

Introduction

Mateo preached amid chaos. The flames, the fireworks, the devil—each added to the drama, but the real tragedy had been brewing for decades. New regimes of deportation, as well as a blurring distinction between the United States’ War on Drugs and its War on Terror, combined with a multibillion-dollar drug trade to expand and embolden transnational street gangs throughout Central America. Guatemala got hit hard. And Mateo felt every punch. Following a thirty-six-year genocidal civil war (1960–96), uneven efforts at democratization and economic restructuring met a criminally negligent state to make postwar Guatemala the most violent noncombat zone in the world. The numbers are bleak. Guatemala City’s homicide rate is more than twenty times the U.S. average. An estimated two-thirds of these homicides are gang related, and less than 2 percent of them result in a conviction. “This ain’t LA,” Mateo would say. “This place is fuckin’ wild.” And wild it can seem—as 24,000 police officers work alongside some 150,000 private security agents, three-quarters of whom are unregistered and all are armed. With the guns and the murders, in the shadows of all this violence, postwar peace and prosperity proved nothing more than bloodied banners.¹ Security is the new anthem.

La mano dura, or a strong-fisted approach to gang violence, has long defined the practice of postwar security. Its techniques include deportation, mass incarceration, and extrajudicial execution. The strategy is clear: stop the violence, for good. Yet, amid repatriation flights and



FIGURE 2. The daily news. Photo by Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela.

paramilitary death squads, overcrowded prisons and angry lynch mobs, an alternative definition of security has emerged. Industry experts call it “soft security.” Its technique is prevention, and its hope is to stop the violence before it starts.² Mateo is one of its agents. He is also one of its subjects. For his testimony, his talk of transformation, braids together a growing commitment to soft security with a dramatic shift in religious affiliation. Once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the country is today as much as 60 percent Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian.³ This confluence is crucial. In the shadows of an anemic postwar state, with unthinkable levels of urban violence, new forms of Christianity organize and underlie the practice of gang prevention. Jesus saves. And he also secures.

This book details the Christian dimensions of soft security in postwar Guatemala. It juxtaposes a set of ethnographies, each delineating how a church mission, a faith-based program, or an ostensibly secular security project traffics in Christian techniques of self-transformation. Much like Christianity, because of Christianity, soft security presumes that its subject is lost and must be found, that he has sinned and so must be saved.⁴ Mateo’s life evidences as much, but so too do the sites that assemble

him: maximum security prisons (Chapter 1), reality television shows (Chapter 2), bilingual call centers (Chapter 3), child sponsorship programs (Chapter 4), and Pentecostal rehabilitation centers (Chapter 5).⁵ Each faith-inflected intervention opens a window onto religion's knotted relationship with security. And this is the point. A range of scholars (in several disciplines) understand religion and security as distinct: religion as a threat to security or religion as a solution to insecurity.⁶ Yet, the practice of soft security demonstrates that religion, observed here through various manifestations of Christianity, is neither the enemy nor the antidote. Rather, religion is a social fact deeply bound to the practice and to the construction of security, to the very idea of what it means to be secure.⁷

Mateo's life, assembled across these sites and braided between these chapters, evidences this entanglement in ways that foreground the fact that soft security is not so soft. Mateo knows this all too well. No matter how earnest the intervention, no matter how clever the effort, the outcomes often proved tragic. People died—spectacularly, in radically undignified ways. Death, dismemberment, and disappearance pierce every one of these chapters. “The programs are just fucked up,” Mateo admitted, “They aren’t organized. Nothing is nice and tight. So a lot of people die.” But to conclude that these are mere misfires is to absolutely miss the point. Efficacy is not the issue. Productiveness is. For the practice of soft security, especially when hitched to Christian coordinates, targets the heart and the mind; it works on the soul, doing so in ways that distinguish between the lost and the found, the sinner and the saved, the worthy and the unworthy.⁸ These moral distinctions have material effects. They set the conditions for visibility, segregation, and captivity—for who is seen (and who is not), who belongs (and who does not), who is free (and who gets tied up). Soft security can be brutal, this book argues, and Christianity makes it so.

