I ask you to be patient. I alone cannot make this decision because the President of the Republic must decide. *El patrón manda* [The patrón is in charge].” He suggested we go to the Ministry of Finance, in charge of state payments, or to the Office of the Vice President, responsible for the supervision of international human rights sentences against the state. Serafin added, with a notably frustrated tone, “We began with the vice president, who referred us to the Ministry of Finance that referred us to you. We know that Law 904 says INDI is responsible for completing this transaction.” Pausing to consider this information, the president replied, “The issue is out of my hands. But I will personally speak with President Cartes to see what can be done.” With that, he excused us.

. . .

Disrupting the Patrón investigates how Enxet and Sanapaná peoples of Paraguay navigate racialized land politics in pursuit of environmental justice. I tell a story of environmental justice by tracing the interwoven experiences of Indigenous activists, settler colonists, human rights lawyers, ranchers, and state officials from dusty cattle ranches built on Enxet and Sanapaná lands to IACHR hearings and back to the Paraguayan Chaco. Throughout, I examine a hallmark of settler power, *legal liminality*: spaces, situations, and subjects that simultaneously lie within and outside the juridical order. Legal liminality is a de facto mode of governance that the state uses to manage Indigenous dispossession of land and rights in the current conjuncture. In effect, state actors and agencies have used Indigenous rights as a facade of care that attempts to distract from the persistent forms of neglect that facilitate extractive development. However, this book is more than a critique of settler colonialism. I argue that my Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors employ dialectics of disruption—strategically working with and against settler law—to unsettle racialized regimes of land control. Despite long-standing efforts to replace Indigenous lifeways with settler cattle ranching, Enxet and Sanapaná persist. This book shows how three communities—Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek—are rebuilding relations with their territories by disrupting state and settler power in an era of radical social-ecological change. Enxet and Sanapaná endurance is radical, future-oriented resistance that shows the pursuit of environmental justice is more than a juridical solution to harm but the ability to maintain collectives in the face of existential threats.

Paraguay is a country divided. The eponymous river that bisects Paraguayan territory not only splits the country's landmass along a north-south axis; it also marks a dialectic tension between the two primary political economic activities that define contemporary land politics, cattle ranching and soybean production. Currently the world's fourth largest exporter of soybeans and the sixth largest exporter of beef, the agro-export economy dominates domestic affairs and frames nearly all Indigenous land claims as antithetical to economic growth.⁴ From the 1960s to the mid-2000s, the drive to establish the agrarian frontier southeast of the Paraguay River resulted in astronomical deforestation rates and violent dispossessions that reduced a region of rich biocultural diversity to a veritable tableau for monocultures—soybeans and settler colonists. Today, upwards of 85 percent of the Interior Atlantic Forest that once covered those lands has been razed, with much of that now covered in soybean fields.⁵ The rapid and extensive land-use change has fueled contentious politics.⁶

The northwestern region of Paraguay called the Chaco had long been a peripheral site within the global economic order, though it is now emerging as a central node in agricultural commodities trading and transport. A multibillion-dollar road development campaign started in 2019 includes creating several new international highways and bridges to facilitate commodity exports that state officials promise will create a regional “logistics hub” for agro-capitalism.⁷ Akin to the political ecologies of monoculture palm-oil plantations in Colombia or the veritable sea of soybeans that spans the Southern Cone, the Paraguayan Chaco is dominated by a land-extensive development model that reduces biocultural diversity to a singular commodity: beef.⁸ As of this writing, nearly 95 percent of the land in the Paraguayan Chaco, more than 233,000 square kilometers, is held as private property, with the majority of those landholdings used for cattle ranching.⁹ The advance of ranching made the Paraguayan Chaco a global deforestation hotspot where nearly eight million hectares of forestland was leveled between 1985 and 2020.¹⁰ With falling trees and growing herds, Paraguay has risen higher in global rankings of beef exporters and is now on the cusp of breaking into the top five, having edged out its renowned neighbor Argentina for tons of beef shipped annually.¹¹

Cattle ranching is thus the backbone of settler colonialism in Paraguay's Chaco, which is a region that covers more than half the country's territory but is home to only 3 percent of its total human population.¹² At the national scale, cows outnumber Paraguayans almost 2:1, but in the Chaco, the ratio nears 50:1.¹³ The patchwork of private ranches has created Indigenous enclaves that often serve as *de facto* labor camps for the ranching industry.¹⁴ Although the country's constitution guarantees Indigenous peoples' land rights, the realization of those rights has often been hampered by party politics, a labyrinthine state bureaucracy that ensures disenfranchisement, and violent dispossessions by non-Indigenous landowners seeking to expand agrarian commodity production.¹⁵



MAP 1. The Paraguayan Chaco and primary study sites. Elaborated by author.

RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

This book centers on the particularities of land rights, environmental racism, and Indigenous struggles in Paraguay but speaks far beyond its borders. The theoretical framework weaves insights from scholarship and activism across the Americas, yet is grounded in Paraguay's Bajo Chaco. Indigenous land struggles across the Americas have often been framed in relation to debates about neoliberal multiculturalism. State-led efforts to recognize multicultural rights for Indigenous peoples in Latin America are often political struggles over the control of "the environment" and resource access when viewed through the lens of land rights. Some scholars

analyze this dynamic through the lens of the “territorial turn,” but here I shift attention to the environmental violence that land dispossession generates.¹⁶ Enxet and Sanapaná territorial struggles cannot be divorced from the resource extractive economies of the Chaco founded on Indigenous land theft. The denial of Enxet and Sanapaná land rights is directly associated with state violations of human rights to life and dignity, among others, as evidenced by multiple IACHR rulings and everyday life conditions.¹⁷ Such rights violations occur along racial lines and the ability, or not, to live free of exposure to environmental hazards.¹⁸ Environmental justice research and activism in the United States began in response to the siting of hazardous industries and toxics in communities of color.¹⁹ I employ a broader conceptualization of hazards exposure and environmental harms than those associated with emblematic cases like those of Warren County, Carver Terrace, or “Cancer Alley” that have shaped this field of study to date in the United States.²⁰ Thinking environmental justice otherwise requires not only rethinking notions of justice beyond Euro-modern epistemologies but also what constitutes hazards and harms.²¹

Environmental hazards often associated with environmental justice analyses include direct exposure to toxic wastes, construction and zoning practices that create greater risk of the adverse effects of extreme weather, and the siting of industrial polluters in marginalized communities. What about the forms of insecurity, harm, and trauma that result from land dispossession? Conceptualizing the environment beyond the nature/culture dualism that animates much thinking in Euro-modern ontologies shifts attention to social ecologies whereby “the environment” is not an external realm but one intimately related with human practice and belief systems.²² These are issues that have long animated Indigenous and Native environmental justice struggles in what is now called North America.²³ In the Latin American context, Indigenous struggles against colonialism and environmental change are often described in US- and European-based scholarship as “popular environmentalism,” read through the lens of human rights, or simply framed as “resistance” rather than viewed with explicit attention to environmental justice.²⁴ Such discursive framings are due, in part, to traditions of mobilizing against the distinct forms of colonial power manifest in Latin America and the region’s recent legacy of authoritarian dictatorships, as well as the distinctly US origins of the environmental justice movement as so named.

