

Heart

Every time I stop by Ignacia's home, she takes me to the garden, and we see how things are growing. On this March day, things were growing well. The mandioca was tall. The sweet potato patch was covered in a tangle of vines and dark green leaves. A handful of small trees planted from seeds seemed well on their way—papaya, grapefruit, and even a mango. "I go to the pond to get water, then come back and give it to them," she told me. "See! They are growing well!" It was exciting to see how her yard had changed over the last year, from a grass-covered pasture to a home with a large garden and lots of flowers. "Do you see my flowers? They are very pretty! I am happy." With that, she told her son to get the photo album. We walked to the shade of some trees where two hammocks hung that she had woven from plastic rope. We each sat, and her son brought over the album.

She flipped through the pictures as her son and sister listened, occasionally adding comments to the stories. With each image, she shared memories from across the years. She paused when we got to one picture: a young woman wearing a navy-blue dress surrounded by other, older women holding sticks about three meters long with bells at the top. Ignacia reminded me that it was a picture of the *baile kuña*—an initiation dance done for women entering puberty. The picture was old, taken at Estancia Salazar before the community had to leave the ranch. I had seen a copy of the picture before and understood that Tierraviva used it as part of the evidence for the community's IACHR case. Ignacia recalled, "This was the last time a girl in Xákmok Kásek did the baile kuña. It is *cultura indígena* [Indigenous culture]. We used to do those things when we lived at Salazar because that was still our land. We were still on our land. Over time we did it less, but we still did it. People still knew *cultura indígena*. When we had to go to 25 de febrero, we stopped. I hope now that we are back on our lands, we will do it again." Ignacia and her sister Estela explained that while they were at 25 de febrero they could not practice *cultura indígena* because they were not on their land. It was familiar but foreign land. Now that they were again living on their lands they could, and would, begin again.

“The men were not happy when they had to work for Eaton. It is our land, but he owned it. We could not do what we wanted. They had to do what the patrón wanted.” Ignacia talked about how some of the men worked near the retiro to plant peanut crops for Eaton on the best land in the area and how they built the old retiro there. “Eaton had lots of land. It went far that way and that way,” she said, while gesturing with her arms to the east and south. “But Eaton loved this part of his estancia. He used to call it ‘the heart of Estancia Salazar.’”¹ After that, she asked if I had ever been to Retiro Primero. “Yes,” I replied. “It’s over there where Yakare used to live.” She laughed and shook her head. “Many people think that is Retiro Primero. It is just an old retiro. The real Retiro Primero is over there,” she said, pointing in the opposite direction. With that, she stood up. “*Jaha*,” let’s go, she said. So we did, and Estela joined.

Ignacia led the way across one pasture, through two old wire fences, then into a stand of young trees next to a large old stock pond. “He built this pond for his cattle and his horses,” she noted, as we surveyed the clearing in the forest. “Eaton had a lot of money. He used to fly here in a little plane. There is an old runway over there,” she pointed. Estela nodded and listened. Then we pushed on into the shade of the trees. As we wandered through the forest, Ignacia and Estela recounted stories about the challenges of life on Estancia Salazar and labor exploitation on the ranch—stories I had heard from many people. Both women fell quiet as we approached a different stand of trees. In it were young mesquites and lots of brush, but there were also older trees that had not been cut. An old gray post stood among the bushes. Before I could ask, Ignacia announced, “This is Retiro Primero. When Eaton came here in his airplane, he would stay here. He loved this place.” What was once a farmstead is now but rubble, the traces of history recalled in memories, rusty wires, and a few rotting wooden posts. As we walked to the post, Ignacia turned to me. “He [Eaton] said, ‘I will never give even one centimeter of land to the Indigenous. I will never give them the heart of Estancia Salazar!’ But now we have Eaton’s heart in our hands. It has been a long time, and we have suffered a lot through the fight. Sometimes we didn’t think that we would make it. Now we are here. We are never going to leave.”