PREFACE

ALEJANDRO HANDED ME A LETTER ON June 2, 2016. He did it quietly, when no one else was looking. We sat shoulder to shoulder inside one of Guatemala City's Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers, listening with fifty-five other captives (*internos*) to sermons about sin and salvation. The center was a grey stump of a building, a simple two-story house that held drug users (often against their will) for months, sometimes for years.[1] Alejandro was one of these users. A proud man in his midthirties, with tired eyes and strong arms, Alejandro often waxed philosophical, but this time he didn't. After pressing the piece of paper into the palm of my hand, he leaned in to say: "Get me the fuck out of here."

The letter read:

Help Me National Police!

My name is Miguel Alejandro Gonzalez, born January 15, 1982. I am of sound mind and body. I know clearly that I do not want and do not need to be in this ministry and in this rehabilitation center.

On April 28, 2016, the pastor tracked me down, found me, and then brought me back to his house against my will. He forcefully detained me with the help of two men from the house by throwing me in the back of a truck.

I told them that I did not want to go to the house. I do not want to be held captive. Every day that passes I tell them that I do not want to be inside the house, but the pastor tells me that he is going to kick my ass.

The punishments here are severe. Here are some examples:

- *They withhold food from me*
- *They yell at me in a loud voice*
- *They make me clean the house*
- *They keep me in a very hot room all day long*

- *I sleep on the floor*
- *They tie me up with ropes for hours*

Please, I do not want to be here. I am here against my will. My family did not put me here, and they do not know where I am. They did not sign a contract, and they are not paying for me to be here.

Please send help so that I can get out of this house.

Thank you,

Miguel Alejandro Gonzalez

Alejandro had been hunted. At the outer edges of today's war on drugs, where the state is weak and churches are strong, Christian vigilante groups scour the streets of Guatemala City with singular intent: to pull drug users out of sin by dragging them into rehab. Often in the middle of the night, when the capital city is an absolute ghost town, three or four recovering users drive with their pastor to the house of an active user. At the request of a wife, a mother, or a sister, each at wits' end, this hunting party (*grupo de cacería*) hovers over the man while he sleeps. They say a short prayer, and 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 they choke him out. All the while the user, suddenly and unexpectedly crucified to his bed, struggles in vain.

"They just grabbed me right off the streets and threw me in here," Alejandro later explained. "They've done it a few times before. I was here six months, and then they let me go. I was out fifteen days, and then they came and got me again. I did another two, maybe three months, and then I got out again." Alejandro looked exhausted. "And now I'm back."

These hunts can be harrowing. I once saw four men from the center corner a young man inside his parents' house. Too strong for his own good, he fought his huntsmen for what seemed like an hour, wrestling with each of them one by one. As I paced nervously off to the side, wondering why the four didn't just rush him all at once, it occurred to me that they were tiring him out. When the young man eventually flagged, the four hog-tied him with such force that I suddenly found myself speaking up. The ropes are too tight, I pleaded. You crossed a line, I stammered, but as I stepped into the fray, I felt a hand holding me back. "Don't be stupid," someone said. That voice was Alejandro's.

Alejandro's letter did not just open a window into the horror of human vulnerability and the experience of being prey; it was also a stark reminder that Alejandro had hunted, and he had hunted for years.[2]

"How many?" Alejandro mused, taking a moment to count. "Three hundred." He quickly checked himself: "No. I've been on more than 300 hunts." Alejandro's best guess signaled his years spent inside these centers as well as his ability to hunt down drug users. "I had to pick up some guy a few nights ago," he told me not too long after handing me his letter. "See the guy over there? In the green shorts?" Alejandro pointed to a young man named Santiago. "I had to grab him from his bed," Alejandro explained, "because his mom paid [the pastor for] us to do it." Alejandro shook his head. "And it's not the first time," he said. "It's actually the second time I've hunted him this year." He then paused just long enough to get the story straight, adding, "And the worst thing is that I end up having to tie people up. We have a jacket with ropes, like a fucking straitjacket, and when someone doesn't do what the pastor tells him to do, I have to tie him up."