The geographic, historical, and social specificity of environmental conflicts and the actions frontline communities use to protect themselves matter. In many parts of Latin America, land dispossession—a process at the root of colonial power and extractivism—creates complex environmental harms that should impel analysts to think with and beyond how environmental justice has long been defined and deployed in the United States. Working with the specificity of environmental hazards that the Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek communities confront, I center environmental racism in debates about development and the politics of recognition in Latin America.²⁵

The history of US environmental justice activism and scholarship places the movement at the intersection of civil rights and exposure to environmental harms.²⁶ Yet given the global circulation of environmental justice discourse and activism in recent years, the US frame only tells part of the story.²⁷ I do not presume to tell “the whole story,” though I want to highlight the role of Indigenous and Latin American histories of resistance to colonialism that bring texture, depth, and distinct understandings to environmental justice otherwise. Language from the first People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 is informative. The summit drew together people from across the United States with several participants from Latin America to strengthen collaborative action for environmental justice. Among calls to invigorate an international movement focused on ensuring healthy and safe environments for historically marginalized and racialized peoples, the guiding document produced at the summit centers environmental justice in the lasting effects of colonization, seeking “to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples.”²⁸ Here I underscore that Indigenous efforts to recover stolen lands are environmental justice struggles where the capability to maintain self-determination, relations, and responsibilities is vital to collective well-being.²⁹ Environmental justice otherwise emerges through tensions between the impossibility of return and the everyday politics of resurgence that animate Enxet and Sanapaná refusal to relinquish the pursuit of more just futures.

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Milciades and I sat outside the home he and his wife had built on the land that sixty-two families from Xákmok Kásek had recently reoccupied after more than thirty years of fighting for restitution. Some flowers grew in a plastic bottle made into a hanging planter that adorned the one-room home’s exterior wall. I arrived in the early afternoon, bringing *tereré* to share. We sat and talked about life for several hours. Milciades grew up on Estancia Salazar, the ranch built on the ancestral lands of his community. His father, Eulalio, labored for much of his life as a peon on that ranch. Together, they lived with other members of Xákmok Kásek until they were forced to leave the ranch and occupy other lands. The reencounter with the lands where Milciades had built his home was generations in the making. As we talked, the sun transited the sky. Suli invited me to stay for a dinner of roasted armadillo that we ate with a serving of rice the state National Emergency Services delivered in the food rations that month. Xákmok Kásek has received the rations since the early 2000s, when the Inter-American Commission ordered Paraguay to provide emergency aid until it resolved the community’s claim for land restitution. The aid was intended as a temporary measure. Yet, like being the subject of rights that are routinely denied, the decades-long assistance has become a part

of daily life. We moved to hammocks as night fell, and darkness enveloped our conversation. Thinking about the prospect of land restitution, Milciades stated, “We will always be scarred from what they have made us live through. I don’t think that land will bring justice, but it will help us find a sense of peace.”

Milciades’s words capture the aporetic nature of the law-justice relation—that the very structure of Indigenous land rights (re)produces legal geographies that limit what justice is and can be.³⁰ This aporetic relation is acute in Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles because settler law not only circumscribes “acceptable” Indigenous difference, but partitions Indigenous peoples from the territorial relations that sustain their lifeways.³¹ Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte draws from Anishinaabe intellectual traditions to argue that settler colonialism is a form of environmental injustice because it severs the ability of Indigenous peoples to maintain “collective continuance,” the interdependencies, systems of responsibilities, and mobilities that enable social resilience.³² Anishinaabe practices and ontologies that inform collective continuance are distinct from Enxet and Sanapaná practices. However, Whyte’s theorization provides a valuable lens through which to examine settler colonialism as environmental injustice across Indigenous geographies.³³ The dispossession of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples from their lands and simultaneous exploitation of their labor on those lands since the turn of the twentieth century has radically altered social-ecological relations, traditions, and the ability to maintain cultural practices over generations, including language transmission. Settler colonial dispossessions have thus disrupted, though not extinguished, Enxet and Sanapaná social collectives and relations with place. If there is one common theme that defines Indigenous environmental justice work across settler geographies, it is an unrelenting refusal to succumb to the enduring forms of colonialism that produce the uneven distribution of social-environmental harms.

Indigenous environmental justice studies of North America critically evaluate the legal relationship between Native Nations and the US or Canadian federal government to show that Indigenous rights must also ensure environmental self-determination.³⁴ Jarratt-Snider and Nielsen argue that environmental (in)justice experienced by Native and Indigenous peoples is distinct from “mainstream” environmental justice due to “the continuing effects of colonization.”³⁵ Settler colonialism drives Indigenous environmental injustice because, as Whyte insists, “one society rob[s] another society of its capacities to experience the world as a place of collective life that its members feel responsible for maintaining into the future.”³⁶ On the other hand, Voyles shows how settler extractivism converts Navajo lands *and* bodies into sites of toxic pollution by treating both as waste-lands.³⁷ Native scholars, Nick Estes, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, and the contributors to the *Standing with Standing Rock* edited volume, have reframed environmental justice through their analyses of the #NoDAPL Movement and ways that state-sanctioned violence in defense of the Dakota Access Pipeline project draw

attention to the tensions between settler colonialism and Indigenous resurgence.³⁸ The broader dynamics that underpin these issues are not confined to the United States and Canada but resonate broadly across the Americas through the persistence of “settler capitalism” and its effects on Indigenous lifeways.³⁹ Note, however, that this book does not purport to present a unitary theorization of Indigenous environmental justice that can be neatly applied to other contexts. The Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek struggles are singular to each community. However, the cases are not unique when placed into the context of Indigenous land struggles across the Americas where frontline communities continue to fight for the environment as freedom.⁴⁰

