◆ Chapter 10

Policial, Anti-Policial, and the (De)legitimation of the State

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In *Crimes against the State, Crimes against Persons*, Persephone Braham argues that Latin American *neopolicial*, as represented by two of its major authors, Cuba's Leonardo Padura and Mexico's Paco Ignacio Taibo II, is concerned primarily with the two kinds of crime registered in her book's title. Braham says that crimes against the Cuban state are paradoxically viewed as also crimes against persons, because the socialist state, according to its own claims, represents the people. Additionally, in the Mexican context, crimes against persons have to do with the systematic repression of citizens *by* the state. Yet, as Braham hints, the Latin American *neopolicial* is not really about crime at all, at least not in the traditional sense of an illegal act that must be understood and whose author must be located and punished. Rather, *neopolicial*, like its precursors, hardboiled detective novels and film noir, refracts a sense of unease and inconformity within society at large. In the case of Padura and Taibo, Braham notes, "detective narrative concerns the failure of revolutionary projects" (xiv).

It's reasonably clear that this is often the case. Cuban authors of Padura's generation are often labelled "desencantados" (the disenchanted ones), meaning that they have become disillusioned with a Revolution that, in the 1990s, came abruptly to a halt amid widespread food and energy shortages. Taibo is likewise writing in the aftermath of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre and the subsequent tidal wave of neoliberalism that has steadily eroded workers' unions, living standards, and the economic viability of Mexico's non-export agriculture, much of which took place under the custodianship of the PRI.

Taibo and Padura, although prominent, are not the only authors of *neopolicial* in Mexico and Cuba, nor are they alone in responding to a post-Revolutionary situation. In fact, while their work represents a critique of the post-Revolutionary state, the works of other contemporary writers may represent a more

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intense or thorough repudiation of both the state and politics as they are commonly understood. In what follows, I will outline an anti-political current within Latin American *neopolicial* narratives, a tendency that I call *antipolicial*.

Padura's own conception of Latin American *neopolicial* includes, as one of the genre's defining features, a distancing from the figure of the policeman ("Miedo y violencia" 15). The policeman is never just a policeman, because he contains within him the policing *function*, a function of the prevailing social order, backed by the state. By placing the policeman at a remove, the *neopolicial* also takes an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the state. It places the investigative function, alongside the search for truth and justice, outside the responsibilities of the state. Already, this begins to complicate an account of *neopolicial* fiction as being centrally concerned with crimes *against* the state. In Padura's work, the state is, as often as not, the perpetrator of the crime. One can point to a recurring figure, the corrupt high-level functionary: Morín, Maciques, Forcade, Mejías, etc. Only by forgetting that these individuals, however selfish and corrupt they prove to be, were also state actors is it possible to construe the state simply as a victim, rather than also as an enabler of these crimes and, indeed, as the condition of their possibility.

Jacques Rancière counterposes *police* and *politics*. With the first term, he means the distribution of modes of acting according to predetermined groups and places. He uses the example of the public square, in which one is permitted to stroll, shop, take photos, etc. But, whenever a crowd materializes, composed not of tourists but of indignant citizens, suddenly the so-called forces of order appear to impose peace with clubs and tear gas (37). What is construed as normality is what happens when everyone plays their assigned part at the appropriate time and place, such as happens every so often in democratic elections. This "normality" is the police order. *Politics*, according to Rancière, is whatever shatters this reality to produce what he calls "dissensus," the manifestation of a breach or inconformity in the police order or the existence of subjects not accounted for in what is conventionally understood as politics (38). The word *policía* in Spanish has historically denoted something like Rancière's tranquil public square, together with modes of behavior both public and private. As Daniel Nemser explains, *policía*, in the Spanish-American colonies, referred not only to the practice of policing (maintaining order in the modern sense of "law enforcement") and not only to the ideal street layout of colonial urban planners (i.e., the rationalized "lettered city" made famous by Angel Rama), but also to a "new social order" that would permeate both public and private spaces (38–40).

Many contemporary *neopolicial* authors can be understood as contributing to an *antipolicial* discourse, given the way their works position themselves (sometimes explicitly and sometimes, perhaps, unwittingly) against the state

and its social order or *policía*. I will make the case that Imanol Caneyada's work is an example of this *antipolicial* current. But first, it will be useful to examine another author, Peru's Santiago Roncagliolo, whose work, although it contains moments of *antipolicial* potential, ultimately attempts to produce a kind of affirmative closure that supports the state and its *policía*.

Roncagliolo: Rebuilding the Family, Saving the State

Santiago Roncagliolo's *La pena máxima* (2014), a prequel to his *Abril rojo* (2006), is a murder mystery that takes place in Peru during the 1978 World Cup, played in Argentina and in which Peru faced the eventually victorious host country. The tournament was controversial because of the ongoing Dirty War prosecuted by Argentina's military junta. Henry Kissinger's presence at the games, as a guest of Videla, was taken as a sign that the United States State Department and intelligence services still supported the violent repression of Argentina's leftists despite the apparent change marked by the Carter administration. Roncagliolo has stated in interviews that he wished to disprove the commonplace assumption that Peru did not collaborate with the period's military dictatorships in Brazil, Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay (Oquendo; Pajares).

