On Hunting
Kevin Lewis O’Neill

“We hunt men,” Alejandro said, “to save them” (fig. 1).1 Locked up inside a Pentecostal drug rehabilitation center for his use of crack cocaine, Alejandro participates in his pastor’s hunting parties or grupos de cacería. At the outer edges of today’s war on drugs, Christian vigilante groups scour the streets of Guatemala City with singular intent: to pull users out of sin by dragging them into rehab. And so, in the middle of the night, when the capital is an absolute ghost town, three or four recovering users drive with their pastor to the house of an active user. Often at the request of a wife, a mother, or a sister, each at wit’s end, they hover over the man while he sleeps.2 “We say a prayer right before,” Alejandro explained, but then it gets physical. One man takes the legs. Another two grab the arms. A fourth (if there is a fourth) controls the neck. “Sometimes we choke him

1. This essay draws on fieldwork completed in Guatemala City between 2011 and 2015. Basit Kareem Iqbal provided research assistance. Those whom I have interviewed remain anonymous or are cited by pseudonym. Fieldwork was supported by the Wenner Gren Foundation, Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, Social Science Research Council, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Open Society Foundations, American Academy of Religion, and American Council of Learned Societies. This essay began as invited talks at the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at the University of Oxford, the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Cambridge, the Center for Mexican Studies at Columbia University, and the Harvard University Mahindra Humanities Center. I also presented the essay at the Yale University Women’s, Genders and Sexualities Studies Program. I thank each of my hosts: Donovan Schafer, Matthew Engelke, Graham Denyer Willis, Claudio Lomnitz, Alex Fattal, Inderpal Grewal, and Zareena Grewal. My thanks to W. J. T. Mitchell, Lauren Berlant, and members of the editorial committee for their insightful reading of this essay. Except where otherwise noted all translations are my own.

2. Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers tend to be all-male institutions. Thus, the masculine pronoun is used throughout this essay to refer to users.
out,” Alejandro admitted. All the while the user, suddenly and unexpectedly crucified to his bed, struggles in vain. “It can be so scary,” Alejandro admitted. For the hunters? I wondered. Alejandro suddenly seemed confused. “How do you think I got here?” he asked. “I’ve hunted, but I’ve also been hunted.”

This essay considers the politics of hunting in Guatemala City. Amid the crack and the Christianity, in the service of so much captivity, Alejandro and his pastor track down drug users, as if they are animals, to remind them, in classic Christian fashion, that they are human—that, in the words of so many missionaries before them, it is not enough to be human, one must also act human. These efforts at ontological policing upset an increasingly bundled set of images about pastoralism today. Across the humanities and the social sciences, from a range of theoretical and

**FIGURE 1.** Photograph by Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela

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methodological commitments, scholars deliver steadfast portraits of neo-liberal withdrawal. And their terms tell all: dispossession and disposability; expulsion and exposure; precarity and social abandonment. While each advances an analytically distinct proposition, each also contributes to a single, powerful image of the failed shepherd, of people left to die.

Hunting tells a different story. Its subplot is not that the masses have been left behind. Instead, a more constructive reading, a more challenging line of inquiry, is that they have been given a head start. “I climbed out of that window,” Alejandro said, “before they put the bars up” (fig. 2). On the second floor of an abandoned apartment building, one renovated for rehabilitation, Alejandro gestured towards the light. “I slid out that window, hung from the sill, and then dropped to the sidewalk.” A slight man in his mid-thirties, Alejandro often waxes philosophical, but this time he didn’t: “I was high a few hours later,” he said, “but I made sure I got a gun. I knew that they would come for me. I knew that the pastor would hunt me down.” And the pastor did. The details of hunting repeat themselves across Guatemala City with such consistency that one begins to wonder whether the failed shepherd is really such a failure after all. The shepherd seems quite capable of catching and releasing his prey. This last point provides pastoralism with a competing point of reference. For the politics nipping at the heels of Alejandro as he climbs out that window, hangs from that sill, and then drops to that sidewalk is not “to make live and to let die.” It is to hunt or be hunted.

**Prohibition**

The manhunt has multiple histories. In Guatemala, for Alejandro, a cycle of tracking, capturing, and releasing human beings starts with American exceptionalism. “I am convinced,” President Richard Nixon announced

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in 1972 with an unfortunate degree of certainty, “that the only effective way to fight this menace [of drug abuse] is by attacking it on many fronts.”