The urgency to disrupt enduring forms of coloniality requires analysts and activists to think beyond the categories of race, gender, and indigeneity that have long facilitated, and been shaped through, extractive relations in Latin America.⁴¹ Recent environmental justice scholarship from the region stresses the connection between environmental change, marginalization, and resistance while centering place-based conceptions of justice and social-environmental relations.⁴² Throughout, scholars call for attention to the geographic specificities of environmental justice beyond the US frame by centering other epistemologies of justice that emerge through Indigenous struggles for well-being in the context of extractivism.⁴³ Environmental racism predicated on histories of land dispossession and resource control has long threatened Indigenous and Afro-descendant well-being across the region. From early colonization to the present, land, water, and resource grabs undermine preexisting social-environmental relations. Indeed, the very categories used to describe Indigenous peoples in many parts of Latin America are inextricably linked to the appropriation of land and life that derive from Euro-modern conceptions of who and what constitutes value. Thus, in thinking with recent provocations to decolonize environmental justice studies, this book attends to place-based struggles of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples while centering my interlocutors’ theorizations of justice and visions for the future.⁴⁴ In so doing, I seek to advance a notion of environmental justice otherwise, enriched by hemispheric conversations about Indigenous politics in the Americas but always attentive to the lived experience of land struggles in Paraguay’s Bajo Chaco.

While returning lands is a first step toward Indigenous environmental justice, Milciades’s remarks remind us that land alone is insufficient. The scars of epistemic and physical violence that Enxet and Sanapaná have endured remain, even after community members recover their lands. Milciades’s words also remind us that there is no simple solution. In this regard, justice is both an aporia and a utopia, a horizon to push toward but not often remedied only by procedure, distribution, or recognition. Despite these limits, the return of stolen lands does open the possibility for more just futures that enable collective well-being in a form that Enxet and Sanapaná determine for themselves. Thus the book does not dwell on settler colonial erasure but instead highlights forms of futurity that “invoke many other

temporalities, other spaces, and yet-to-be possibilities” created through Enxet and Sanapaná efforts to reclaim lands and rebuild relations to their territories.⁴⁵ Enxet and Sanapaná strategies to envision a future beyond dispossession—even under the most oppressive circumstances—highlight possibilities that engender Milciedades’s invocation of “a sense of peace,” where endurance and resurgence enact environmental justice otherwise.⁴⁶

RACIAL GEOGRAPHIES

In January 2016, I sat under a grove of algarrobo trees drinking *tereré* with Eulalio, a spiritual leader of Xákmok Kásek. He recalled times living on Estancia Salazar and working as a peon on the ranch. During our conversation, Eulalio looked across a clearing before us until his eyes settled on an old building that he helped construct and that had been used to house non-Indigenous ranch laborers. “They [the ranchers] just used up the Indigenous,” he said. He spoke slowly and deliberately, with a pause between each sentence. “They barely gave us any food . . . We’d work twelve, sixteen, sometimes eighteen hours putting up fences, riding horses, whatever. It was hard work . . . day after day. If you got sick, there was no doctor . . . If you died, you died . . . We were practically slaves until we learned we had rights.”⁴⁷ As we sat, passing *tereré*, he explained how ranchers exploited Sanapaná and Enxet laborers through discriminatory practices that included less pay and worse working conditions than for non-Indigenous peons. Eulalio argued that the operation of cattle ranches denied Indigenous peoples control over their territories, instead forcing them to work their stolen lands as wage laborers or in conditions of debt peonage.

Eulalio’s insights inform my analysis in two important ways. First, land-labor relations, particularly Indigenous dispossession and labor exploitation, are central to the enduring structures of settler colonialism in Latin America—structures predicated on *patrón*-Indigenous social relations.⁴⁸ The incipient cattle-ranching economy in Paraguay’s Bajo Chaco required Indigenous labor. It effectively ensured that labor availability through land enclosures that limited economic opportunities outside of ranching. As with the establishment of cattle ranching in the Bajo Chaco to the present day, Indigenous peoples are often the ranch peons who clear forests, plant pasture, erect fences, run cattle, and build the houses used for ranch operations. Ranching, therefore, undergirds the racial geography of settler colonialism in the Paraguayan Chaco by structuring social-spatial relations *vis-à-vis* the ranch as a site of Indigenous dispossession and non-Indigenous capital accumulation.⁴⁹ Settler territorializations of Enxet and Sanapaná lands produced distinct racial geographies where people were spatially organized in specific ways based on a simple binary calculus: non-Indigenous folks owned land via private property, and Indigenous peoples often labored on the lands taken from them. This racial geography persists to the present. In effect, white

male landholders are imagined to command economically productive industries. In contrast, Indigenous peoples are imagined as those justifiably dispossessed of land because they stand “in the way of” progress, simultaneously out of space and out of time with modernist notions of agrarian development.⁵⁰ The processes of colonizing the Bajo Chaco and the resulting spatial organization of land and bodies (both human and bovine) articulate with the nuanced dynamics of settler colonialism in Latin America.

There are rich debates about the valences of coloniality in Latin America, given the region's distinct relation with European expansionism and widespread campaigns to enslave or eliminate Indigenous peoples. I do not map the contours of those debates here but focus on two distinct yet intersecting colonial processes: settler and internal colonialism. Scholars in, of, and from Latin America have often used “postcolonial” as a historical marker to index the period that followed direct European colonization. As newly independent countries pursued different development pathways in the postcolonial era, many leaders sought to exert greater control over their territories and the Indigenous populations living within them. The Mexican sociologist Pablo Gonzalez Casanova's classic analysis is helpful: “The notion of ‘internal colonialism’ has its roots in the great independence movement of the old colonies.” He continues, “With the disappearance of the direct domination of foreigners over natives . . . the substitution of domination of Spaniards by that of the ‘creoles’ [ensued]. Interestingly, the exploitation of the Indians continues, having *the same characteristics* it had before independence.”⁵¹ Casanova and his contemporaries were writing during a period when agrarian reforms incentivized the movement of citizens to the hinterlands of many Latin American countries through the promise of “land for those who work it.”⁵² Internal colonization through agrarian reforms often produced conflict when non-Indigenous settler campesinos and state actors dispossessed Indigenous peoples from their lands to promote agrarian development, as was the case in Paraguay and numerous countries. While internal colonization is evident in Paraguay's eastern frontier, in the Chaco the dynamic is different. It is a site of settler colonization.