La pena máxima begins like a classic detective story: with a murder. Initially, the victim is unknown, but is soon discovered to be Joaquín, a friend of Félix Chacaltana, the neurotic "assistant district attorney" of *Abril rojo*, who returns as the protagonist of the prequel. The younger Chacaltana, working as a clerk in a government archive, has been investigating the mysterious appearance on his desk of an incomplete form. In his stubbornly obsessive manner, Chacaltana searches for the origin of this "minor migratory administrative irregularity," which turns out to be the loose thread that not only leads to the killer, but also reveals the deep collaboration of the Peruvian military with the Argentine junta's torture, incarceration, and disappearance of leftists, as well as its role in the kidnappings and illegal adoptions of victims' children. The killer, in a meaningful twist, is discovered to be Joaquin's father, an exiled anarchist veteran of the Spanish Civil War who cannot stomach his son's collaboration with the state or his direct participation in the kidnapping of a child. The *minor* migratory administrative irregularity turns out to have been evidence of the illegal introduction of a minor into the country, and Chacaltana had been misreading the document all along.

In a review of Santiago Roncagliolo's *La pena máxima*, Javier Agreda notes a certain similarity between Chacaltana and comic detectives of the police procedural genre. Chacaltana certainly does his fair share of bumbling,

yet there is no corresponding witty antagonist to act as foil. He is not lovably inept like Clouseau, nor does he feign ineptitude like television's Colombo. In fact, there is nothing inept about Chacaltana at all. He is extremely good at his job, which, over the course of his life, allows him to reach positions of certain influence, despite his lack of charm and ambition. His torpitude stems rather from his extreme devotion to the letter of the law and to proceduralism. Yet, this is also his greatest talent and, from a literary point of view, his *raison d'etre*. Chacaltana is the embodiment of the state and of the rule of law.

Chacaltana is an archive assistant (*asistente de archivo*) in Peru's judicial branch of government (*Poder Judicial*). Moreover, Chacaltana always displays the utmost respect for patriotic symbols and military officials, going so far as to salute them even when, as a civilian, he is under no obligation to do so. His identification with his job is almost total; he even speaks in what might be characterized as a bureaucratic argot. When his supervisor points out the poor pay for clerks in the public sector, Chacaltana asserts that his greatest compensation is to serve his country (24). The same supervisor, attempting to convince Chacaltana not to pursue the matter of the "minor migratory administrative irregularity" that so preoccupies him, claims that it is Chacaltana's duty not to make waves in the context of the upcoming elections, saying "The State must be defended. And you work for the State" (97).[1] Here, as in *Abril rojo*, elections are seen as integral to the legitimacy of the state. To defend democracy is to uphold the state, and Chacaltana is, above all, devoted to maintaining the social and institutional status quo, aware at all times of "the exact limits of his functions as a public employee, a citizen, and a son" (126). Of course, as a literary creation, Cacaltana is a brilliant example of how that devotion—to the democratic state, to the family—turns in on itself. At various points along Chacaltana's trajectory across two novels, the devotee of democracy lends a hand to the repression of democratic and revolutionary movements, the model son is revealed as a parricide, and the correct and formal suitor turns into a rapist.

His function, in the novels in which he appears, is to lay bare the Schmittian contradictions of the law, which, in its efforts to govern, must always be suspended. It seems evident that Roncagliolo, by choosing key moments in Peruvian political history as the context for these stories, wishes to provide historical lessons about the precarity of democratic rule in those moments. Yet, Chacaltana's insensibility and violence nevertheless appear as characteristics of the rule of law itself. These are novels about governability in the modern state, *tout court*. Erik Larson supports this reading, claiming that Chacaltana has the "ability to stand in for the contradictions of order and enlightenment at the heart of the neoliberal state" and that "he acts as

an analagon [here Larson appeals to Baudrillard] to the state itself." Larson extrapolates further, tying Chacaltana's excessive rationality, "his mania for translatability and transparency," to Fujimori's neoliberalism, which used opinion polls to produce a popular mandate for its policies (Larson cites Jon Beasley-Murray's *Posthegemony* on this point), effectively turning them into a product to be "sold" to a public whose level of demand could be precisely calculated. Upon this claim about the total legibility of the popular will, explains Larson, rested the *autogolpe*, the Schmittian suspension of democracy to save democracy. This production of a popular mandate via polls and the spectacle of voting is also precisely what Rancière understands as "consensus," a foreclosure of politics and a suppression of dissensus on behalf of the police order.