Alejandro cringed. "I'm tired of hunting," he said, "because when I leave here, the people I've tied up come looking for me." He seemed to grow indignant. "But they don't understand that I have to hunt. It's what I have to do to eat better, to sleep a little longer, so I can get a shower here." Alejandro then connected the dots for me: "Hunting is why the pastor keeps me here. The pastor hunts me because I hunt for him."

This is a book about humans hunting humans. It is an ethnography of Pentecostals who track down drug users, as if they were 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. After years of fieldwork alongside Alejandro but also many others, I came to understand this hunting as a kind of predatory pastoralism. This is the Christian impulse to seek out, tie up, and drag back those sheep that have wandered from the fold. It is a disruptive insight for at least three reasons. The first is that it upends the more standard philosophical position that pastoralism and predation have opposed genealogies—that persuasion is different from coercion. I now regard pastoralism and predation as not really at odds with each other but rather as interdependent modes of governance.[3] "It's about saving a life," Alejandro insisted. "That's why we beat these guys, tie them up, and drag them here like pigs."[4]

The second realization is that every hunt presupposes a theory of its prey, a clear sense of who can be hunted and why. Whereas manhunts tend to presume an ontological distinction between the hunter and the hunted, predatory pastoralism announces that everyone is a sinner in the eyes of the Lord. This means that salvation is the only way to escape—and that what must be evaded is not the chase or the center but oneself.

The third insight is that predation upsets an increasingly bundled set of images about pastoralism.[5] Across the humanities and the social sciences, from a range of theoretical and methodological commitments, scholars deliver steadfast portraits of state withdrawal, their key terms telling 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.[6]

Hunted 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." On the second floor of his pastor's center, Alejandro gestured towards the light. "I slid out that window, hung from the sill, and then dropped to the sidewalk." Alejandro walked me closer to the windows. "I was high a few hours later," he then 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 this hunt 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. That is the point. The political demand nipping at the heels of Alejandro as he escaped from the pastor's center was not to make live or let die but rather to hunt or be hunted.[7]

The manhunt has multiple histories, but in Guatemala, predatory pastoralism begins with the war on drugs.[8] "I am convinced," President Richard Nixon announced in 1971, "that the only way to fight this menace [of drug abuse] is by attacking it on many fronts." And attack he did—with the fumigation of Mexican hemp fields and a crackdown on Mexican marijuana smugglers. But this show of military might did little more than kill enough cannabis to pique America's interest in cocaine. As demand soared, cocaine corridors connected Medellín to Miami and Cali to Northern Mexico, all by way of the Caribbean. The United States responded with hugely militarized antidrug policies, but these increasingly expensive, progressively effective maritime blockades only prompted traffickers to shift their transport operations from sea to land, eventually making Central America a principal

transit route. Soon planes, boats, and submarines ferried cocaine along the Pacific coast to northern Guatemala. There, beyond the reach of US interdiction efforts, traffickers prepped their product for its eventual trip north. And they have continued to 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. A decade later at least 80 percent of this product touched Guatemalan soil.[9]

The movement of all this material came with considerable logistics. Equipment, labor, infrastructure—traffickers need all of this, but pay for none of it in cash. Instead, they pay with cocaine, which itself never held much value in Guatemala. There have never been enough Guatemalans who can afford the drug. To monetize this material, to convert cocaine into cash, laboratories began mixing the drug with baking soda to make crack cocaine. Sold throughout Guatemala City, crack cocaine has proven to be a far more affordable and far more addictive version of powder cocaine. Smoked through a pipe one rock at a time, crack is as intense and fleeting as it is cheap. In the United States, the rise of crack cocaine met growing urban violence and decidedly racist antidrug policies in ways that tripled the country's prison population. Yet in Guatemala City, with a homicide rate often twenty times the US average, crack cocaine was not criminalized so much as Pentecostalized.[10]

The Pentecostalization of drugs and drug use in Guatemala hinges on 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 one percent of Guatemala's total health budget addresses issues of mental health. Hospitals also flatly deny medical service to patients seeking support for substance abuse while the Roman Catholic Church has proven absolutely impassive. The Church runs one detoxification center in Guatemala City for alcoholics. Expensive even by middle-class standards, the center only has six beds. Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers, when taken in the aggregate, have over 6,000 beds. This radical disparity in cots has long mirrored equally disproportionate rates of conversion. Once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, Guatemala is now at least half Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian.[11]