And attack he did—by fumigating Mexican hemp fields and cracking down on Mexican marijuana smugglers. But this military might did little more than kill enough cannabis to pique America’s interest in cocaine. As demand soared, cocaine corridors connected Medellin to Miami and Cali to northern Mexico, all by way of the Caribbean. In response, the United States militarized its antidrug policies, but these more expensive and more effective maritime blockades only spurred traffickers to shift their operations from sea to land, eventually making Central America a main transit route. Now, planes, boats, and submarines ferry cocaine along the Pacific coast to northern Guatemala. There, outside the reach of US interdiction efforts, traffickers prepare this cocaine for its eventual shipment north, and they do so at a growing clip. In 2004, some 10 percent of the cocaine produced in the Andes and bound for the United States passed through Guatemala. Today some 80 percent of this product touches Guatemalan soil.

10. See United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, Transnational Organized Crime in Central America and the Caribbean: A Threat Assessment (Vienna, 2012), and Amanda Feilding
The hitch here is that traffickers need equipment, labor, and infrastructure to move this material in and out of Guatemala, but they pay for none of these with cash. Instead, they pay with cocaine, which actually holds very little value in Guatemala. There are simply not enough Guatemalans who can afford the drug. To turn this cocaine into cash, laboratories mix the drug with baking soda to make crack cocaine. Now sold throughout Guatemala City, crack cocaine is the far more affordable version of powder cocaine that hit Los Angeles, New York, and Miami in the mid-1980s. In the United States, the rise of crack cocaine met unquestionably racist antidrug policies in ways that tripled the country’s prison population. Yet in Guatemala City, with a homicide rate nearly ten times the US average, crack cocaine has not been criminalized so much as transformed into the object of Christian concern.

This Pentecostal preoccupation with crack begins with an extreme lack of social services. As a part of economic restructuring—which has included the privatization of state enterprises, the liberalization of trade, and the relaxation of government regulation—less than 2 percent of Guatemala’s total health budget addresses issues of mental health, with its hospitals flatly denying medical service to those patients seeking support for substance abuse. The Roman Catholic Church has also proven impassive, self-consciously constituting itself over the last century as an erratic charitable entity. The church runs a detoxification center in Guatemala City for alcoholics. Expensive even by middle-class standards, the center has six beds. Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers, when taken in the aggregate, have six thousand beds. This radical disparity in cots mirrors equally disproportionate rates of conversion. Once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, Guatemala is today as much as 60 percent Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian.
More important than numbers, however, are the visceral truths that Pentecostal Christianity promises its people: Salvation is real; hell is eternal; and Jesus loves you. Another imperative also follows. Often stamped onto Pentecostal print media, with an allusion to sin as well as the hunt, it announces: escape for your life (fig. 3). One effect of this faith is a growing network of informal and largely unregulated Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers. These sites warehouse users against their will inside of onetime garages, factories, and apartment buildings. Each has been repurposed for rehabilitation with razor wire, steel bars, and iron gates. Inside, pastors practice teoterapia, or theological therapy. This is a mix of Pentecostal theology, twelve-step programming, and self-help psychology. Its working assumption is that captivity will give way to conversion. It does not. Yet this bald fact has not slowed down the growth of these centers, and for good reason. Again, these centers provide a practical solution to a concrete problem. Drug use is up. State resources are down. And Pentecostalism is the discourse of change. The net result is a shadow carceral system infused with Pentecostal imperatives about not just sin and salvation but also about who can be hunted and why. It is a theological construction that carries concrete consequences. Today more Guatemalans find themselves literally tied up in Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers than locked up in maximum-security prisons. 16

Predation

Populating these centers presents pastors with a fundamental challenge. Users do not want to enter rehab (at least not these rehabs), and so users must be brought to rehab. They must be hunted. There is near consensus about this last point. The police condone hunting, families pay for the service, and centers profit from it both financially and spiritually. Much of this has to do with immediate social context, but there is also great theological precedent to the hunting of wayward souls. Consider the crosier, or shepherd’s crook, that abiding symbol of pastoral power, which bends at the top, fashioned in such a way as to fit tightly around the neck of an animal. “I will send for many hunters,” reads Jeremiah 16:16, “and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks.” 17 To read this rod on its own terms is to appreciate pastoralism’s physicality. A combination of pulling and prodding,

17. All scripture comes from The Holy Bible: New International Version (Colorado Springs, Colo., 2011).
FIGURE 3.
dragging and drawing, puts into context that iconic image of Christ as shepherd, replete with a sheep on his shoulders, and how Christ, to get that sheep on his shoulders, must have grabbed the beast by its legs and controlled its neck. Not unlike a user suddenly and unexpectedly crucified to his bed, the sheep must have struggled in vain. It is an unsettling image. To which Alejandro’s pastor replied, with a lilt of inspiration, “I do not kidnap men. I rescue them.”