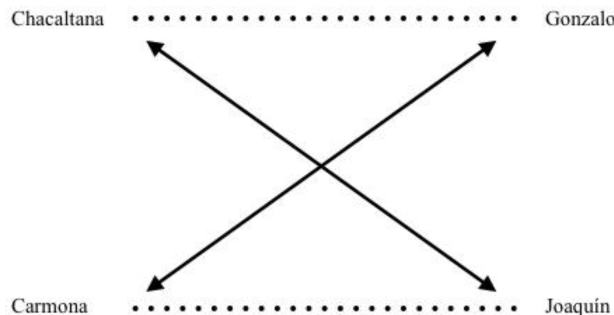
While *Abril rojo* sheds light on the presence of this Schmittian contradiction at the end of the Fujimori presidency and, in doing so, exposes cracks in the façade of democracy, *La pena máxima* takes place in 1978 during the transition to democracy and prior to any explicit neoliberal policy platform (the 1978 elections marked the rise of APRA and Alán García, whose government, in its first iteration, was *not* neoliberal). Yet, the same basic dynamic—the violation of democratic principles in the name of democracy—is present. But this is also where *La pena máxima*, the prequel, perhaps differs from *Abril rojo*, which was published eight years prior. Where *Abril rojo* ends with the descent into madness of neoliberal democracy's avatar and a decidedly ironic "resolution" in which another state employee buries these excesses in a report filled with bureaucratic jargon worthy of Chacaltana himself, *La pena máxima* offers a more optimistic resolution. To understand this resolution and its relationship to contemporary Peru, it is necessary to first identify key structural elements of the novel and describe the ideological system that they comprise.

Including Chacaltana, there are four characters (all men) who stand in a particular relationship to one another as representatives of certain values. Chacaltana, as noted, represents the state and the social order. He is the keeper of the state archive and therefore a kind of custodian of memory, a function that reinforces his positive outlook on the state and society: "The Judicial Archive was a compendium of all the misdemeanors, crimes, and infractions committed in a country, a living registry of everything that society could do better. For that, it deserved respect" (19). Other important structural features include the fact that Chacaltana plays the role of a son who happens to have an absent father (his father was abusive and Chacaltana killed him, perhaps accidentally) and that he is timid and excessively formal in his amorous relationships.

In opposition to Chacaltana stands the antagonist, Gonzalo. As an anarchist, Gonzalo represents anti-state values. As his own son's killer, he inverts

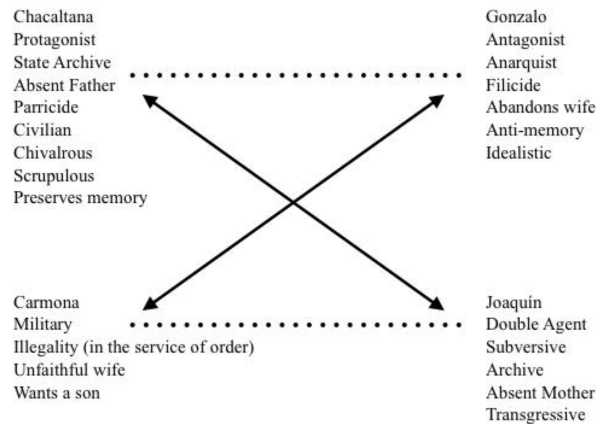
the Oedipal relationship so evident in Chacaltana's case. Gonzalo is Chacaltana's contrary in other respects as well: while the state archivist is devoted to organizing and preserving the state's judicial memory, the stateless anarchist wishes most of all to forget, and advises Chacaltana to do the same: "I told you, Felix. Or I tried to tell you. Separate yourself from the past. Don't get carried away by the dead, or you'll be one of them" (329). Chacaltana is characterized by his excessive scrupulosity and adherence to rules and norms. In contrast, Gonzalo demonstrates an idealism so extreme that it leads him not only to oppose the state and its laws, but also to kill his own son, without second thoughts and without regrets. In conversation with Mendoza, Gonzalo's old comrade-in-arms, Chacaltana expresses doubt about Gonzalo's ability to fire a weapon, owing to his apparent age-related trembling. Mendoza replies: "I don't know what you're talking about, kid. Gonzalo doesn't shake. He pointed a weapon at me and his hand was as solid as a rock" (359). Taken together in their contrary relationship, Chacaltana and Gonzalo represent order and disorder, respectively, as their primary values.

At the other half of this quartet of primary characters, and standing in a similar contrary relationship to one another, are Admiral Carmona and the murder victim Joaquin. If it is permissible to resurrect a structuralist tool as a useful heuristic, I will assert that Carmona, the military officer who was to be the recipient of the kidnapped child, and Joaquin, the double agent civilian who was to deliver the child to him, form a second set of contraries in what now emerges as a Greimas square.