The Christianity of interest here is neither a stable tradition nor a singular sect. It is an aspiration.⁹ At the center of most every effort at prevention sits not Pentecostalism or Presbyterianism, but a piety built of sin and hope.¹⁰ Make good with God, this piety insists, by turning inward, assessing your soul, and righting yourself with the Lord. “God was knocking at my door,” Mateo confessed at the church that night, “God wanted to come inside. God wanted to raise me up.” Both an obligation and an inspiration, evoking the cross as well as the empty tomb, Christian piety sits at the center of soft security. It demands from its person a commitment, at times a compulsion, to improve, to be

better—to turn it all around. In doing so, this piety renders Christianity ubiquitous and undifferentiated, a Christianity best described as undenominated.¹¹ This is why this book moves beyond church histories and denominational ethnographies to see what the promise of piety makes possible.¹² In postwar Guatemala, with ruthless levels of social suffering, the promise of piety makes the solution to gang violence intuitive: secure the soul.

To appreciate this imperative requires some more detailed remarks on prevention and piety. The rest of this introduction does the rest of this work. It also frames Mateo's life history, which makes up the text between each numbered chapter. Edited for length and style, Mateo's life history evidences the social worlds that exist between each of these chapters as well as the cultural forces that bind them together. Yet Mateo's life history should be taken neither as mere evidence nor simple texture. Given his confessional logic and Christian techniques of self-transformation, his ambivalent relationship to being lost and having to be found, Mateo makes piety the perfect problem through which to see the politics of postwar security anew. Few life histories supply such a powerful demonstration of the violence and banality of transnational cultures, linking relatively mundane ministerial efforts to contemporary threads of religion and globalization; the politics of frontiers, borders, and boundaries; and deportation and democratization as lived practice. A patterned entity, embodying a story that is more than his own, Mateo is not incidental to some larger theoretical claim. In this book, for this analysis, amid a deeply interrelated set of ethnographies, Mateo is the thesis. He is the argument.¹³

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A Soviet beachhead. This is what Guatemala would become, intelligence reports insisted, if the United States did not intervene.¹⁴ In the early 1950s, the Truman administration watched as Guatemala transitioned from a military dictatorship to a democratically elected government. President Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán posed no obvious threat. His policies, in many ways, extended those of his predecessor. Yet, Decree 900 raised concerns. This new piece of legislation, passed by the Guatemalan Congress in 1952, redistributed unused land to peasants, in an effort to shift the economy from feudalism to capitalism. But the practice smacked of communism, at least to the United Fruit Company. This U.S. multinational corporation owned 42 percent of the arable land in Guatemala, some of it vulnerable to Decree 900. Two stockholders took charge.

They petitioned the president of the United States to intervene. Brothers in arms as well as actual brothers, they were Allen Welsh Dulles, the director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and John Foster Dulles, the U.S. secretary of state. They made their case well.¹⁵

In June 1954, under the Eisenhower administration, the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état against President Árbenz. It would become an infamous affair, with U.S.-trained revolutionaries on the ground and New York City advertisement agencies in the air. Both managed a message: President Árbenz was a communist. Sigmund Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, authored the propaganda.¹⁶ The results were disastrous.

The Guatemalan government became increasingly militarized until large-scale massacres, scorched-earth tactics, and massive numbers of disappearances and displacements riddled the country with what would later be understood as acts of genocide. At the helm of it all was Efraín Ríos Montt, a military dictator and a Pentecostal Christian. He delivered weekly radio addresses known as "sermons" and developed close ties to the United States' growing Moral Majority.¹⁷ Dressed in battle fatigues and answering to the title of El General, Ríos Montt became Guatemala's quintessential Christian soldier. Yet, the net effect of his campaign, of the entire war, proved genocidal: 200,000 dead, 50,000 disappeared, and 1 million displaced.¹⁸