Wolfe's oft-cited argument that colonialism is a “structure, not an event” helps explain the violence that conditions Enxet and Sanapaná struggles, not as *post*-colonial but as wrought by the *ongoing* effects of settler colonialism.⁵³ Recent studies have evaluated settler colonialism as a transhistorical process of social, political, and economic change attendant to dispossession, the rule of law, environmental governance, and labor predicated on controlling Indigenous life.⁵⁴ Unlike externally imposed colonial efforts like those of Spain in pre-independence Latin America designed to extract resources, settler colonists come to stay and establish new societies. Settler colonialism in many parts of Latin America is distinct from internal colonization as framed by Casanova and from Wolfe's influential analysis in the US context, where he observes that Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of land and enslaved Africans were forced to work those lands for the accumulation

of white settlers.⁵⁵ Enxet and Sanapaná were dispossessed *in place* and forced to labor on ranches built on lands often taken from them by foreign missionaries and investors. The resulting dynamic evokes the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of “settler capitalism” that Speed argues has come to define the geographies of Indigenous dispossession in Latin America.⁵⁶

SETTLER GOVERNANCE OF DISPOSSESSION

Before moving further, I return to my conversation with Eulalio to flag the second way that his insights inform this book. Eulalio’s comments draw attention to distinct modalities of governance at play in Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles, from confronting racial capitalism to the different ways that the politics of recognition manifest across settler geographies in Latin America. Suggesting that Indigenous peoples “were basically slaves” until learning they had rights, Eulalio indexed the trans-scalar practice and evolution of Indigenous activism. Legal recognition from the Paraguayan state, and later from the IACHR, flagged vital shifts in Xákmok Kásek political subjectivity through the “emancipatory potential of human rights politics.”⁵⁷ Consequently, Xákmok Kásek, like Yakye Axa and Sawhoyamaxa, used human rights law and discourse as a basis to shame the state and claim legal protections by condemning Paraguay for supporting cattle ranching instead of upholding Indigenous land rights. With the evolution of rights frameworks, from emergent labor rights to constitutional rights to the collective ownership of ancestral territory, Enxet and Sanapaná crafted new political strategies to advance their struggles for self-determination, changing from “indio” wards of missionaries and ranchers to Indigenous victims of state-led human rights abuse to a political force that is disrupting the legacies of settler governmentality.⁵⁸ Enxet and Sanapaná peoples thus forged new interethnic relations between non-Indigenous activist anthropologists and *indigenistas* (Indigenous rights advocates) to leverage rights-based claims that challenged settler land control, albeit with uneven outcomes.⁵⁹

In the wake of Paraguay’s nascent democratic transition in 1989 and the subsequent suite of Indigenous rights reforms, Enxet and Sanapaná peons demanded restitution of the ranches where they had lived and labored since the enclosure of the Chaco. During two decades, Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek leveraged all legal strategies possible within Paraguay to demand the state reconstitute their lands per the law. Exhausting all legal options in Paraguay, members of each community petitioned the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to adjudicate an amenable solution. After failing to reach a resolution before the Commission, the IACHR arbitrated each case, issuing judgments in 2005, 2006, and 2010. In each ruling, the IACHR argued that denying land restitution violated the right to property, and thereby the state was directly responsible for a suite of human rights abuses against members of each community. Attentive to the limits of Paraguay’s Indigenous rights framework, the IACHR subsequently ordered

Paraguay to follow measures I call *restitution as development*—coupling land restitution with economic redistribution to support Indigenous development initiatives.

Despite the IACHR judgments, Paraguay refused to resolve the Enxet and Sanapaná land claims, instead allowing each community to remain in precarious living conditions on the margins of cattle ranches and the side of a major highway. Here it is important to note that when I refer to “the margins,” I do so in two senses: the literal geographic margins of ranches or highways where my interlocutors have long lived; and the metaphorical margins of citizenship, of being inside and outside the juridical and human order through liminality created by discretionary application of the law. The uncertainty of living with and without rights coupled with the routinized violence of living on the margins of cattle ranches for decades exacted grave tolls on the people of Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek. Many people died from preventable diseases and the denial of basic services necessary to ensure their well-being, while the cattle that live on Enxet and Sanapaná ancestral lands, mere feet from each community’s respective encampments, receive extraordinary care to ensure they live. The prioritization of cattle life over Indigenous life that the Paraguayan state has repeatedly shown through several generations is a form of neglect where some populations are made to live and others let to die.⁶⁰ Together, neglect and legal liminality create a structure of social and spatial relations that have become a de facto mode of settler governance.

DIALECTICS OF DISRUPTION

My analysis of restitution as development shows that state officials treat Indigenous rights as discretionary, acts that reveal the aporia of justice within settler legal systems. In this regard, state officials often exercise their power by granting or withholding vital resources—a troubling pattern that resonates across every Indigenous land-rights case the IACHR has ruled on in the Americas.⁶¹ Having long abided by the law yet endured repeated dispossessions, the Enxet and Sanapaná protagonists of this story increasingly began to take extralegal means to disrupt settler land control. Serafin López, a leader of Xákmok Kásek, often explains this to me by stating, “We refused to wait any longer with our arms crossed.”

Enxet and Sanapaná struggles are founded on hope, but questions I heard throughout my research show these struggles are also conditioned by perpetual uncertainty. Political anthropologists have argued that states express authority through the politics of making people wait as they navigate bureaucracy, whereby time becomes a tool of governance that begets uncertainty.⁶² Writing of Bolivian migrants working in Chile, Ryburn frames uncertainty as a constant state of flux experienced by “being here and not-here, of constantly ‘going,’ constantly ‘becoming,’ of the present as a means to the future.”⁶³ Uncertainty works on temporal, affective, and material registers that manifest as legal liminality in Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles. Liminality is the condition of being a threshold,

a transitional phase between two states of being, and is often used to describe subject-formation processes that accompany rituals.⁶⁴ The politics of recognition and the act of claiming land rights through state frameworks are conditioned by acts that can be read as ritual: they are repeated and practiced to promulgate the norms of a specific social-legal order. And like many other forms of ritual, the outcomes of legal procedure are bereft with uncertainty. In this context, the liminal is thus marked by hope for a particular outcome and uncertainty that will become—something many interlocutors expressed through the word *ikatu*.