Carmona and Joaquin emerge as contraries not just through the military/civilian distinction, but also via their relationship to Susana Aranda, Carmona's wife and Joaquin's lover. The structure of this relationship places Carmona on

the side of licit or socially permissible relationships, while Joaquin is found on the side of illicit or unsanctioned relationships. Not incidentally, a contradictory relationship between Joaquin, the transgressive lover, and Chacaltana, the cautious suitor, comes into view. Chacaltana maintains the official state archive, while Joaquin maintains an unofficial, subversive archive (intelligence gathering on leftist formations). Similar contradictions are seen between Carmona, who wants a son and whose wife abandons the marital bed, and Gonzalo, who wishes he never had a son and who abandoned his wife on a hospital bed.



If Chacaltana and Gonzalo represent the poles of order and disorder, state and anti-state, Carmona and Joaquin produce what Jameson designates as a “neutral term, in which all of the privations and negations are assembled” (xiv). Together, these binaries produce an ideological system that perhaps reveals Roncagliolo’s own political priorities. One of the few existing academic studies on *La pena máxima* notes that “all the characters have the same motive: the reconfiguration of the family at the expense of almost everything” (Velásquez Soto 74). This is noteworthy, and while none of the four primary characters succeed in preserving their own family unit, it is significant that only Chacaltana survives and that in the end he observes the formation of a new family.

> Before the niche closed forever, a couple with a baby approached it. They were Chinese, and although they didn’t speak Castilian, they greeted

> Félix Chacaltana with a head movement. Then they looked at the niches and shook their heads. They seemed deeply affected.
>
> The woman's cheeks were bathed in tears. She carried a wreath of flowers, which she placed in front of the sepulcher. While she did this, the baby seemed to look behind her, toward Félix Chacaltana. The archive assistant noticed that the boy had blond hair, and remembered some words he had heard recently:
>
> "In Perú, blond children are never orphans." (381–82)

The child is of course the one kidnapped in Argentina and intended for Admiral Carmona. The resolution the novel provides does not address possible justice for the victims but instead offers a vision of a smiling, happy baby with its parents, who together form a multiethnic and (one presumes eventually) multilinguistic family. The symbolism is obvious: Peru has put its past behind to form a new, more inclusive national "family" in place of the traditional one. Leftist extremism (Gonzalo) and militarism (Carmona) have been eliminated along with the need for morally dubious double agents (Joaquin). Chacaltana is left to preside over the new democratic Peru. Although imperfect and perhaps overly technocratic, he represents the rule of law.

Although *La pena máxima* takes place at the beginning of the post-military period, when democracy still had an uncertain future, it is more affirmative of the state and the rule of law than *Abril rojo*. Where the earlier novel appeared to open a space to question the state and neoliberal democracy, *La pena máxima* produces an ideological closure very much in favor of the status quo and of Rancière's *policía*, which is exactly the opposite of what one would expect given the subsequent breakdown and madness of Chacaltana. But it is perhaps a trajectory that reflects Roncagliolo's stance on the role of literature, revealed clearly in the first epilogue of *La cuarta espada*, Roncagliolo's political biography of Abimael Guzmán. In it, Roncagliolo claims that Guzmán read and liked *Abril rojo*. He describes a conversation with Elena Iparraguirre about whether literature should have a political role. Roncagliolo says that it should not, while the *senderistas* affirms that it should (*La cuarta espada* 180). Despite his apparent allergy to political literature, Roncagliolo (in the second epilogue, written ten years later and perhaps after forgetting what was said in the first one) outlines a very political vision of Guzmán's biography, which is equally a testimonial and historiographical project, and what it means to him.[2] A careful reading makes it clear that what Roncagliolo objects to isn't so much political literature as literature that takes a side instead of situating itself as an arbiter, as a unifying discourse that will heal the nation's wounds. He sees political literature in support of class struggle as

undesirable, while approving a putatively apolitical literature that somehow resolves society's contradictions and supports the ideological presuppositions of the state (as in *La pena máxima*).

Caneyada: Family Drama as Neoliberal Class Struggle

In contrast to Roncagliolo's novels, which affirm the desirability of a state-back social order, the fiction of Imanol Caneyada implicates the state in the production of social disorder. Born in Spain but a long-time resident of Hermosillo, Caneyada's journalistic and narrative works deal primarily with Sonoran politics and social issues. Two of his most recent novels, *Hotel de arraigo* (2015) and *49 cruces blancas* (2018), will be considered here.

Hotel de arraigo begins with the kidnapping of Gabriel, the spoiled teenage son of real estate mogul Heriberto García. Gabriel is a victim with whom it is hard to sympathize; he is introduced in a party scene in which he shares a pornographic video of a classmate without her permission. Gabriel's kidnapping, mutilation (his captors remove one of his fingers), and subsequent efforts to resume his life take place against a background of upper- and middle-class society as seen through the respective internal dramas of the wealthy García and the middle-class Lizárraga families. These families and the constraints (or lack thereof) within which they operate produce an uncompromising critique of Sonoran society.