Many of the displaced marched north. They were not alone. El Salvador's civil war (1980–92), also backed by the U.S. government, coincided with Guatemala's, pushing tens of thousands of Central Americans to Los Angeles's poorest neighborhoods.¹⁹ Once there, for reasons of belonging and security, the children of these refugees formed gangs to defend themselves against the city's already well-established Asian, African American, and Mexican gangs. Initially modest in reach, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 became transnational criminal organizations in the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.²⁰ With a torched cityscape and a surging Moral Majority, increasingly strict antigang laws meant tougher prosecution, expanding the legal grounds for deportation to include such minor offenses as shoplifting.²¹

The tenor of it all was brash. Just months after the Los Angeles riots, presidential hopeful Patrick Buchanan spoke at the 1992 Republican National Convention. He crowed to a national television audience, "There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America." His speech was reactionary, filled with homophobic and racist statements as well as a Manichean division



FIGURE 3. Los desaparecidos. Photo by Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela.

between us and them. It ended with an image from the Los Angeles riots: “The troopers [of the Eighteenth Cavalry] came up the street,” he said, “M-16s at the ready. And the mob threatened and cursed, but the mob retreated because it had met the one thing that could stop it: force, rooted in justice, and backed by moral courage.” Citing scripture (John 15:13, to be exact), Buchanan then set a tone for U.S. immigration policy that would last for decades. He announced, in militant Christian idiom, “[Just] as those [troopers] took back the streets of Los Angeles, block by block, my friends, we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.”²² This is a war for the soul of America, Buchanan insisted, rooted in force, justice, and moral courage.

The U.S. government led with force. The number of Central Americans deported annually tripled in less than a decade, rising from just over 8,000 in 1996 to well over 24,000 in 2004.²³ Following the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government began to confront MS-13 and Barrio 18 under the auspices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a new division of the Department of Homeland Security. In 2007, by routinely alleging unsubstantiated associations between these gangs and al-Qaeda, by stretching the War on Terror to its rhetorical limits, the U.S. government deported some 74,000 Central Americans to

Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. In 2010, the United States successfully repatriated more than 31,000 Guatemalans, with 31.3 percent deported on criminal grounds.²⁴ Our goal, explained Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, is to “return every single illegal entrant, no exceptions.”²⁵ And when U.S. presidencies changed, U.S. policies did not. President Barack Obama issued more deportations in his first year in office than did President George W. Bush in his last year in office.²⁶

The immigration laws that deported these Central Americans also banned U.S. officials from disclosing the criminal backgrounds of the deportees to their home countries. With a typical lack of coordination between the United States and Central American governments, hundreds of men, women, and children (but mostly men) stepped off of repatriation flights, walked onto tarmacs, and then hopped onto city buses—every day. No questions asked. Challenging already strained police, prison, and judicial systems, these deportees met minimum life chances, a complete lack of social services, and a glut of weapons left over from the region’s civil wars. And, as men and women born in Central America but oftentimes raised in the United States, the youngest of these deportees did not speak Spanish fluently; they had no close family ties and no viable life chances but gang life.

These factors generated the ideal conditions for gang expansion. By 2006, with homicide rates that outpace even those of Guatemala’s genocidal civil war, Central American gangs began to boast more than 100,000 members throughout the Americas—a population that continues to grow alongside a heaving drug trade.²⁷ In 2011, as much as 90 percent of the cocaine shipped from the Andes to the United States flowed through Guatemala.²⁸ For this reason, and for many more, members of Central American gangs have been spotted as far south as Argentina and as far north as Alaska.²⁹ In the end, a myriad of mistakes and misjudgments radically expanded the conditions of postwar violence, outpacing initial concerns of a Soviet beachhead. These gangs had gone global.