The Guaraní word *ikatu* connotes both possibility and affirmation, meaning “it is possible” or “you may,” depending on the context. The word thus carries an aspirational charge that indexes hope while also centering uncertainty. “Will ranchers react violently to land reoccupations? *Ikatu*.” “Can I take a seat here? *Ikatu*.” “Will state officials bring the monthly ration supply? *Ikatu*.” “Will it rain today? *Ikatu*.” “Will the ambulance arrive in time, or ever? *Ikatu*.” Such are the utterances and contexts in which my interlocutors use the term, often in ways that speak to the liminal legal state that has ensnared many Enxet and Sanapaná communities for decades—simultaneously recognized and protected by the law but always excluded from its protections with the hope that one day the state will comply.

My interlocutors’ strategies over the long arc of their struggles for land embody a *dialectics of disruption*. In its most basic formulation, a dialectic has two terms—the thesis and antithesis. One term of the dialectic the Enxet and Sanapaná mobilize can be defined by what the Aymara scholar Cusicanqui has called the “indio permitido”—the authorized Indian who acts within the limits of settler legal and social orders, doing little to disrupt the power structures that precede recognition and rights.⁶⁵ Enxet and Sanapaná peoples long comported themselves within the settler legal order’s confines, following outlined procedures and navigating state bureaucracy to advance their claims. Yet the Paraguayan state neglected adjudicating their cases for decades, reproducing the “structured dispossession” of the politics of recognition.⁶⁶ If following the law is the dialectic’s thesis in this context, breaking the law is the antithesis through which disruption takes a new form.

By following the struggles of Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek from their inception to the present, I trace how Enxet and Sanapaná people work with and against the law to erode settler control of their ancestral territories. Kahnawà:ke Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus* shows how refusal to accept the tenets of settler law interrupt the authority of the settler state and exert Native sovereignty.⁶⁷ On a related point, Dene scholar Glenn Coulthard argues that the politics of recognition operates on a dispossessive logic that recenters the settler state’s authority instead of supporting Indigenous self-determination or mutual recognition.⁶⁸ Critical scholars of Latin American studies, such as Restrepo, Martínez-Novoa, Paschel, and Hale, respectively assess the limits of multicultural recognition by highlighting lasting forms of racism and discrimination that result from such reforms.⁶⁹ A common thread weaves through

this literature: resistance is often the only path by which Indigenous autonomies emerge due to state violence and the aporia of justice in colonial legal orders.

Enxet and Sanapaná of Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek have taken a tack that shifts between selectively following and breaking the law to force state officials and cattle ranchers to capitulate to their land claims. In other words, the dialectics of disruption encapsulate never fully refusing but never fully accepting the settler legal order, instead both refusing and engaging facets of the law to articulate territorial autonomies.⁷⁰ This is not a story that romanticizes resistance or portrays a homogeneous experience as each community transits an uneven terrain of struggle with variegated outcomes. Yet there are common power relations and patterns of dispossession that Enxet and Sanapaná efforts disrupt.

PATRÓN, A POWER RELATION AND PATTERN

Patrón is a commonly used Spanish word that means “boss.”⁷¹ The concept is ubiquitous in Paraguay. In colloquial use, the patrón commands laborers and controls resource access, is most often a man of white or mestizo descent, and holds greater power in relation to others who do not have the same resources or social status but who share a social relation with the patrón, often through labor.⁷² Thus when people invoke the notion of the patrón, they simultaneously index a gendered, racialized, and class-based relation, something clearly demonstrated in the rupture that opens this introduction. Yet the asymmetrical power of the patrón in relation to the peon is marked by a tenuous form of reciprocity. To put it differently, the patrón depends on the peon’s labor and the peon on the resources of the patrón, but the authority of the patrón is not total over the peon. Therefore, the patrón-peon relationship is based on unequal, *yet shifting*, forms of reciprocity that reveal relationships of mutual interdependence with asymmetrical access to resources.⁷³ In the Bajo Chaco, patrón-peon relations are conditioned by histories of ranching and agrarian rationalities.

Colonization and cattle ranching began in the Bajo Chaco—the southeastern, humid portion of the Paraguayan Chaco—when the Paraguayan state sold off nearly all its landholdings in the region to finance debts incurred in the devastating Triple Alliance War (1864–70). As a result of the sale, (mostly) foreign investors purchased tracts of land sold by the league with Indigenous communities inside the newly formed properties.⁷⁴ The region was devoid of an official state presence throughout the first thirty years of colonization, relying instead on Anglican missionaries, cattle ranchers, and loggers whose presence was the surrogate for state power. The imposition of private property rights and expansion of the ranching economy over Enxet and Sanapaná territories limited traditionally mobile lifeways where movement was necessary to live with the annual flood and drought cycle that defines the region’s physical geography.⁷⁵ Indigenous relations with ranchers and state officials seen as *patrones* are also spatial relations because

they are often mediated by struggles for land rights and unequal access regimes.⁷⁶ With the expansion of ranches and increased enforcement of private property, many Enxet and Sanapaná became the peons to the ranching patrones, a process I discuss in depth later.⁷⁷

With attention to patrón-Indigenous relations, I show that power and political subjectivities are dynamic, constantly being reworked as actors vie to exert control over land and resources. In his work *Intimate Enemies*, Bobrow-Strain suggests the patrón-peon relation is an “implied contract of reciprocal responsibilities” that structure socio-spatial relations and resource access.⁷⁸ Within such relations of reciprocity lies a great deal of heterogeneity. Interdependence between patrones and peons creates dynamic relations of reciprocity and exchange that shift vis-à-vis one’s ability to control resource access.⁷⁹ For example, a patrón can be a state official who offers bribes to communities for votes, or people can use the word jokingly to ask for something from a friend: “Give me a smoke, patrón.” When I would arrive at the Xákmok Kásek reoccupation after going to a local town to purchase food to share with a family who hosted me, Ramona would jokingly announce, “My patrón has arrived!” On other occasions, people often recalled their work on ranches by referring to “good” or “bad” patrones based on how forthcoming a ranch owner was with pay or perks such as providing extra beef for meals at holidays. These examples demonstrate how the notion of the patrón as a keeper of resources permeates social imaginaries while indicating subtleties of unequal relations. Reciprocity and exchange permeate patrón-Indigenous relations and are informative for understanding how the Paraguayan state manages Indigenous dispossession to maintain the political economy of cattle ranching.