More important than numbers are the visceral truths that Pentecostal Christianity promises its people. They include that salvation is real; hell is eternal; and Jesus loves you. These principles have set the conditions for something called theological therapy (*teoterapia*). This is a mashup of

Pentecostal theology, twelve-step programming, and self-help psychology. Its most basic assumption is that captivity will give way to conversion. It rarely does, but this has done nothing to slow the growth of these centers for a simple reason: they provide a practical solution to a concrete problem. Drug use is up, state resources are down, and only Jesus saves. The net result is a shadow carceral system infused with Pentecostal imperatives about who can be hunted and why. It is a theological construction that carries considerable consequences. By 2016, more Guatemalans found themselves literally tied up in Pentecostal drug rehabilitation centers than locked up in maximum-security prisons.[12]

Populating these centers presents pastors with a fundamental challenge. Users often do not want to enter rehab, and so they must be brought to rehab. They must be hunted. There is near consensus on this last point: the police condone hunting; families pay for the service; and centers profit from the practice, both financially and spiritually. Much of this has to do with the immediate social context—with an extreme lack of social services, for example—but there is also great theological precedent to the hunting of wayward souls.

Consider the crosier. The shepherd's crook, that abiding symbol of pastoral power, bends at the top, fashioned in such a way as to fit tightly around the neck of an animal. To read this rod is to appreciate pastoralism's physicality. A combination of pulling and prodding, dragging and drawing, puts into context that iconic image of Christ as shepherd, the one with the 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 that Pedro, Alejandro's pastor, invoked with a lilt of inspiration: "I do not kidnap men. I rescue them."

Pedro's logic is open to interpretation, but in the end, it is interpretation to which he opened himself—not simply by allowing me to shadow his work for years but also by lining his center with theologies of predation. Across the top of a wall, just outside his office, there hung the image of an eagle. It could have been classic Christian iconography. The Bible often evokes 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 was not ascending. It was diving, with talons drawn. This bird of prey was hunting. "God the Father," Pedro once mused while we spoke in his office, "has a fish in one hand and a whip in the other." Pairing salvation and slavery, the fish and the whip, this pastor took as intuitive the overlooked observation that pastoralism is predatory.

Yet hunting as pastoral mandate too often fades from sight. 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 shepherd and the bad shepherd reflects 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 Giorgio Agamben takes to be the progressive animalization of man and what Foucault laments as the bestialization of biopolitics. What is ethnographically obvious, however, is that at the very limits of the pastorate, where the state is absent and the souls are unmanageable, the shepherd does not simply either administer or abandon his sheep but also makes them his quarry.[13]

Pedro was very proud of his work, and he was eager to share it. In his midfifties, with fading tattoos down his arms, Pedro often preached about saving souls, but too often, he felt, society misunderstood his labor of love. A local news team once filed a story on his center, assigning a camera crew to one of his hunts. The mission was routine enough. A father had called Pedro to bring his son to the center for drug rehabilitation, but the story that aired stopped just short of giving Pedro his full due. Bookended by buttoned-up newscasters behind a station desk, the two-minute report showed Pedro and his men barging into a family's house, tackling a young man, and then restraining him with a pair of handcuffs that Pedro had lifted from the National Police years earlier. The climax came when Pedro pulled a knife from the young man's hand. Holding the weapon up to the camera, Pedro announced with no small amount of pride: "This is the kind of work that we do!"

The problem was that a private security guard witnessed the events from afar, mistook the intervention for a kidnapping, and immediately called the National Police, who arrived with guns drawn to throw Pedro and his men up against a wall. All the while, the cameras kept recording. The police quickly realized their mistake, apologized to Pedro and his men, and then thanked

them for their service. They even accompanied Pedro and his new captive back to the center, but the apology and police escort never made the final cut. Even though the news story proved sympathetic to Pedro, advancing in no uncertain terms an unqualified appreciation for this kind of predation, the image of the police frisking the pastor lingered with him for years. It ultimately made him very wary of journalists, with their rushed timelines, but rather warm to me, an anthropologist, whose commitment to understanding his predatory pastoralism extended over years. Pedro also appreciated the nuance that ethnography made possible, valuing our conversations about such broad theological themes as freedom, justice, and love as well as sin, grace, and the will. Pedro saw my fieldwork and this book as one way to get the story right.

