

## Open/Closed

Waiting at the gate, we heard the tin sputter of a motor scooter approaching and soon saw Marcelino weaving to follow the smoothest path along the rough dirt road as he approached us. After brief pleasantries, he unlocked the gate, and we entered the ranch, following him to the small house where he and his wife lived when they are looking after things. Marcelino is now *capataz* of the ranch, responsible for watching over the herd, coordinating work parties when they are needed, and keeping an eye on things while the patrón is away. He is also one of the four leaders of Xákmok Kásek and had long played a central role in the community's land struggles. We came to visit so he, Clemente, and Serafin could discuss new developments in their case. But we also came to fish.

The ranch Marcelino works for is located on land with a storied history. International Products Company purchased this land, the traditional territory of Sana-paná peoples, in the late 1800s, then transferred ownership to a trio of English and US ranchers who started the Eaton & Cía. cattle ranch. Eventually, a Mennonite settler purchased the parcel, and he is now Marcelino's patrón. The process of purchase, sale, and subdivision came with an ordered but unruly expansion of fences to delineate cattle pastures in a landscape defined by seasonal variations in flood and drought, where meandering streams challenge quadrilinear Cartesian logics. Working with the landscape and against the caprices of the region's climate, ranchers construct *tajamares* (stock ponds) that fill with floodwaters and sustain cattle during times of drought. The *tajamares* also fill with fish and have become reliable food sources for Indigenous peoples who used to move freely over these lands but are now bound by ranching's enclosures. After talking business over *tereré*, Marcelino grabbed his fishing gear and took us to his favorite *tajamar* on the ranch.

The sun was low in the sky, temperatures were dropping, and the mosquitos were swarming. "Okaru la pira," promised Marcelino. The fish would eat. Eat they did. The five of us spread out to different parts of the pond with a handful of raw beef chunks and a simple fishing setup—about ten meters of fishing line wrapped

around a small square of wood with a lead weight and a hook. A piece of meat on the hook, a couple turns of the wrist, and a cast out into the water. They made it look easy. For me, it was less so, but I eventually got the hang of things as dusk turned to dark, and we continued to fish with the steel blue-gray light of the moon reflecting on the tajamar. With each fish landed came a yelp of excitement from one side of the pond to the next, “nde!” With each fish lost, a new cast onto the water. After a couple hours, we regrouped at Ireneo’s truck to take stock of the haul. Marcelino had about twenty-five, Clemente and Serafin each brought in around twenty, Ireneo had twelve, and I had seven. We let Marcelino choose from our fish as a tribute to his inviting us to the tajamar and then set off to return to Retiro Primero, where sixty-three families from Xákmok Kásek had recently reoccupied the ranch in an effort to take back their ancestral territory.

The next morning, I sat with a group of men by the gate at the entrance to Retiro Primero. The anticipation that something would happen was palpable. Would the police come? Would the ranchers react violently? Would the state finally restitute these lands? Ikatu. But like many before it, this day passed without any resolution. For a land reoccupation some thirty years in the making, most days were surprisingly dull. So most people hung around and talked when they were not doing chores around their tents or off hunting or fishing. Felipe knew that we had gone to see Marcelino and had heard about the tajamar. “Okaru la pira,” he asked. “Heê. Okaru.” Yes. They ate, I replied. With that, Felipe recounted a story.

The land used to be open. When my father was a boy in this area, the land was open. He said that we could go anywhere we wanted, to go fishing or hunting, to gather algarrobo seeds. We could go anywhere. Then the land changed. One day they found a fence [*alambre*]. It was *campo* [farmland]. The land was closed, and we stayed inside because they [the ranchers] would get very angry if we crossed [the fences]. They closed the land. We started living on the ranches and working there. Others came for work because all the land was closed, and the Indigenous people could no longer live like they used to. We had to stay and work.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of my research for this project, several people, mostly elders, from Xákmok Kásek, Sawhoyamaxa, and Yakye Axa would all share an iteration of this story. While some of the details changed, the person who recounted this story always used the same two words to describe the dynamic: “open” (*abierto*) and “closed” (*omboty*). The expansion of the cattle-ranching industry and its impacts on social-spatial relations is vivid in the collective memory of Enxet and Sanapaná peoples, who have lived through the process of enclosure and still navigate its effects. Many elders and the parents or grandparents of middle-aged Enxet and Sanapaná lived through a time of radical change when cattle ranching spread and intensified in the region.