The novel moves back and forth between the domestic and professional lives of both fathers, a parallelism that extends to the *hotel de arraigo* of the title and its counterpart, the *hotel de paso*. "Arraigo" means "rootedness" but, in this context, is something akin to "grounding" or "house arrest." *Arraigo* is a judicial mechanism that allows authorities to detain those suspected of involvement in organized crime and prevent their flight or interference with an investigation. The practice has been criticized as a form of arbitrary detention and as a means to extract confessions under duress or torture (Comisión Mexicana). While Arnulfo Lizárraga, Heriberto's middle-class homologue, is placed in *arraigo* at a hotel used by police for this purpose, his wealthy counterpart spends time with his mistress at his country house or at a *hotel de paso*, a euphemism for a hotel used as a place to have sex. The two types of hotels can also be read as metaphors for the class differences in the novel—for one type of person there is justice (albeit manipulated and manufactured) and for another type there is complete impunity.

Arnulfo, an agent of the state police, becomes the subject of an investigation into corruption within his Anti-Kidnapping Task Force (Grupo Antisecuestros). Under pressure to support the consumer lifestyle of his wife and

daughter, Arnulfo has been receiving bribes and kickbacks from organized criminals involved with kidnapping schemes. The novel details the effects of the kidnapping on the García family and, simultaneously, the impact of the anti-corruption sting on Arnulfo's ability to continue to facilitate the Lizárraga family's outsized expenses. These events produce several fractures within the family units but, ultimately, only the middle-class Lizárraga family really comes out worse for the experience. Guilty of corruption, Arnulfo is also implicated (falsely) in the García boy's kidnapping and is consequently imprisoned.

Heriberto eventually suffers a minor heart attack (the result of stress and lifestyle), his family remains intact, and he soon recovers from the financial setback of the ransom payment through a land deal made possible through his connections with the state: "Mr. Subsecretary was eager to meet with him, the problem with the *ejido* landholders was resolved and development for tourism couldn't wait any longer" (310). The more precarious class position of the Lizárragas means that Arnulfo has no friends in high places: his marriage collapses, he is attacked as a presumed informer in prison, and he eventually goes insane. His wife Carmen returns, defeated, to the small town in the *sierra* from which she had been desperate to escape years ago. To complete the tragedy, Verónica dies, in another *hotel de paso*, at the hand of Gabriel García, who had planned to rape and humiliate her out of revenge for her father's presumed role in his kidnapping but who instead ends up murdering her. Heriberto pays off hotel employees and works with a compliant *Policía Judicial* to make the death appear a suicide (308). Gabriel is then shipped off to college in sunny California.

In addition to foregrounding a class dynamic wherein some are above the law while others are victimized by the legal system, the novel also reflects certain features of the broader economic context of NAFTA-era Sonora. One such feature is the decline of the rural economy in certain areas, such as the *sierra* region, from which Carmen first flees and to which she returns once her life in Hermosillo collapses. Carmen's father is a resentful man who wanted a son and who "blamed her for the economic collapse of the mountain towns, cemeteries of a lifestyle that now only existed in the collective imagination and the tacky symbolism of media discourse . . . he even blamed her for the gradual invasion of the drug traffickers" (160). Although Sonora's economic growth rate outperformed the national average during NAFTA's first decade, it lagged behind that of other border states, and growth favored certain areas more than others. Agriculture and livestock (the lifeblood of the *sierra* region, represented in the novel by Carmen's father, who came from a long line of ranchers) suffered a decline with respect to the national average (Hernández Moreno 116). Along with these changes

to rural life, the novel documents another feature: the speculative real-estate boom behind the rise of Heriberto García. Urban development and development for tourism, most notable in the city of Hermosillo and the Hermosillo Coast region, has had broad, if uneven, impacts on traditional *ejido* communities and economies. Significantly, *ejidos* in or near metro or tourist areas have experience greater pressure to privatize and sell (Perramond 362–64). This is precisely the scenario that appears in *Hotel de arraigo*—Heriberto García is dealing with intransigent *ejidatarios* whose opposition has been "resolved" in some unspecified way (310).

Although *Hotel de arraigo* is not concerned primarily with drug trafficking, it depicts a reality that appears, in many respects, to mirror what José Luis Solís González has theorized as the "narco state."[3] Solís writes, "a new form of peripheral capitalist State . . . whose external manifestation is that of a technocratic neoliberal political regime with a strong presence of organized crime's representatives in its various governments as well as in the economy and in finance" (7). In other words, in Mexico, and especially in drug-corridor or border states like Sonora, the government itself is either directly involved in or facilitates the trafficking of drugs and persons. Arnulfo Lizárraga's connection with a kidnapping ring is one example of the subordination of government institutions to organized crime. Moreover, the pressure he feels to maintain a middle-class lifestyle (and his need to resort to accepting bribes to do so) arguably points to other well-known features of neoliberalism: the growing gap between the ultra-wealthy and the rest of society and the state's disinvestment in public-sector jobs.