I too wanted to get it right, but these centers, especially Pedro's, often proved so extreme that descriptions of them never seemed to translate well to a general academic audience. Anthropologists always seemed concerned that my conclusions were far too normative while scholars of public health often pressed me to make more of an abolitionist argument. Historians of religion never seemed entirely convinced that these centers were actually Christian, and human rights activists wanted a list of abuses. Nothing I ever described seemed quite right.

To the activists, I would concede that a book could be written that details the human rights violations committed inside these centers. The houses tended to be far too small to hold as many men as they did; there was no way for anyone to appeal their captivity, and dozens died every year while inside.[14] In fact, the violence that occurred across this industry could support a formal truth commission, with personal testimonies and historical analysis not only evidencing that human rights abuses occurred but also that the Guatemalan government left its people to fend for themselves amid terribly uncertain times. But such a book, I came to realize, would flatten the moral and political ambiguities of predatory pastoralism. It would also obscure my own ambivalence. If these houses were such problems, then why did the police apologize to Pedro, thank him for his service, and then escort him back to his center—without ever stopping to question why the pastor had a pair of their handcuffs in the first place?[15]

For more than a decade, I attempted to answer this question by walking with those who hunted as well as those who had been hunted—if only because they tended to be the same people. It was an intimate project that admittedly made my efforts at observation look a lot like participation, with fieldwork proving to be a kind of pursuit in its own right, a style of hunting,

with its own targets and objectives. Committed to the promise of ethnography, to the idea that extended participation can yield otherwise illusive observations, my fieldwork traced very particular webs of predation to make certain persons (Alejandro, Santiago, and Pedro, but also hundreds of other individuals) objects of inquiry and, thus, people to track and capture through reflection and analysis. In methodological terms, however uncomfortable the conclusion may be, this research led me to understand ethnography too as a mode of predation. My notes and photographs, archives and spreadsheets, demonstrate an almost compulsive attention to an underemphasized anthropological obsession with acquisition.

Bronislaw Malinowski is best known for describing fieldwork as a way of enduring alterity. "Imagine yourself," he famously writes in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), "suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight." Less cited but possibly more relevant to explaining the workings of ethnographic research is a metaphor he crafts only a few pages later: "The ethnographer has not only to spread his nets in the right place, and wait for what will fall into them. He must be an active huntsman, and drive his quarry into them and follow it up to its most inaccessible lairs."[16] For over a decade, I tracked and captured knowledge about predatory pastoralism, spreading my nets across Guatemala City and waiting for what fell into them.[17]

The material that I gathered tended to fold along three lines of inquiry, with this book's narrative arc ultimately focusing on Pedro's center as well as the plights of Alejandro and one of the young men he had hunted: Santiago.[18] The first line of inquiry always felt like a loud rush. Much of my fieldwork took place in the streets, with users, dealers, and cops as well as the family and friends who witnessed the consequences of drug use. Organized by pastors, such as Pedro, these hunting parties collected users from the streets and their homes. More often than not the hunters were themselves in rehab, also under lock and key, but they were bigger, stronger, and sometimes smarter than the average captive. Hunting was a privilege, and the rewards were immediate: status, adventure, and a bit of sunlight. "I'd be lying if I said that I didn't enjoy the hunt," Alejandro once told me. But hunting also opened the hunter to the possibility of being hunted. "People are after me," Alejandro worried. "Every time I leave the center, I know that people are looking for me. I hunted them, and so now they want to beat me." It is, in fact, amid a series of home invasions and back alley chases that my fieldwork drilled down into the frantic realities of predatory pastoralism.