The pastor’s distinction is open to interpretation, but, in the end, it is interpretation to which he has opened himself—not simply by allowing an anthropologist to shadow his work but also by lining his center with theologies of predation. One mural stands out (fig. 4). Across the top of a wall, just outside the pastor’s office, reads Psalm 103:5: “who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” The mural could have been classic Christian iconography. The passage has long evoked the image of a soaring eagle, its flight symbolizing the resurrection or ascension of Christ. And yet here, in this rehab, for this pastor, the eagle on this wall is not ascending. It is diving, with talons drawn. This bird of prey is hunting. “God the father,” the pastor once mused, “has a fish in one hand and a whip in the other.” Pairing salvation and slavery, the fish and the whip, this pastor makes intuitive the often overlooked observation that predation complements pastoralism.

Yet hunting as pastoral mandate too often fades from sight. This is because scholarship about pastoralism tends to pivot between two archetypes. The first is the good shepherd, who governs with “constant kindness”—through what Michel Foucault has called the “art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men.” Its counterpart is the bad shepherd, who “disperses the flock, lets it die of thirst, [and] shears it solely for profit’s sake.” This strict dichotomy between the good and the bad shepherd yields a strict analytic division between research programs on humanitarian intervention and zones of social abandonment. The former aligns with “the management of life in the name of the well-being of the population.” The latter invokes what

20. For humanitarian intervention, see Peter Redfield, Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors without Borders (Berkeley, 2013). For zones of social abandonment, see João Biehl, Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment (Berkeley, 2005).
Giorgio Agamben takes to be the progressive animalization of man and what Foucault laments as the bestialization of biopolitics. Yet what is ethnographically obvious is that at the very limits of the pastorate, where the state is absent and the souls are unmanageable, the shepherd neither administers nor abandons his sheep. Instead he makes them his quarry.

The Hunt

“What would you have done?” The question immediately shifted my status from observer to participant. I sat in a modest two-room structure in a poor zona of Guatemala City. I spoke with the mother, brother, and sister of Santiago. Four months earlier, Santiago’s use of crack cocaine had left his family with no other choice than to commit him to a Pentecostal drug rehabilitation center. Up all hours of the night, and then gone for days on end, Santiago was unable to work a steady job. And so Santiago began to steal from his family. This meant taking cash straight from their pockets but also stealing hard-earned appliances from under their noses.

Santiago sold the family's microwave for pennies on the dollar. “He sold my table saw,” his brother huffed, “that [machine] was how I made money around here.” Santiago had also started to run into trouble with local dealers. They would sell to Santiago, but they were also obviously upset with him. One young man came looking for Santiago at his home. He had a gun. The family called the pastor that same day.

Santiago is in his early twenties. He is fit, broad shouldered, and quick to anger. He also has absolutely no interest in entering a drug rehabilitation center. Santiago’s mother is slight, his sister petite, and his brother overweight. The drug rehabilitation center is an hour away from the family’s home. And so with no steady access to either a car or brute strength, there was simply no conceivable way for the family to get Santiago to the center without having him hunted. Already stretching the family’s budget, haggling with the pastor over Santiago’s monthly fees, even downgrading Santiago’s stay from a bed to a floor mat, the family eventually paid a lump sum to transport Santiago from the streets to the center. Alejandro did the honors.

“How many?” Alejandro asked, counting numbers in his head, “Three hundred.” He quickly checked himself; “No. I’ve been on more than three hundred hunts.” Alejandro’s best guess signals his years spent inside of Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers as well as the bright divide that his experience straddles. Prior to 2006, when there were only dozens (rather than hundreds) of Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers in Guatemala City, hunting parties tended to track down and capture those who drank too much. This was a different kind of hunt, with a different set of techniques. Alcohol slows down the user, even puts him to sleep, which can make hunting look a lot like fishing.23 “If he drank,” Alejandro explained, “We let him drink. And then we’d give him more to drink. Until he couldn’t talk. Until he couldn’t walk. Then we’d take him.” Casting a bit of bait, Alejandro would reel in user after user. The work was easy. It was also inspired. “It’s for their well-being,” Alejandro explained, “and for the well-being of the family. If you’re in the street, you’ll end up dead. [But] it’s [also] not just about the person who takes the drugs, [it is] also about the family who is suffering.”