Solís explains that the Mexican state has lost its willingness to intervene to maintain the "welfare state" or social safety net, along with its capacity to effect meaningful projects of national development. Now that the economy has been harnessed to that of the capitalist core of the hemisphere via NAFTA, Mexico has come to be dominated by foreign capital in its most influential or hegemonic sector, which forms part of a transnational supply chain of consumer goods and agricultural exports (13–15). Solís notes that this situation of domination by foreign capital and organized crime, combined with longstanding problems of corruption and impunity, has undermined the legitimacy of the state: "The 'rule of law' is just a fiction in present-day Mexican society, which is both witness and victim of a State that expresses itself through an authoritarian, repressive, and illegitimate political regime" (16). While the repressive nature of the neoliberal state has been sublimated in Peru or relegated to the anathematized margins (the political opinions of *senderistas* and the fictional anarchist Gonzalo), it is an open secret in Mexico.

The particular forms of lawlessness in *Hotel de arraigo* are therefore grounded in the economic changes to Sonora during the NAFTA period.

These include the hollowing out of parts of the *sierra*, which, combined with Peña Nieto's war on drugs, produced an incentive for drug traffickers and other criminals to take refuge in rural areas. When kidnapped, Gabriel was held in the vicinity of the remote village of El Tapui (211), which happens to be Carmen's hometown (313). (This fictional location also appears in Caneyada's *Las paredes desnudas.*) Likewise, the war on drugs and its extension, Peña Nieto's anticorruption campaign, form the context for the dubious justice meted out to people like Arnulfo. The forms of lawlessness seen in the novel also include collusion between government officials and real-estate developers like Heriberto to defraud and dispossess *ejidatarios*. In sum, it adds up to a detailed portrait of a dysfunctional society in which the state and its institutions are adjuncts to class domination and the neoliberal order.

Caneyada: Burned Children, Unburned Streets

49 cruces blancas is the first of Caneyada's novels to be based on actual events—in this case, the tragic fire at the state-run ABC Daycare in Hermosillo, Sonora. The investigation into the events that resulted in the death of 49 children and serious burn injuries to many others, along with attempts by victims' parents to seek redress, have been stymied by politicians and police, who have alternatively scapegoated parties (some of whom were later exonerated) and attempted to close the case. Caneyada's novel details the victims' quest for justice through the eyes of José González, a down-and-out former state attorney whose promising career was destroyed after he obeyed orders from above to interfere with a rape prosecution (the accused was the heir of a wealthy and connected family). For José, also known as Pitic, the chance to seek justice on behalf of the ABC victims represents a chance at redemption for his ethical lapse, and he embarks on a quixotic crusade for justice.

Pitic's investigation reveals that the fire was intentional and probably set by someone wanting to cover up government malfeasance (the fire started in a building adjacent to the ABC Daycare, in a room containing government archives). The novel provides few answers—indeed, it is less about providing answers than about dramatizing the frustration and futility of trying to seek justice and accountability when injustice is systemic and not readily attributable to an individual: "How do you put corruption on trial?" (256). The dilemmas associated with the assignation of blame are a major theme in *49 cruces blancas*, which explores how culpability is essentially an inoperative concept within a general social framework of lawlessness and impunity, backed by the power of the state.

During the presentation of *49 cruces blancas* at the VII Feria Nacional del Libro in Texcoco (2 March 2019), Imanol Caneyada mentioned Gustavo Forero's *La novela de crímenes en América Latina: un espacio de anomia social.* In this book, Forero explains that the crime novel, early in its 150-year history as a transnational genre, was fundamentally concerned with the rule of law (*estado de derecho*) and the ability of reason and logic (embodied in the detective) to regulate and provide order to social relations rendered confusing and turbulent in an era of rapid industrialization and urbanization. Over time, Forero writes, particularly in the wake of the Great Depression, the state came to be seen as the guarantor of order and justice and as a brake on the excesses of capitalism and individualism. Forero says that this is ultimately true even of the hard-boiled authors, who, despite their profound and acerbic commentaries on social dysfunction, continued to maintain a certain confidence in the ability of reason and the state police apparatus to reestablish order. However, in recent years, says Forero, citing statistics on rates of impunity in Latin America, novels have come to question the concept of a legal system capable of maintaining the rule of law or to which one can appeal for justice. For this reason, Forero asserts, the crime novel (differing from the classic detective or noir novel) has gained prominence in Latin America, and these novels tend to privilege the literary representation of the criminal underworld rather than the classical procedures of establishing facts and identifying guilty parties.