The second line of inquiry always seemed like little more than a whisper. It came from inside these centers, alongside these captives. Unlike the hunt's frantic pace, the rhythm inside these centers was slow. There were often no twelve-step programs or group sessions. None of the captives had case workers or even files. Progress was unevenly measured, with captives hardly ever better or worse—only free or not. "A lot of people say it's a process," reasoned one pastor, "but it's not a process. Rehabilitation is a miracle." Like a switch that flips on and off, there was often nothing in between, and so I waited alongside these captives for a miracle to happen amid brutal patches of boredom.

Along the way, Pedro allowed me to enter and exit his center as my schedule saw fit. This provided me with a gross amount of privilege, but somehow (and to my surprise) my mobility never seemed to stir these captives so much as my apparent lack of vice. As Pedro's population changed from month to month, with users caught and released, I found myself answering a familiar set of questions not just about fieldwork but about my soul. Did I drink? Not often, I would answer. Did I use drugs? They never interested me much, I would say. To have a conversation with a captive, to listen to him speak about his inability to control himself, proved uncomfortable for both of us when it became clear that we did not have the same appetites. "You don't have any vices?" I remember one man asking me in complete disbelief. "None?"

The third line of inquiry proved to be nothing more than a series of handshakes with police officers, judges, lawyers, human rights activists, and public health officials. Every meeting began with an earnest effort on my part to understand the relative regulation of these centers, but they always ended with a firm sense that reform was not possible. When I began fieldwork on these centers in 2006, Guatemala boasted one of the highest homicide rates in the world and one of the lowest conviction rates. By the end of this project in 2018, after extraordinary efforts at judicial reform, conviction rates had risen (incrementally) as homicide rates fell (modestly), but Guatemala City remained one of the most dangerous cities in the world, with three (rather than two) percent of murders resulting in a conviction.[19]

Throughout those years, in the face of extreme urban violence, consensus held among government and church officials that these centers had become an accepted solution to a dynamic problem. In some effort to nuance this belief, I began to work with a photographer to tell a story that, like ethnography, evades any easy or singular interpretation. This led to a series of photography exhibits in Guatemala City, in addition to staged debates

among public health officials, human rights activists, and members of the Christian community. To jumpstart a public conversation about compulsory drug rehabilitation centers, I also engaged the British Broadcasting Company and the United Nations Committee Against Torture. Perhaps predictably, the images I curated and the life stories I advanced provoked a wide range of responses, with even the most challenging of photographs leading to unanticipated optimism about the promise of Christian renewal. "This is the work of God," Pedro insisted while appreciating the photograph of a young man held behind a set of makeshift bars. "This is the absolute work of God."[20]

Understanding Pedro's perspective meant becoming subject to and at times ensnared by predatory pastoralism. This was the situation when Alejandro handed me his letter on June 2, 2016. His note directly interpellated me as an active participant rather than as a passive observer. The letter caught me with its very form. I could have treated it as an artifact that provided yet another perspective on predation, but the letter itself demanded not an interpretation but rather a response.[21] How would I respond? This book, one such reply, details the webs of predation that pastoralism spins, pinpointing those moments when apparent lines of flight become absolute dead ends. Alejandro had indeed been hunted by the pastor, physically tied up but also tethered to a set of social relationships that would not let him go. Yet Alejandro's plea also set me in motion, scrambling to figure out how to honor his request without endangering lives.

Alejandro addressed his letter to the National Police in the hopes of triggering a raid, but my deep familiarity with these centers had taught me that these police actions almost always end poorly, with the newly liberated either picked up moments later by other pastors or found dead in the streets in a matter of weeks. And so I approached the police as well as lawyers and public health officials, while also working with Alejandro and his pastor to find him a way out of the center, the drugs, and the hunting. No easy solution ever emerged. "You want to get Alejandro out of here?" Pedro eventually asked me. "Then buy me a pair of Nikes. Or better yet, just give me $100 [USD]." As money changed hands, with lives forever altered, the fact remains that hunting is itself a genre with a narrative arc that even I could never really escape.[22] The Hunt. Captivity. Escape. Return. This fieldwork tied me up, which is why this book starts on the run, so to speak, with Santiago, the young man whose mother paid to have him hunted (by Alejandro no less), and it ends with Alejandro, who never really found his way out.