In addition to an asymmetrical social relation, the word *patrón* also means “pattern” in Spanish. Therefore, I use the dual meaning of patrón to flag the socio-economic, racial, and gendered differences associated with Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors’ usage and draw attention to the patterns of behavior and spatial relations that emerge through Indigenous-settler and Indigenous-state interactions. State officials and local ranchers repeatedly deny Indigenous rights, creating a pattern of racialized inequities. In contrast, the patchwork of pastures marked by fences built with Indigenous labor inscribes a pattern of racialized land dispossession across the Chaco. Thus the book’s title evokes the dual meaning of the Spanish word *patrón* to highlight predominant social relations and patterns while flagging the endurance of Enxet and Sanapaná efforts to disrupt long-standing settler-state-Indigenous relations by working with and against the law.

My use of the Spanish *patrón* should not be confused with the vast literature on patron-client relations. My concern lies with how patrón-Indigenous relations reveal nuances of settler colonialism in Latin America that also inform our understanding of how Indigenous peoples and their allies work to disrupt prevailing oppressive systems. Nevertheless, political patronage networks have deep roots in Paraguay and shape how the politics of recognition and environmental justice

struggles intersect. The country is often cited for having high levels of corruption and opaque transparency, characteristics common throughout the Alfredo Stroessner dictatorship, from 1954 to 1989. Stroessner ruled Paraguay as if he were the country's *patrón* by using the military, political favors, and violence to maintain order.⁸⁰ Despite the democratic transition that followed Stroessner's ouster in 1989, much of the formal and informal governance structure his administration established has not significantly changed. Stroessner's Colorado political party has remained the dominant political force even in the wake of his ouster in 1989, mainly because the state bureaucratic apparatus has long functioned along with a durable structure of patron-client relations.

The legacy of Stroessner's patronage networks is borne in the enduring influence of agrarian elites whose political lobbies have a direct influence on state policies, from the minimal taxation of export soybeans to the adjudication of Indigenous land claims.⁸¹ The *latifundias* that Stroessner's policies and political favors created continue to define land inequality issues and the concentration of political power in the country.⁸² Indeed, two recent Paraguayan presidents have directly benefited from Stroessner. Horacio Cartes established his cigarette smuggling empire in the waning years of the dictatorship; Mario Abdo Benítez's father was Stroessner's primary adviser.⁸³ Stroessner's rule thus established popular imaginaries of the Paraguayan state as an authoritarian *patrón* who controls resources, an imaginary with material consequences.

ON METHODS: RESEARCH AS/IS RELATIONAL PRACTICE

The multisited ethnography that animates this book is a relational story, not a comparative analysis. The chapters never focus solely on one community or case but draw insights from actors and processes across multiple sites to reveal a broader array of social-spatial patterns and practices of co-resistance that are neither merely disparate cases nor a uniform movement but efforts interwoven across time and space.⁸⁴ The book follows a roughly chronological order to chart how settler colonialism emerged not only as a structure, but as a process of recurrent dispossession that simultaneously incited recurrent and ever-changing forms of resistance on the part of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples. Over the chapters and ethnographic interludes—ruptures—that appear between chapters, I map how Enxet and Sanapaná struggles emerge and change over time while highlighting their dynamism and contradictions.⁸⁵ I draw on an eclectic body of information, from Anglican missionary accounts and IACHR documents to interviews with cattle ranchers, state officials, human rights lawyers, and Indigenous activists. The basis of my ethnography is participant observation in activities that range from everyday life in Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek to countermapping, protests, and meetings with state officials from the vice president to clerical staff.

Ethnography is a relational practice. Since 2013, I have traveled to Paraguay seven times to conduct research that informs this book.⁸⁶ Trips lasted between two weeks and thirteen months, totaling over twenty months. The study's long-term quality has allowed me to build lasting and deeply meaningful relationships with many people whose stories animate this book. Indeed, those stories and relationships find their root in embodied experience and conversation. In practice, my research adapted to, and adopted, practices of storytelling and conversation common among Indigenous communities in the Paraguayan Chaco.⁸⁷ Within many Indigenous knowledge systems, storytelling plays a vital role, as both a form of pedagogy and how people build relations to one another and other-than-human relations.⁸⁸ Rather than rely on a rigid, structured question-answer interview format, my research with Enxet and Sanapaná peoples revolved around what the Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach calls conversation as method: "a dialogic approach to gathering knowledge that is built upon an Indigenous relational tradition" utilizing open-ended questions "to prompt conversation where participant and research co-create knowledge."⁸⁹ More often than not, such conversations often took place while drinking *tereré*.

More than a beverage, *tereré* is a cornerstone of Paraguayan national identity built on a ritual of sharing and conversation. *Tereré jere* is a Guaraní phrase for the *tereré* circle, where one person with a pitcher or thermos filled with water serves *tereré* to all in attendance by pouring water over yerba mate in a cup, then passing that cup sequentially to each person in the circle. The recipient drinks from a straw that filters the tea, and generally takes their time, in the process talking with everyone in attendance. When one person finishes drinking their cup of *tereré*, they pass the empty cup back to the server, who refills and passes it to the next person. And so it goes, from person to server to person, round and round. No matter where you go in Paraguay, from the Supreme Court to a packed bus to a tent encampment at the edge of disputed lands, you will likely find *tereré* and someone who will invite you to sit, drink, and talk. The ritual draws people together to slow down, share, and be in space with one another. In this way, *tereré jere* became a method of storytelling and relationality that informs this book. The everyday practice of drinking *tereré* in community helped build relationships that were vital to my understanding of Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles.