The problem is that while alcohol slows down the user, crack cocaine speeds him up. Vaporized with a lighter and then absorbed through the lungs, crack cocaine hits the bloodstream almost immediately, flooding the brain with dopamine. This jolt causes crack cocaine’s characteristic

high; it also constricts blood vessels, dilates pupils, and increases body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure. But this euphoria lasts only for about five to ten minutes and less if the crack is of poor quality (and the crack sold in Guatemala City is almost always of poor quality). It is, in fact, this sudden spike and then equally abrasive drop that fosters increasingly aggressive binge sessions. This is why the biochemical effects of crack cocaine can quickly bleed into matters of public safety and citizenship security. Santiago could stay drunk in Guatemala City for less than one US dollar a day. Quimica, or rubbing alcohol, is incredibly cheap. It is also unbelievably accessible. But Santiago does not want to get drunk. He wants to get high, and he wants to stay high. The problem is that a two-hour crack session can cost upwards of fifty dollars, or the street value of four off-brand smart phones. And so thefts, muggings, and home invasions—the back alley sale of microwaves and table saws—often accompany the use of crack cocaine.

“It can get bad,” Alejandro admitted: “A mother had us pick up her son the other day. The problem was that he was high when we showed up. And so he took off [running] once he saw us. We chased him but then he climbed up a [three story] building.” Alejandro paused to let me imagine the scene. “He made it all the way up to the roof. [And] along the way he picked up a [metal] pipe.” The problem was suddenly obvious, at least to me, but Alejandro spelled it out: “He had the high ground and there was only one ladder [leading up to the roof]. So it was impossible to get up there without getting hit on the head.” So what did you do? I asked. “We waited him out,” Alejandro said, “And then we distracted him while two guys scaled the other side of the building. They took him from behind.” Alejandro paused, shaking his head: “But that hunt took five hours.”

Santiago did not make it to any roofs. “We waited until he was asleep,” Alejandro explained. After entering the house in the middle of the night, his men quietly searched the room for weapons in case Santiago struggled free. Once the room was secured, they grabbed Santiago, tied him up, and threw him in the back of a truck. The only hitch came when Alejandro had to transfer Santiago from the truck to the center. There is a short open stretch between the curb and the center’s front door, a seemingly inconsequential patch of concrete. Yet it is always a hurdle. The hunted can lull their hunters into a sense of calm with an uneventful car ride, then reach for a final jolt of energy, of sheer desperation, when the user finds himself out of the truck but not yet inside the center. Santiago made a run for it,

but he did not get very far. The men pulled him into the center and locked him behind a steel door (fig. 5). They smiled as Santiago struggled, enjoying the inevitability of it all. Santiago never had a chance. But undergirding this affect—the thrill of the hunt—lay a clear Christian principle. “It’s about saving a life,” Alejandro insisted. “That’s why we beat these guys, tie them up, and drag them here like pigs.”

The image of Santiago hamstrung and hogtied returned to me when his brother repeated his question. “But, really,” he asked, “what would you have done?” Already four months into Santiago’s captivity, knowing that Santiago had slept on the floor every night while some kid with a gun waited for him in the streets, I answered the brother with an unfortunate degree of certainty. “I would have had him hunted,” I said, “I am absolutely certain of this.”

**Escape**

Testing my confidence was the knowledge that the hunt continues well after the capture. The first few days inside a center can be unbearable, often spent inside _la morgue_, which is a barred closet set aside for detox (fig. 6). Alejandro knows the morgue all too well. “I woke up there,” Alejandro admitted, “And I asked this guy [next to me] if he’d stop me if I tried to escape.” The man said that he would not. “And so I got up and started acting crazy.” The pastor unlocked the door to the morgue to see what was going on, which allowed Alejandro to push past him, grab a chair, and start hitting the main door, which was also locked. “You either let me out of here,” Alejandro screamed, “or I want drinks.” The pastor had someone fetch three glasses of liquor, which the pastor keeps to soften hangovers. “But they must have had pills in them,” Alejandro guessed, “because I started to get all quiet. I was all wired up on cocaine, but I started to calm down.” Alejandro did the math: “I had an eight ball [of cocaine] before I got picked up. I smoked ten rocks the night before, but they just kept giving me pills and drinks.” Alejandro settled into his cell.