Central American governments answered with force, mobilizing paramilitary death squads and pushing prison systems past 300 percent of capacity.³⁰ El Salvador, in July 2003, rolled out its *Mano Dura* (Strong Fist) policy and then, months later, implemented more aggressive legislation named *Super Mano Dura*.³¹ Honduras followed suit. Directly derived from Mayor Rudolf Giuliani’s Zero Tolerance approach in New York City, the Honduran government launched *Cero Tolerancia* in August 2003. In January 2004, Guatemala enacted *Plan Escoba*



FIGURE 4. Guatemala City, Zona 3. Photo by Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela.

(Operation Street Sweep), effectively militarizing the country's police force, with off-duty police officers authorized to hunt down suspected gang members. The strong fist got even stronger.³²

Central American governments, along with the United States, quickly admitted that a strong-fisted approach did little to curb the growth and influence of these gangs. This is one reason government agencies throughout the Americas began to pair *suppressive* policies—ones that favor incarceration and deportation—with more *integrated* efforts at gang prevention. An integrated approach synthesizes community policing efforts with youth programs and social services, creating a well-coordinated social net to catch those free-falling into gang life.³³ This was soft security.

Money started to move. Between 2008 and 2012, the U.S. Congress allocated \$35 million in global International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement funds for antigang efforts in Central America. In 2008, it provided an additional \$60 million of support for antigang efforts through the Mérida Initiative, a \$1.6 billion counterdrug and anticrime program for Mexico and Central America.³⁴ From 2009 to 2012, Congress directed \$465.5 million through the Central American Regional Security Initiative, with \$146 million delivered to United States Agency for International Development (USAID; for rule of law

efforts and violence prevention projects) and the U.S. State Department (for cultural programs). Then others kicked in. The Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the United Nations joined with Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and South Korea to provide almost \$2 billion between January 2009 and April 2012.³⁵ These funds supported soft-security projects throughout Central America.

Awash in money, with program officers scouring the streets in search of viable grantees, the integrated approach to gang violence quickly blurred any conceivable separation between soft security, international development, and corporate social responsibility.³⁶ The three suddenly shared the same end game. Good development became good security, which all became good business. Microloan cooperatives, after-school initiatives, and weekend soccer camps worked alongside community policing programs and private-public partnerships. Each crafted popular opinion, established coherence between aid and politics, and mitigated security threats by rebranding the opposition. Each project also placed people, rather than politics, at the center of security, intervening in the life of the individual for the sake of society.

Christianity, in this milieu, became a real political resource. Much of the reason is that the religion dominates civil society in Central America. No other social imaginary articulates change more persuasively than Christianity. No other institution has more legitimacy than churches. And no other set of actors connects better with people—with their hopes, their fears—than Christians. In Central America, especially in postwar Guatemala, Jesus is the answer, at times the only answer. Practically speaking, this meant that international aid agencies sought out Christian organizations to discuss, staff, and even implement soft-security projects, while Christians themselves jockeyed for growing amounts of money. The faithful pitched new projects and repurposed already proven programs. One-time acts of charity (the poor visit) morphed into development projects (mentorship programs) only to become soft-security schemes (anger management classes). Christianity, and often Christianity alone, was positioned perfectly to minister to the person, to administer security softly. An entrepreneurial buzz filled the air.

The result was countless Christian prevention programs. They were countless not because the number of Christian projects was actually infinite, but rather because counting some as Christian and others as not-Christian proved preposterous. The distinctions were imperceptible, even confounding. Ethnographically speaking, a so-called secular program staffed by Christians appeared just as Christian as a church project

augmented by an international aid agency. Even the Guatemalan National Civil Police's own Office of Prevention, itself funded by the U.S. government, used scripture in its mission statement: "It is necessary to submit to the authorities not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience" (Romans 13:1, 6).³⁷ These elisions illustrate the argument made elsewhere that trying to disentangle the secular from the saved only performs the indeterminacy of secularism itself.³⁸