Although the three communities that I focus on have distinct histories, struggles, and cases before the IACHR, they are also all intimately related along colonial, juridical, political, and familial lines. Colonization and its settler legacies on Enxet and Sanapaná territories have been driven by a conjoined effort to spread the Anglican faith and establish cattle ranching in the wake. The three communities' legal struggles are related through jurisprudence established by the IACHR decisions. Findings from the Yakye Axa case were used to argue for the Sawhoyamaya community's rights, just as the Xákmok Kásek case directly builds from the jurisprudence established in *Sawhoyamaya v. Paraguay* (2006). Legal jurisprudence

used to support Indigenous territorial claims is another example of how lines of legal inquiry connect place-based struggles through counter-topographies that form a relation across distinct geographies.⁹⁰

The communities share a relationship with the same legal counsel, the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) *Tierraviva a los Pueblos Indígenas del Chaco* (*Tierraviva*). People from Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek have worked with *Tierraviva*'s staff since the early 1990s, collaborating to strategize how to advance their land claims and the rights of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples. Their work has forged lasting interpersonal relationships between many people who share deep affection for one another. When traveling to Asunción for meetings with state officials or *Tierraviva* staff, many Enxet and Sanapaná stay at the *Tierraviva* offices in housing provided free of charge. The space is a dynamic site of interchange where people from across the Bajo Chaco convene, often talking late into the night long after office doors have closed for the day. Moreover, the three communities often coordinate with one another about how to pressure the state to comply with the IACHR, sending delegations from one community to the other when the opportunity to do so arises. It is no surprise, then, that over the years of collective struggles and exchange, some members of Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek have intermarried to form new kin relations among the communities. Consequently, I tell a story of relations, not of comparison.

The research for this book grew in part from my interest in human rights and Indigenous land struggles and in part from Enxet and Sanapaná interests in using research to increase the visibility of their cases. Over the years this study has unfolded, I have worked closely with leaders in Xákmok Kásek, Sawhoyamaxa, and Yakye Axa, conferring and collaborating with them on research design and discussing the research process during meetings where community members provided feedback. I also met frequently with colleagues at *Tierraviva*, who helped me better understand the political-judicial realities of adjudicating Indigenous land-rights cases in Paraguay and its labyrinthine state bureaucracy.⁹¹ I accompanied their lawyers and staff on various tasks related to the implementation process, giving me a clearer view on the murky bureaucratic and legal procedures involved in each case while also showing me what solidarity research looks like in everyday practice. *Tierraviva* staff and lawyers entertained hours of my curiosity and gave me access to vital archival data and information about each of the cases. These documents include communications with the Paraguayan state, historical accounts by colonizers, anthropological studies, media reports, property titles, maps, and communications with the Inter-American System—a wealth of historical and contemporary documents that would have taken months of dedicated work to find on my own. In addition, I attended high-level meetings with state officials, participated in political actions led by community members, and assessed negotiations over compliance with the IACHR judgments. Throughout those activities, I conducted more than 170 semistructured and informal

interviews.⁹² The quotations and ethnographic details derive from a mix of audio or video recordings, handwritten and transcribed field notes, and photographs I have taken. I conducted all interviews in Guaraní or Spanish and translated them into English with feedback from interviewees where possible.⁹³ While most interviewees wanted to have their names used in the text, some did not, in which case I use pseudonyms or a general title to protect their privacy.

ETHICS, REPRESENTATION, LIMITS

Conducting research on human rights violations and environmental injustice is delicate and difficult. Questions, conversations, and topics transit painful sites, even when they focus on future visions of what could be (but by extension is not yet). In this context, aspirational politics, hope, and resistance conjure new possibilities but do so in reference to ongoing and past harms. At the close of an interview with Serafin López, I asked, “Who else should I speak with about these matters, about your community’s case before the court [IACHR]?” Serafin, who had just spent the previous hour and a half vividly recalling decades of struggle through moments of laughter, gravity, and defiance, went silent. His eyes welled with tears and turned bloodshot as he looked beyond me before turning to say, “Ña Antonia Ramirez. She was a great fighter for the community. She traveled all the way to Lima to testify to the court. She died not long after the trip and was never able to return to this land here. She knew the *lucha* [fight].” Moments like this make clear the stakes of research and limits of representational practices. There are no innocuous questions. The writing of the findings matters immensely.

Through the research process, many Enxet and Sanapaná interlocutors sought to denounce wrongs they had experienced and continue to live with. Given the high-level profile of the Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek cases, community members have long engaged NGOs, state officials, and international human rights advocates to recount their experiences to advance their land claims. By granting permission and inviting me to conduct the research that informs this book, community members saw an opportunity to share their experience with other audiences and charged me to share their accounts. The charge is a heavy one that intersects with politics of research and representation. How do researchers maintain fidelity to their interlocutors while articulating the insights they share with broader conversations (e.g., academic theory and debate)? How can academic writing meet the charge of ethically sharing traumatic experiences in ways that do not romanticize oppression, abstract lived experience through theories derived in other places, or flatten the heterogeneity of complex social processes and actors to fit a uniform explanation? Research and writing are always political because they pertain to uneven power, representation, and the coloniality of academic knowledge production.

Throughout the book, I endeavor to center Enxet and Sanapaná narratives and experiences in ways that drive the analysis. My use of academic theory, citations, and storytelling intends to draw connections between schools of thought—academic and otherwise. My aim is not to read Enxet and Sanapaná experiences through theory derived from scholars (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) based in North America, Europe, or provincial sites in Latin America but to think with insights shared by interlocutors in this research and bring them to bear on established theory to provide another way of understanding environmental justice, human rights, and Indigenous land restitution in the current conjuncture. Bringing Enxet and Sanapaná storytelling practices into conversation with academic storytelling (i.e., citationality) does not eschew the coloniality of representational politics. The political economy of academic writing—not only the word limits authors work with, but the intellectual currency of advancing debate—and push to abstract theorization from everyday life create limits and challenges to solidarity research that involves publication. I do not intend to “speak for” or “give voice to” any of the people who participated in this research. Members of Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaya, and Xákmok Kásek have voices and speak for themselves in their ongoing struggles, advocacy, and everyday life. One of my goals, however, is to amplify my interlocutors’ insights, and thus this book is written as a form of reciprocity made in a spirit of using research as resistance to honor Enxet and Sanapaná struggles for self-determination.⁹⁴

Despite those intentions, I am aware that ethnography has long been a colonial tool, forged as a practice to codify cultural differences, distinguish “others,” define notions of superiority, and reaffirm white supremacy.⁹⁵ Critical scholars have trenchantly, and rightly, critiqued the forms of ventriloquism that academic writing often produces, underscoring that the inequities inherent to this form of knowledge production and circulation speak for subaltern actors.⁹⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith eloquently states, “Academic writing is a form of selecting, arranging and presenting knowledge. It privileges sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant; and, by engaging in the same process uncritically, we too can render indigenous writers invisible or unimportant while reinforcing the validity of other writers. If we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous.”⁹⁷ Despite my efforts to center self-reflexive critical analysis and Enxet and Sanapaná perspectives, this book invariably produces its own silences through the process of weaving together distinct grounded experiences and diverse academic theories.