Santiago proved a more submissive subject than Alejandro. He struggled when they dragged him across those last few meters of freedom, but then he quietly retreated into a corner of the center. He kept to himself, often for days on end. Wearing the only sweatshirt he owned, with a hood that covered much of his face, Santiago would squat in the back of the

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26. Chamayou observes that hunting “does not occur only at the time of the first acquisition, but also later on, as a means of governing” (Chamayou, _Manhunts_, p. 8).
room as visiting pastors delivered sermons on the saving grace of Jesus Christ. “How many people here feel blessed to be alive?” one visiting pastor preached. “Amen,” the pastor answered—to himself, by himself. “Because life is a blessing.” The visiting pastor stood firmly behind a lectern. “And so I ask you,” he preached, “I ask you, what is your intention?” I suddenly felt a piece of paper pushed into my pocket. “What is your purpose in life?” the pastor asked. I turned to see Santiago settling back into his corner. “My purpose,” the pastor continued, “is to tell you that Jesus has come to give all of us hope.” I fished the note from my pocket as the pastor extolled the struggles between hope and heaven. It was a letter written on pirated paper with a stunted pencil. Santiago had penned an apology to his family.

“Oh, you can tell,” Alejandro’s pastor insisted. “When a person changes, there is a change in his physical status. His hygiene starts to change. He starts to fix himself, to change himself, to improve himself.” We sat on the other side of a locked gate. The men milled about the general population as we convened in the pastor’s front office. “There are those who don’t want to change. Their hearts are hard. But a fixed person is obedient. He follows the rules.” Later in the day, while much of my conversation with the pastor still echoed in my ears, I opened Santiago’s letter. It was addressed to his mother, brother, and sister. “How are you?” it began: “I’m feeling better now that I am inside the center. I have begun to

FIGURE 5. Photograph by Fogarty-Valenzuela
handle myself differently.” The letter modeled the sincerity that the pastor had just described, a sincerity that seemed to mark the beginning of real change.27 “I’m really happy because I’m not on drugs,” the letter continued, “and I’m not drunk. This place has given me some time to think. I’m better now.” Santiago’s note worked hard to make exterior what would always be hidden on the inside: sincerity of faith, true conversion, maybe even a radical change.

“The exterior reflects the interior,” Alejandro’s pastor explained. “Did you know that? A person who is right with God is going to show it in his face. They are going to comport themselves differently. They are going to speak differently.” As the pastor’s missionary logic infused otherness with disorder and salvation with rectitude, Santiago’s letter rolled on, itself trying to fuse together language, personal character, and regimes of truth. “I hope,” Santiago wrote, “that you can forgive me for everything and for all the stuff I took from the house. Forgive me. Please. I’m really sorry.”

The pastor had lectured on, systematizing his vast experiences with clear Christian coordinates: “But there are people who just don’t care. They come here and they act the same way inside [the center] as they do outside.

[it]. But the most important is the interior [of the person]. . . . And if we can fix what’s going on inside a person, then we can set that person free.”

The pastor quickly qualified his conditions of release: “—that is, spiritually speaking. We can set that person free, spiritually speaking.”

With physical liberation increasingly out of reach, Santiago’s letter nonetheless seemed an honest first step towards spiritual freedom. Regret, concession, and repentance—it all fit the genre. Santiago seemed to be doing things with words. But then he suddenly slipped in slow motion, tumbling over himself with every word that he wrote thereafter. “When you come,” Santiago asked immediately after apologizing, without even a line break to mark a new thought, “could you bring some sugar and some bread?” The request was modest, but it also felt shallow. It was too soon, considering how much and for how long Santiago had made his family suffer. The ask also made Santiago seem completely unaware, as Erving Goffman once argued, that the apology is a process through which a person symbolically splits “into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule.”

Santiago seemed incapable of splitting himself into two parts. And so his requests rolled on: “[Could you] also [bring] beans, coffee, soup, milk, ham, fried chicken and some french fries?” His onetime apology had suddenly become a grocery list: “and some juice, cookies, sardines, mayonnaise, a few of those muffins that you brought last time, ten pieces of fruit, and a cup of chicken broth?” At a certain point, the apology faded from sight. One could even be forgiven for missing the apology altogether. “Could you bring five pounds of rice? Five pounds of beans? A liter of Coca-Cola?”