Consistent through each of these efforts at gang prevention has been Christian piety. More ontology than cosmology, irrespective of theology, Christian piety is a persistent pull to work something out. That "something" is sin. Its "out" is salvation. "When I got out of prison in the United States," Mateo preached, "I just fell back into the same things." The problem is that Christian piety forever places redemption just beyond reach. "And then I got up," Mateo added, "dusted myself off, and then fell back into it all over again." For Christian piety assumes a radically imperfect world populated by radically imperfect people as well as a God hell-bent on perfection. Frustration and failure are inevitable. "And then I fell again and again and again," he added, "That's how I got deported." But resignation is not an option. It never has been. Not only is capitulation not Christian, but impiety is also *the* justification for intervention. It can also be *the* rationalization for abandonment.³⁹ "But I do not quit," Mateo beamed, to himself as well as to the faithful who filled the church that night. "I never stop trying to change myself."

Clear articulations of this piety emerge in the church setting. Mateo often pleads for parishioners to change. But this piety needs neither a pastor nor a priest. There is no church of piety.⁴⁰ A mash-up of self-esteem, motivation, and liberation draped across the ruins of disciplinary infrastructures, these faith-inflected efforts at gang abatement constitute the affective infrastructure of postwar security, fusing Christian practice, moral ambition, and behavior modification to the dialectics of local empowerment and transnational delinquency.⁴¹ Be better, these programs insist. For you are fallen, they remind. The ultimate effect is an everlasting effort at sanctification, as the sinner struggles to bridge the chasm between perfection and imperfection, between God and himself. And so things get done. Sinners strengthen their will, examine their conscience, and comport their bodies. The pious also intervene in the lives of the uninterested, if only to strengthen their own sense of self. These practices, beyond Christian denomination and bound to ideologies of transformation, constitute embodied horizons of absolute uncertainty.

This uncertainty has a history. Piety and prevention have been bedfellows for centuries. In the early twentieth century, the influential Chicago School of urban thought argued that when communities do not transmit the right values to their youth, those youth go crooked.⁴² They loiter in alleyways; they run with the wrong crowd. They join street gangs. As this logic gained an audience in the 1940s, as the welfare state grew, antigang initiatives in the United States worked to strengthen communities. This meant that government-funded social workers intervened in the lives of youth while Protestant ministers, inspired by a then-popular Social Gospel, followed suit. These moral technicians walked the streets, talking to disillusioned youth about earning an honest wage in what was then a thriving urban industrial economy. This was the so-called social work approach to fighting gangs, and it lingered at the level of individual behavior and personal values.⁴³ It placed supreme confidence in the idea that if young men and women received the attention they deserved, then the problem of street gangs would dissipate, and security would follow.

This approach to gang abatement worked mostly because social workers and Protestant ministers targeted men and women aging out of gangs. Given that adolescents largely constituted U.S. street gangs in the 1940s and 1950s and that the street gang's primary activity in this era was inactivity, gang members eventually needed to find work.⁴⁴ Gang membership, in a sense, had a life cycle that social workers and Protestant ministers helped to complete.

Much has changed since then, of course, about gangs and the economy.⁴⁵ Neoliberal economic reforms, along with a concomitant decline of the welfare state, have radically limited the kind of work available to those young men and women who might otherwise have aged out of gang life.⁴⁶ Migrant labor circuits, the War on Terror, and new regimes of deportation are other processes that have made the social work approach rather ill equipped to address the problem of gangs. Yet antigang strategies across the Americas still draw on some of the Chicago School's most basic assumptions about prevention and piety while at the same time coordinating with Christian notions of sin and salvation. This rather potent mix of idiom and affect amid a politically unstable context has significantly reordered piety's relationship to prevention.

For one, the place of piety has changed. For centuries, piety got under the skin of its subject within clearly demarcated places. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century efforts at discipline placed people inside of buildings—to mold them, to make them docile. Prisons, factories, and

hospitals as well as asylums, seminaries, and schools served as principal sites of correction. The social work approach to gangs pivoted on this fact. Meticulous regulation, methodical schedules, and elaborate inspections did their best to turn the peasant into the soldier, the misfit into the altar boy.⁴⁷ All of these efforts, bolstered by the built form, disciplined the body.