Yet through accessible language and upon eventual translation, I hope the book will serve meaningfully for the Enxet and Sanapaná communities with whom I have worked on this project for many years. I also hope the analysis is useful to students, scholars, and activists who read the work. In this way, the writing itself intends to disrupt staid academic convention and speak to a broad readership of critical scholars, activists, and those who participated in the research. This book

is the product of thinking, conversing, and living *with* Enxet and Sanapaná collaborators; however, it does not provide a holistic account of Enxet and Sanapaná struggles, indigenista organizing, the Paraguayan state, or settler experiences. *Disrupting the Patrón* is but one story of environmental justice among many that can be told about Indigenous rights and land in Paraguay's Bajo Chaco.

BOOK OUTLINE

I begin by laying the groundwork for understanding the stakes of the legal struggles Enxet and Sanapaná wage to regain their lands. To do this, I examine the establishment and structures of settler colonialism in the Bajo Chaco by attending to Anglican missionization and the early years of cattle ranching. Anglican missionary accounts and settler rancher testimonies show that Enxet and Sanapaná peoples have long occupied a central yet peripheral position within Paraguayan state formation. The erasure of Indigenous lifeways was more than religious conversion or dispossession. It operated through efforts to produce a labor force that would build the infrastructures on which ranching has expanded and ultimately persisted. Drawing missionary, settler, and Indigenous narratives into conversation, I chart the emergence of the social and spatial relations of power that persist through contemporary patrón-Indigenous relations.

Not entirely unlike the evangelical Christians who led the colonization of the Chaco, activist anthropologists and indigenistas sought to evangelize Enxet and Sanapaná peoples in a new way of being—through the knowledge and language of rights. The mid-1970s project, called Marandú (“News” or “Information” in Guaraní), sought to spread information about rights to empower Indigenous peoples who had been exploited on ranches across the country. For many, interactions with these actors represent a critical historical conjuncture when the knowledge of rights—first for better working conditions, then eventually for land, and, finally, as humans—changed their political outlook. Thus chapter 2 traces relationships between labor, law, rights, and Indigenous political mobilizations.⁹⁸ By drawing attention to racial capitalism and its effects on the politics of recognition, I suggest that Enxet and Sanapaná land struggles cannot be reduced to neoliberal multiculturalism. Instead of facilitating state governance or enabling the state to co-opt Indigenous struggles, new multicultural rights frameworks opened a field of struggle conditioned by the *longue durée* of patrón-Indigenous land and labor relations.

As Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek waged legal struggles to reclaim land from the ranches where they lived and labored, each community was eventually forced to leave those ranches. Two communities occupied the margin of a highway in front of the lands they claimed, and the third moved onto lands of a sympathetic Indigenous community. Life is hard on the ranches as it is on the margins. Drinking water and firewood are scarce. There is no land to garden, let alone

hunt or fish. Ceding to pressure from local NGOs during the 1990s, two presidents of Paraguay declared a state of emergency in each community, authorizing the delivery of food rations and drinking water. Eventually, the IACHR ordered Paraguay to maintain the emergency services until the government resolved the stalled land claims. More than a generation later, the states of emergency remain, and the claims have not been fully resolved. With everyday emergencies in mind, chapter 3 argues that the Paraguayan state governs Indigenous dispossession through a biopolitics of neglect.⁹⁹ Here I draw attention to stark disparities in how cattle raised on stolen Indigenous lands are valued more than Enxet and Sanapaná life on the margins of cattle ranches. I show that neglect emanates from legal abandonment, creating a life condition where the only predictable thing is unpredictability.

After exhausting all legal avenues within Paraguay, Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxe, and Xákmok Kásek scaled up their struggles by petitioning the Inter-American System of Justice to arbitrate. In three judgments, the IACHR ordered Paraguay to recognize its human rights violations, return ancestral lands to each community, and provide funds for development projects as restitution. Whereas the development of the Chaco drove Enxet and Sanapaná dispossession, the IACHR strategy frames ethno-development as a form of restitution. The IACHR issued its judgments in 2005, 2006, and 2010, with a clear mandate that the state implement the orders within three years of each decision. Nevertheless, the responsible state institutions have only complied with the IACHR in uneven, discretionary ways that intensify legal liminality rather than resolve it. Chapter 4 investigates the IACHR strategy of restitution as development and focuses on the politics and practice of implementing that strategy in Yakye Axa and Sawhoyamaxe.¹⁰⁰ In theory, restitution as development is a vehicle to support Indigenous self-determination and decenter the state's authority by placing decision making with affected communities. In practice, a more complicated terrain of struggle followed after "winning" the case in court. Implementation politics expose the depth of Paraguay's biopolitics of neglect and motivate Enxet and Sanapaná activists to use more radical forms of resistance.

The final chapter focuses on extralegal practices that complete the dialectics of disruption. Rather than everyday forms of resistance, the dialectics of disruption revolve around strategically breaking select laws through public acts that compel a state response while simultaneously using those situations to draw attention to how the state violates Indigenous human rights. Doing so reworks the terms of recognition by making the state negotiate directly with Enxet and Sanapaná leaders, simultaneously recognizing their authority and self-determination and delineating an emerging Indigenous environmental justice. My interlocutors show Enxet and Sanapaná renewal is neither abject rejection nor total acceptance of the politics of recognition but always negotiated and somewhere between. The chapter brings nuance to analyses of the evolving strategies of resistance and renewal used to disrupt settler colonial power.

Disrupting the Patrón concludes by drawing experiences from Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek into conversation with one another vis-à-vis scholarship on decolonial politics in the Americas. I resist fetishizing Indigenous struggle by highlighting the lasting ambiguities and newfound challenges that come after land restitution. The goal of recovering land has animated the Yakye Axa, Sawhoyamaxa, and Xákmok Kásek struggles for decades. Yet life after land restitution has been highly uneven in each community. Whereas time and the uncertainty of legal liminality have been undeniably oppressive, Enxet and Sanapaná leverage endurance as a radical act of resistance in efforts to restore their relations with land in pursuit of environmental justice.