During his book presentation, Caneyada references Forero's notion of "social anomie," which the novelist explains as "the absence of a state that guarantees justice" ("Presentación"). Because injustice and impunity are central concerns of Caneyada's fiction works, and because the author cites Forero approvingly, it's reasonably clear that he sees his novels as belonging to the trend that Forero outlines. However, Caneyada's fiction arguably goes beyond this tendency toward skepticism about the possibility of justice and about the trustworthiness of the state. While his novels certainly express cynicism in this regard, they also continue to perform the role of the classic detective novel of pointing to the responsible parties. In the same interview, Caneyada says that "if *novela negra* is the genre that deals with criminal acts, the greatest criminals in Latin America have been associated with power. Economic and political power." One could characterize this view as one in which social anomie or lawlessness are not opposed to the state as the real or potential guarantor of order (as conventional *policial* narratives like Roncagliolo's *La pena máxima* still seem to suggest) but are in fact a production of the state.

49 cruces blancas insists on pointing out that responsibility lies with state actors, even as it makes clear how unlikely it is for justice to be enacted in a milieu in which victims are the ones most likely to be assigned blame

for their own tragedies. The most distressing aspect of the novel concerns the victims' parents, represented by the character Raquel. They are under pressure from family members who want them to accept a government settlement, and they are crucified by public opinion, which considers them to be in it for the money. Pitic doesn't understand why the victims insist and why they don't accept the settlement. Raquel explains: "Are you sure they're not buying us off? Because at least here, in Hermosillo, there are a lot of people who don't see it your way. They think we are taking advantage, that we are sellouts, that we are blackmailing the government with our pain" (142). Caneyada explains that one of his motivations for writing the novel was that the state itself "criminalized the victims" by asking why parents didn't pay more attention to the conditions at the daycare, questioning why they put their children there in the first place, or asserting that they were exploiting the tragedy for personal gain. Moreover, Caneyada notes that the "criminalization of victims is a permanent state policy" in Mexico. This pattern of victim blaming is, according to Adam Kotsko, one of neoliberalism's defining features. Not only is neoliberalism an economic order characterized by the dismantling of the Fordist "welfare state," the generalization of precarious and informal sorts of labor, the entrenchment of an apparently (but not really) laissez-faire approach to market regulation, and the "spread of a competitive market ethos into ever more areas of life" (5), it is also a moral order that insists that negative outcomes are the result of free choices made by individuals (ignoring the fact that many of these "choices" are constrained in advance). Therefore, individuals bear the entire responsibility for their fate. As Kotsko puts it, "Neoliberalism makes demons of us all" (89). Such victim blaming is particularly insidious when the victims are children, as in the ABC Daycare fire, or when a marginalized race or class is involved, as is the case when conservative commentators or Barack Obama chalk up disproportional, society-wide Black incarceration rates to the moral failures of individual Black fathers.

Despite being cast as morally suspect, the victims in the ABC tragedy, represented in the novel by Raquel, continue to demand an investigation into the involvement of high-level officials in the fire, seeking greater information and accountability than has so far been forthcoming. Yet even the parents' endurance has its limits, and the crusade ends not with justice but with Pitic drunk, huddled in a fetal position, abject, and abandoned by hope and by the once-firm advocates for accountability. The knockout blow to Pitic's sense of justice and hope for redemption comes in the form of a text message from Raquel: "She asked me not to judge her for giving up a fight that had been lost from the moment the flames reached the daycare" (285–86).

With this denouement, Caneyada appears to signal the limit of Pitic's investigation into the ABC fire and his quest for justice. Yet, it is at precisely this point that the novel insists on the possibility of transcending this limit, which is the limit of the para-judicial figure of the private sleuth, and forging on toward justice. Throughout the story, two texts surface repeatedly as a kind of leitmotif. One is a classic Sherlock Holmes vehicle, *The Valley of Fear* (*El valle del terror*). Pitic reads the novel in fits and starts, misplacing it for a while, rediscovering it, and ultimately giving up finishing it—"He abandonado la lectura de *El valle del terror*" (201) (I've given up reading *The Valley of Fear*). The second text, which eventually interests Pitic more than Doyle's novel, is an academic article about forms of guilt in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers: "Navego por la red a propósito del incendio y me encuentro con que un articulista habla de la culpa y menciona a Karl Jaspers, quien hace una clara distinción entre la culpa moral y la culpa metafísica" (123) (I surf the internet apropos of the fire and I come across an article writer who talks about guilt and mentions Karl Jaspers, who makes a clear distinction between moral and metaphysical guilt).

The fact that this second text (uncited in the novel but likely written by Pablo Galain Palermo) displaces the detective novel in its classical form suggests that the private detective, and perhaps the detective (policial) genre in general, have come up against their limits. The old procedures of establishing motive, gathering evidence, constructing truth with deductive logic, and, ultimately, assigning blame to the guilty party seem not to function in a world where accountability begins and ends with the individual(s) to whom harm has befallen. On the other hand, Pitic appears to glimpse a way forward in the article, perhaps via Jaspers's notion of metaphysical–collective guilt, a form of blame that transcends individualization (Galain 133).