To Santiago’s credit, his list makes sense. The center’s food is terrible. These men are chronically underfed, and Santiago had already lost considerable weight. But his letter as some effort at escape obviously missed its mark. Every item requested evidenced an interior in need of further rehabilitation: “Also [could you get me] some deodorant and some toothpaste, some floss, some soap to wash my pants, five tubes of glue, two razors, two tablets of aspirin, and two tablets of cold and flu medicine.”


had misplaced his apology. “But there are people who just don’t care,” the pastor repeated, as if having read Santiago’s letter. “The way they comport themselves in the streets is the way they comport themselves here.”

Santiago’s brother read the letter as I sat with him and his sister in their home. He shook his head. The letter had obviously upset him. With what seemed to be true sincerity, Santiago’s brother announced through gritted teeth, “He’ll stay there for another year. For another year.” He then turned to me, asking me again: “What do you think about that?”

**Reversal**

A year sounded extreme, I said. Yet, there were certainly no other institutions willing or able to take Santiago. Guatemala’s prisons sit at 250 percent capacity; the hospitals do not accept users; and Guatemala’s only mental institution understands drug use to be well outside the scope of its mission. These centers are the only option—for Santiago but also for his family. And yet what is obvious about these centers, regarding sincerity and salvation, is that the only way for the hunted to truly escape the center is for the hunted to reverse his position—that is, to become a hunter. “In order to anticipate the reactions of his pursuers,” writes Chamayou, “the hunted man has to learn to interpret his own actions from the point of view of his predator.”

This can be a literal transition. The user can rise through a center’s ranks until he has earned enough privileges to join an actual hunting party, but this reversal also comes through a conversion of sorts from object to subject, from being hunted (because of sin) to hunting oneself (because of sin). This turn inward includes thinking like a hunter, reasoning like a hunter, and understanding at a rather fundamental level why sinners must be hunted. And central to this new subjectivity is the recognition that classic Christian techniques of self-governance allow the hunted to hunt himself.

Part of this process involves surveying the grounds. With Socratic flare, in place of a sermon Alejandro’s pastor commanded the attention of his users, walking them through a theological anthropology driven by a cartographical imagination. With the pastor standing and the users sitting, he located the place of sin. He told them where to look for it, how to find it, and when to flush it from cover. He even posted a map onto a dilapidated chalkboard. The image was unpretentious but effective. Imagine the silhouette of a gingerbread man. “What’s the sign of sin?” the pastor

asked. “There are many,” an eager man offered. “There are bad words and sloppy clothes.” The pastor wrote the words just next to the figure’s body. Another user added with equal earnestness, “And there is bad character and selfishness. There is ambitiousness and compulsiveness.” The group slowly mapped the sinner’s exterior world. “Anger,” another offered.

“But inside the person? What is inside the sinner?” the pastor prodded. The same three users collaborated on another list: resentment, frustration, vulgarity, and paranoia. The list grew as the pastor inscribed the words atop and inside of the stick figure: stuck-up, conceited, bitter, and troubled. “And the effects?” inquired the pastor, a specific endpoint obviously in mind. “Lies,” the three insisted, “a lack of faith, crime, and drug addiction.” The three users sat a little taller. The pastor smiled.

The other thirty-eight users in attendance remained absolutely silent. Some paid attention, but others whispered to each other. Many more stared straight ahead, not focusing their attention on the board or even really blinking. A cluster slept in the back. Santiago joined them, with his hood over his head. His eyes were hardly visible. He seemed to be waiting for this sermon as well as his captivity to just end—for the doors to swing open and his life to begin again. But the sermon did not end, not really, and the doors would not swing open, at least not any time soon. This is one reason why those three users proved to be so keen. Sincerity seemed to be the way out of the center, and to perform this sincerity by spotting the place of sin suggested that the user himself was on the hunt.