But the built form is no longer necessary. Discipline is not dead, of course, but the closed, contained space of the prison, factory, and asylum has given way to emergent configurations of innovation, ethics, and good will. The difference between the two is critical. While the prison, factory, and asylum offer concrete, architecturally specific sites of intervention, the experience of piety and prevention today—of soft security—is opportunistic. It is fleeting. One does not enter or exit a reality television show or a child sponsorship program the same way one enters or exits a nineteenth-century prison, even if each works to stem the tide of gang violence. The prison is heavy, its logic established, with blueprints that clearly define its ethics. The reality television show and the child sponsorship program, in contrast, are lines of flight.⁴⁸ Here one moment, each are gone the next. The child sponsorship program might overlap with an after-school program, which might then bleed into a community policing unit, which ultimately might dovetail with a back-to-work program run by a local church and sponsored (in part) by a multinational corporation. The program might also lead to absolutely nothing. While the experience of discipline is of being inside a building (or not), the phenomenology of Christian piety is of being a part of something (or not). For in postwar Guatemala, when it comes to soft security, there are no blueprints. There is no stability. Nothing is heavy. Everything is open, even the prison, the factory, and the asylum.

The life of Mateo makes this point. He starred in the reality television show detailed in Chapter 2. Soon after the show, by way of some contract work, he volunteered as a prison chaplain (Chapter 1), drawing on his own experience of incarceration in the United States, while also moonlighting with a child sponsorship program (Chapter 4). Alongside all of this, Mateo worked for call centers (Chapter 3), often trading his paychecks for weeklong benders that would sometimes land him in a Pentecostal rehabilitation center (Chapter 5) or a maximum security prison (Chapter 1). “I’m not perfect, Kev,” Mateo would tell me. “No one is.” This might be true, but Mateo is still alive, which is more than can be said for the thousands of other men who shuttled between prisons, call centers, and rehabilitation centers while some-



FIGURE 5. Grim reaper. Photo by Benjamin Fogarty-Valenzuela.

times coming into contact with back-to-work initiatives and sponsorship programs.

Mateo's longevity has a lot to do with his history. With the help of Christianity, he left his Los Angeles-based gang while in a U.S. prison. And so he returned to Guatemala with few complications. No one there expected him to join a gang nor was immediately offended that he had left one. "I never walked the streets in Guate," Mateo said, "so that helped me out—'cause those other people, you know, they're dead." His father also continued to work a steady job in the United States, sending support when he could. So there is a logic to his relatively long life. There is also a lesson. True to Christian piety, Mateo wants to be better. In his home, pinned to a wall, hangs a piece of paper. Picked up at a call center, or maybe a church, obviously crumpled up but then smoothed out, the flyer presents a constellation of words. They overlap: *sincere, confident, healthy, generous, and loyal*. There are others: *peaceful, secure, forgiven, ambitious, and righteous*. At least fifty more words fill the page. But at the top, in his own writing, Mateo scratched a note to himself. "Take 100% responsibility for your life," he writes, "No excuses. No blame. It is in you. Choose your feelings carefully. Connect with love. Be at peace. Act as if [you are at peace] and you

will soon feel those vibrations.” It is this sincerity, this ambition, especially this sense of having been forgiven, that makes Mateo such an intriguing figure. He strives. He falls. And Christian piety is one of his only tools to get back up again, making radiantly clear just how intimately linked the identification of a problem really is to the availability of a solution.⁴⁹

Mateo’s anger is also important. So too is the drinking and the drugs. They ground this book, upsetting any kind of narrative arc that could place Mateo on some kind of teleology, one with a clear before and an obvious after. Augustine’s *Confessions* is good to think with; it casts a long shadow, especially over this book, but the bishop’s story is pure fiction.⁵⁰ Mateo embodies Christian piety; he speaks with an Augustinian accent, but the ethnographic method upends normative questions of success and failure. Is Mateo actually pious? This is a terribly unhelpful question. More interesting, more honest to the life of Mateo as well as to the politics of soft security, is a different set of questions: What counts as piety? Under which conditions does piety emerge? And to what effect? When one asks these questions with an eye to soft security, it is obvious that Christian piety does a great deal. It provides the imperative to improve as well as the metrics to assess this improvement. This piety also helps to parse out who gets to live and who is allowed to die. The pious receive attention. The impious do not. For while the problematic of modern governance is often characterized as those processes by which authorities make live and let die, it is the impulse of Christian piety that structures this distinction.⁵¹