Despite Pitic's abject failure to find evidence to directly implicate state actors in the fire, the novel continues to insist on justice, unexpectedly deploying a conspiracy theory as a figure for the possibility of a more comprehensive or collective notion of justice. Immediately prior the novel's conclusion, Director Basave, Pitic's former colleague in the *Procuraduría*, while warning Pitic not to keep investigating the fire, produces a murky outline of the circumstances behind the fire:

> Let me tell you a story. In the south of this state full of noble and hard-working people, there was once a boy who was humiliated and insulted by all his little friends, sons of the region's landowners, the agro-titans of the Yaqui Valley: the Bours, the Díaz Browns, the Castellos, etc. This boy was the bastard son of one of those landowners and a

> housemaid, so he grew up with the stigma of his bastard status; anyway, they made his life hell. (283)

The boy alluded to here is Manlio Fabio Beltrones, former governor of Sonora and a major player in the national party apparatus of the PRI. Basave suggests that Beltrones's intra-PRI rivalry with Bours produced a plot to throw the election for the PAN candidate, Guillermo Padrés Elías, and that the fire was a (perhaps unplanned) consequence of this plot. Basave thus sketches a theory of intra-class political maneuvering behind the tragedy, only to backtrack, throwing everything into doubt:

> All these theories sound really good as long as they stay that way, as theories. The one about the cooler, the one about Bours ordering the burning of incriminating documents, the one I just told you, they're all plausible, none of them are supported. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? They should remain theories that feed . . . political fiction, the curiosity of the masses, conspiratorial fantasies. (284)

The cynical Basave appears to add insult to injury, as far as Pitic is concerned, yet his theory (which he is careful to disavow) nevertheless produces the most compelling explanation on offer for the Sonoran ruling class's involvement in and responsibility for the fire. The conspiracy theory, framed here as an unfounded supposition within a work of fiction, perhaps does what journalism and the legal system cannot do, which is to name names and draw conclusions without the burden of documentary evidence or risk to life and livelihood.[4] The conspiracy theory dispenses with the evidence-gathering procedures of detective work, which are rendered useless in any case by systemic corruption and cover-up. It also refuses to isolate individual culprits, instead pointing to the collective guilt of the elites who profit from and maintain the neoliberal order. Basave's disavowal reveals a certain disdain for "the masses," who will supposedly be satisfied with such unsupported theories, but also invokes the only collectivity that can, in the last instance, produce justice in the face of the inoperative state-led judicial mechanism. In this way, the conspiracy theory invokes both collective responsibility and a collective justice of the kind whose absence, as Caneyada himself has noted, has been conspicuous.

During a book interview at Texcoco, Caneyada named public figures, from the governor to the archbishop, who had made callous statements about the ABC daycare victims. Caneyada asked, "¿por qué no salimos a

quemar las calles? ¿Por qué no fuimos a la casa del gobernador y quemamos la casa del gobernador? No entendí yo porque estábamos tan paralizados" ("Presentación") (Why didn't we go out and set the streets on fire? Why didn't we go and burn the governor's house? I didn't understand why we were so paralyzed). *49 cruces blancas* poses the same question, while also showing that official roads to justice lead nowhere. If Pitic the individual could not succeed in wresting accountability from the state, perhaps Pitic the collective (Caneyada explains that this was the original name of the city of Hermosillo) can dismantle it.

In lieu of a conclusion, I wish to again contrast how the authors bring their novels to a close. By having Chacaltana prevail over Gonzalo, the story's antagonist, and by reconstituting the family unit, albeit in a modified, multicultural form, Roncagliolo produces a resolution in which order is restored. For that reason, *La pena máxima* can be considered a conventional *policial*. In contrast, Caneyada's novels end without justice and without clear solutions for the neoliberal social crisis highlighted throughout. Caneyada's refusal to produce cathartic conclusions or provide dubious answers points to his lack of accommodation to the neoliberal order. Rather than being an aesthetic formalization of the accommodation (here there are no ideological closures nor solutions "within the system"), these *antipolicial* novels function as markers in the desert of the neoliberal era. They are accusing fingers pointed directly at the state and its agents (the Sonoran political and economic elite).

Notes

1. All translations of texts and interviews originally in Spanish are mine.
2. "Senderistas, emerretistas, police, and military prisoners crammed into those presentations, not so much to listen to me as to listen to one another. One after another, for hours, and sometimes with tears in their eyes, they told their personal stories in public. They shared their pain. And they met one another through the stories. Those people who had shot at one another for years had more in common with one another than they had with people like me. And if my book helped those on the inside to understand one another, perhaps it can also help those on the outside" (Roncagliolo, *La cuarta espada* 197).
3. Another of Caneyada's novels, *Tardarás un rato en morir* (2012), deals directly with the topic of drug trafficking.
4. Caneyada's own extensive work as a journalist includes sharp critiques of government officials and entities. He has a knack for spotting delays and inefficiencies that point to

corruption or negligence. However, some of this reporting reveals the slipperiness of determining culpability in an environment in which officials can plausibly claim that responsibility lies elsewhere. The standards of journalism often prevent one from making direct accusations, however much of an open secret corruption may be.

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