Engaging in sermons, offering testimonies, and sitting up straighter than the next user leads to added privileges. This is clear. “You have to be sincere,” Alejandro insisted, “So like when the pastor walks in the house, you have the soap ready for him because you know he’s going to wash his face. And you need to have the brush ready for his teeth and the towel for his hands. You have that ready, too. You treat him like a king.” The added privileges that this hustle generates might begin with directing a prayer session but then can develop into managing a door and then maybe even coordinating the kitchen. The kitchen is a big step (fig. 7). An open air space, with some room for escape, the kitchen staff gains access to a set of dull knives. The user’s ability to control himself by serving with sincerity becomes rock steady evidence that interior change is afoot. Yet Santiago never really engaged. Instead he performed insincerity with an almost adolescent indifference. Santiago shrugged.

32. On Christianity as a didactic process, see Joel Robbins, Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society (Berkeley, 2004).
Alejandro always did the opposite. Once tracked and captured, after being released from the morgue, he did his very best to work his way up through the community. “The pastor treats me good,” Alejandro confessed, “And it feels good [when he does]. He lets me know what’s wrong and what’s right. Then the rest is up to me. I just have to behave.” This apparent clarity does not mean that Alejandro never stumbles. In one heroic run Alejandro even reached the kitchen, but then his temperament shifted. He simply could not spend another night inside, on the floor, next to another user. He had been inside for three months when he lifted a knife from the kitchen, put it to the throat of a visiting pastor, and walked himself and the pastor out of the gate. Yet it was those last ten meters of freedom that tripped him up. Terrible timing placed a hunting party at the front door just as Alejandro was making his break. “They beat the absolute shit out of me,” he said. And yet he rebounded, as he always does, until he graduated (yet again) to a hunting party. “Hunting’s the most prized position,” Alejandro explained. “Because they know that the hunter could just take off. He could just run away during the hunt. You have to know that the hunter is sincere.”

Of course, the hunter is not always sincere. There are numerous stories of a hunting party losing men. A group of four suddenly becomes a group of three. It is a remarkable moment of reversal. For when the hunter makes a break for it, the hunter suddenly becomes the hunted, and once
the others complete their immediate task, they set out to find the escapee. Alejandro has been on the lam many times. “It was about five days after I ran off and I was at an internet shop. These guys walk in and they’re like, ‘OK, Alejandro. Come on. We’re here to get you.’ So I said, ‘Alright, let’s go outside.’” Alejandro went outside, took off his shirt, and said, “We’re not in the center anymore. I don’t have to listen to you. We’re on my block. So take me. Beat me and take me, if you can.” It turns out they could, and so they did.

**Hunted**

Santiago was always hatching a plan for his escape. He pitched one to me: “You could go upstairs,” he said. “The shingles are open on the roof, like two feet open. And that goes to the roof next door, which is the hardware store.” He mapped a bit of this out on the floor with his finger: “I could jump on the roof. I mean, I could jump in the middle of the shingle on top of the 2x4. That’s the base.” He weighed his options. “But if that 2x4 is rotten,” he said with some hesitation, “I’d fall [three stories] to the ground.” His plan was not new. It was, in fact, rather well worn. Many users have shimmied their bodies through those two open feet and have landed (with luck) on a solid 2x4. They have then hit the ground running, but this is just the beginning. Most of these men will live on the streets for a time, only to return to the center against their will. They will be hunted. This is because their families will learn of their escape and, for a time, may even preach the gospel of tough love. “Then let him die in the streets,” Santiago’s brother once said, exasperated. But this bravado will then give way to absolute panic. “But he could die in the streets,” Santiago’s brother later said, again exasperated. The scenario then starts all over again, with families haggling over monthly fees, even downgrading their loved one’s stay from a bed to a floor mat, just to have their father, son, or brother hunted.33 “God is not going to come [and get the user],” the pastor once mentioned, “so we need to take the person by force so he can choose between good and evil.”

This seemingly endless cycle pales in comparison to the ensnaring of the interior self. Santiago seemed to evade this trap at all cost while Alejandro often raced into it. Hints of this hunt can be found in those disciplinary moments when the user sits up straighter than his neighbor or when he answers the right question. These efforts at bodily comportment signal a user that has succumbed to a Pentecostal appreciation for sincerity, a subject that has effectively internalized a cat-and-mouse game between him

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33. For an ethnography of addiction and return, see Angela Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande* (Berkeley, 2010).
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and himself. This includes the Pentecostal imperative to manage his own posture, to prod his own self into proper participation, and to spot his own sins. This more intimate reversal draws from a broader Pentecostal commitment to prohibition that actively folds, or doubles, the subject—that splits the user into two. Much of this folding begins when users recognize these centers as a source of their moral obligations, a place where they can transform and work on themselves. But much of this doubling also pivots atop the idea that the user (because he is now a Christian) must hunt himself (because he has always been a sinner).