The effects are observable. Christian piety provides both the agents and the subjects of soft security with an embodied set of coordinates that answers some rather fundamental questions: Who is worthy of intervention (and who is not)? Who is open to the promise of piety (and who is not)? And who is in search of redemption (and who is not)? The answers to these questions set the conditions for life itself—for who gets to live (and who is allowed to die). Christian piety distinguishes between the ineligible and the eligible, the delinquent and the citizen, the lost and the found.

At the center of these distinctions, at the core of Christian piety, is a struggle between sin and salvation. This is why neither an absolutely perfect person nor a recklessly failed subject would be able to tell the embattled story of Christian piety in postwar Guatemala. They could not communicate the effects of soft security. Only an honestly ambivalent subject, a divided person, one torn by Christian piety’s own

extremes, could do justice to this confluence of piety and prevention in postwar Guatemala. That person is Mateo.

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We sat at a table, in a roadside eatery. The traffic often drowned out our conversation. Mateo seemed nervous. I was too. “So the book would be about me?” he asked. I sat up in my chair. “No, not really,” I explained. “Your story would sit between more formal chapters.” I drew a table of contents on the back of a napkin. “The reader would read about you and then read about the prisons. Then he’d read more about you and then read about the reality television show. And so on.” Mateo nodded. “But why?” he asked. I fumbled the answer. I mentioned something about chapters 1, 3, and 5 marking a self-conscious effort to rethink the postwar prison, factory, and asylum. They work differently today than they did in the past. “They’re all so fluid,” I said. As I spoke I redrew the table of contents, connecting these three chapters with arrows. I then added that chapters 2 and 4 would focus on bodily comportment and etiquette. “Like being polite and sitting up straight,” I said, as I connected those two chapters with more lines. Mateo stared at me. “No, bro,” he said, with waning patience. “Why me?” That was easier. I told him that his story connects the dots. “These five sites are going to seem pretty random,” I explained, “but they are totally obvious to you. And to all the guys sent back from the States. These are the kinds of places and projects that engage you and that you engage.” Mateo nodded.

Over the sound of traffic and the smell of diesel fume, I then wanted to add (though could not yet get my head around) the idea that these five chapters, when read alongside Mateo’s life story, map the affective infrastructure of postwar security. The prisons are porous. The call center industry rose but will relocate (most likely to El Salvador). And the rehabs close and reopen at a surprising rate. The reality television show came and went while the child sponsorship program floats atop a fickle donor base. Prevention is impermanent, I wanted to explain. And yet underneath it all, structuring these institutions and imperatives, sits a Christian piety that empties the present and eviscerates the future. The book, I wanted to say, maps ethnographically this ever-morphing assemblage.

But I said none of this. I couldn’t. I didn’t know enough yet. Instead we both stared at my digital recorder until I went to turn it on. “You cool with this?” I asked. “Yeah,” he shrugged. So I pressed the record button. And then he stopped me. “I wanna start with a prayer,” he said. “Do it,” I encouraged. Mateo then closed his eyes, bowed his head, and

started to pray. “Father God,” he whispered, “when I speak, I pray that it’ll be you who gives me the words to speak and speak of my . . . of what I’ve been through, and what I’ve suffered, and what I’m doing now. And give me the exact words to say, so that people that’s gonna be listening to me will be touched by your Holy Spirit, will be touched by your presence, will be touched by your grace and mercy. Thank you Lord for allowing me to see another day, and I pray for all of those that are gonna read this, that they will recognize that God is the only one. Amen.” Amen.