The sight is difficult to witness, let alone understand. Its brightest manifestation begins with an escape. The user then returns, some days later, on his own accord—in search of help, to sober up. These are desperate moments, but in these instances the pastor rarely lets the escapee re-enter the center, at least at first. He makes the user wait outside the front door, sometimes for days on end. And so a user, reeling from withdrawal and filthy from the streets, will squat in that threshold of freedom, across those same ten meters, pleading for the pastor to drag him inside the center—to unlock his steel door just long enough to let him in. “But the gate is narrow,” the pastor often preaches, with an obvious reference to Luke 13:23–30. This parable places the sinner just outside the gates of heaven. “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door,” the passage pleads, “because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”

The pastor preaches this parable in explicitly apocalyptic terms, provoking a kind of impromptu passion play that brings to life another Pentecostal pamphlet among many that so often litter the center’s floors (fig. 8). “Where will you spend eternity?” both the pastor and this pamphlet ask. Embedded inside this question is a moral imperative. As the pamphlet makes clear, the earthly city exists on one side of the abyss. It is a debauched hellscape, up in flames and literally pouring over the edge of a cliff. On the other side of the abyss stands the City of God, with ordered streets and tree-lined green spaces. Christ’s crucifixion bridges these two worlds, enabling the faithful to choose a side, but how much of a choice does this pamphlet really offer? Who would choose flames over freedom?

“All I want to do is get better,” Santiago confessed: “All I want to do is get the fuck out of here and stop smoking.” The real question, it would seem, is not whether the user prefers the earthly city or the City of God but

34. Gilles Deleuze describes subjectification as how “the relations of an outside, folded back to create a doubling, allow a relation to oneself to emerge, and constitute an inside which is hollowed out and develops its own unique dimension” (Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, trans. Seán Hand [New York, 2015], p. 83).
whether the rehabilitation center is heaven or hell. Are the streets of Guatemala City on fire? Or is the center itself up in flames? Is the capital city Christian? Or does the center mark some kind of salvation? The answer to any of these questions is not obvious, at least from Santiago’s perspective, given that both the streets and the center keep him on edge. They reduce him to a near constant state of anxiety.

One more young man provides one more example. Physically strong and with a long history of hunting, he escaped the center. He then returned days later only to be denied reentrance, and so he waited outside the front door until the pastor let him back inside. The process took days, and the scene was pathetic, made even more so each time I crossed this user’s path to enter the center. When I did, the young man would grab my arm, pull me close, and ask, at times beg, for me to take him with me—to somehow sneak him into the center. “Antrópologo,” he would call to me, “Talk to the pastor. Talk to him for me. Get me inside.” It was in those moments when the pastor’s parable proved perversely prescient: “Once the owner of the house gets up and locks the door,” reads Luke 13:25, “you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’” The more desperate this user became, the more stubborn this pastor proved and the tighter this user would grab my arm.
This desperation conjured amid desperate times is how this young man has become both huntable and hunted. He is huntable because the pastor has him on the run. The user has no idea which way to turn. And he is hunted because the pastor has him right where he wants him—outside his front door, frantic to reenter, and splayed out on a cross of the user’s own making.

Pentecostalism makes this predation possible in Guatemala, but the story does not stop there. While scholars often organize today’s literature in ways that prize narratives of abandonment over acquisition, Alejandro and Santiago, the desperate plight of this young man, pull the practice of critical inquiry to the very edges of the pastorate. From this perspective, what becomes clear is that it is hunting season, and maybe it always already was. Drones with their kill lists, Minutemen on the Mexican-American border, and Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean—they all lie in wait. And they are not alone. Extortionists across Central America, kidnappers in Iraq, and eviction notices stapled to front doors across the United States—each connects with the beguiling fact that there are some thirty thousand men in Philadelphia alone with warrants out for their arrest. Every one of these hunts distinguishes the active technologies of tracking and capturing from the relative passivity of letting die. Hunting as analytic also provokes an alternative politics. For narratives of abandonment tend to elicit a humanitarian response—of compassion, empathy, and consideration. Hunting, however, lays claim to the ethnographic fact that the hunted awaits not our recognition but rather our participation in overcoming these often overlapping cycles of tracking, capturing, and releasing. Or, as Santiago once asked me, “How are we going to get me out of here?”

