New Culprits, True Culprits: The Re-politicization of Mexican "Organized Crime" in *Crimen de estado* (2009) and *Ingobernable* (2017–2018)

Matteo Cantarello

(William & Mary)

Abstract

SINCE the 1970s, Mexican and foreign fictions have persistently glamorized Mexican narcotrafficking and have, as Pablo Piccato and Oswaldo Zavala have argued, contributed depoliticized understandings of the phenomenon. According to Zavala, Mexican politicians have constructed a "hegemonic discourse" that blames narcos while concealing state responsibility. This article argues that two recent works of fiction, Gregorio Ortega Molina's novel *Crimen de estado* (2009) and the Netflix TV show *Ingobernable* (2017–2018) work to re-politicize Mexican organized crime. Both portray the phenomenon as both an arm of and a scapegoat of politicians and law enforcement. They shift discourse away from commonly glamorized elements to cast light on the responsibility borne by government. Both based on real events in Mexico's recent history, they avoid glorifying narcotraffickers to portray them instead as subordinates of Mexico's political machine. The works not only hypothesize that it is Mexico's political (under)world that pulls the strings of organized crime but also depict the process of concocting what Zavala identifies as the hegemonic discourse. Borrowing from Wolfgang Iser, I demonstrate how the "fictionalizing acts" of works like *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* achieve two goals: they dismantle the hegemonic discourse about organized crime and reveal how that discourse is in fact constructed by a complicit governing State.

WHEN President Richard Nixon declared the beginning of the so-called War on Drugs in 1971, little did he know that it would turn into one of the most unsuccessful military operations in US-American and Mexican history. Thirty-five years later, in 2006, Mexican President Felipe Calderón introduced similar efforts—ignoring the rabbit hole down which the American government had fallen—and inaugurated "one of the deadliest periods in Mexican history" that led to a "guerra fallida" ["fruitless war"],[1] as Jessica Loudis and Frauke Gewecke (30), respectively, pointed out. The only tangible result of Calderón's military interventions was even more violence and bloodshed.

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[1] All translations from Spanish are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

During Enrique Peña Nieto's *sexenio*[2] (2012–2018), the trend continued unchanged, and the first half of 2018 even broke a new record with almost 16,000 homicides, 16% more than in the same period the previous year (Associated Press). In 2019, recently elected president Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared that one of the goals of his presidency was to stop the carnage and, in line with this, proposed a National Peace and Security Plan (Wattenbarger). However, López Obrador's intentions were lacking in detail and his early reconciliatory attempts raised many doubts (Zerega). On 12 April 2019, during a news conference, López Obrador declared that the homicide rate in Mexico was not growing. To this, journalist Jorge Ramos, who was leading the conference, responded that publicly available data coming from Mexico's Ministry of Public Security showed an 18% uptick in the homicide rate during the first three months of López Obrador's presidency. The president replied that he had other statistics (Linthicum).

In its failure, Nixon's crusade coincided with the rise of Mexican organized crime as a social threat. Although the origins of Mexican organized crime date back to the drug trade of the 1930s, it was only in the 1970s that the huge volume of business achieved by the traffickers became an international matter (Astorga 139).[3] By then, criminal organizations were rapidly dismembering the social structures in certain Mexican states and undermining the relationship between citizens, government bodies, and law enforcement corps. Relatedly, as Oswaldo Zavala explains, the 1970s mark the beginning of a rhetorical construction: that of the "enemigo formidable" (10) ["formidable enemy"]. By this, Zavala refers to the fact that Mexican and US-American politicians, as well as media and academics, started talking about Mexican organized crime as an entity with enough military and economic power to fight law enforcement bodies on equal terms (9–13). In their works, Zavala and Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo discuss this "formidable enemy" from a rhetorical perspective—that is, how the discourse surrounding organized crime has been constructed in the past five decades—and then analyse whether or not literary and non-literary sources follow that rhetoric. In this article, I complement Zavala's and Escalante Gonzalbo's arguments with those of Federico Varese, and Phil Williams and Roy Godson, all of whom discuss the relationship between organized crime and the sovereign state from the point of view of sociology and political science.[4] These scholars represent some of the few voices to refute the widespread misconception that Mexican cartels have been able to challenge the

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[2] A *sexenio* is "a period of six years"—a presidential term in Mexico.

[3] In his work on *narcocorridos*, Elijah Wald argues that the inception of narco-culture has to be sought in the 1970s, concomitant to the ballooning of narcotraffic's volume of business. This established a connection between the increasing phenomenon of narcotraffic and the ascending appeal for the representation of its tenets (violence, criminal culture) and agents (smugglers, drug lords) (Horak and Vázquez Ríos 79).

[4] Varese defines organized crime and Mafias "against the backdrop of existing states, with which they compete for offering service of governance" (19). Williams and Godson, among the political models outlined in their article, insert Mexico into the category of "strong regimes becoming weak", meaning that "[c]riminals tend to be at the service of the political establishment rather than a threat to it" (316).

sovereignty of the Mexican state. In this article, building on their groundwork, I adopt the term *anti-state* to refer to both the rhetorical and the political features of this fallacy, according to which political mismanagement by the government led criminal groups to provide safety and employment to Mexican citizens in return for their silence or implicit collaboration. And the state often had the power—even if it failed to use it properly—to end organized crime.

Since its inception, the anti-state as a socio-political concept has been debated and disputed by scholars. Zavala explains how the anti-state has been used by Mexican politicians to divert public attention from the state's political responsibility for the crisis. One of the consequences of the anti-state myth is the gradual de-politicization of the phenomenon of organized crime. This rhetorical construction, which Zavala characterizes as a hoax concocted by hegemonic discourse, has become very popular, and has been widely accepted by public opinion to the extent that it has entered most Mexican literary and filmic representations of organized crime. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Zavala affirmed that the reason behind the success of *narcoficciones*—that is, fiction based on different aspects of drug-related organized crime in Mexico—is that

> ese discurso hegemónico [. . .] convierte al "narco" en una realidad casi tangible, de modo que las novelas, las películas, las series, la música, el arte conceptual (y un largo etc.) sobre el "narco" se confunden con la realidad porque reproducen la misma narrativa que también aparece en los medios de comunicación. (López)

> [this hegemonic discourse [. . .] converts the "narco" phenomenon into an almost-tangible reality, to the extent that "narco-" novels, films, TV shows, music, conceptual art (and a long etc.) are mistaken for reality because they reproduce the same narrative as the media.]

One of the most innovative aspects of Zavala's work consists of highlighting the long-standing existence and popularity of the anti-state fallacy by showing how literary and filmic fictions, as well as non-fiction productions such as journalism, are imbued with this rhetorical construction.

Nowadays, the majority of fictional pieces that portray organized crime depict drug lords and kingpins as able to fight law enforcement corps—hence, the state—on equal terms. Furthermore, most narratives exclusively focus on the depiction of criminals and the underworld, thus providing "una lectura incompleta de la realidad, pero proponiéndola como la realidad completa" (Rodríguez-Blanco and Mastrogiovanni 98) ["an incomplete reading of reality, presented as a complete one"]. In analysing three successful crime-based TV shows—*Narcos*, *El Chapo*, and *Gomorrah*—Sergio Rodríguez-Blanco and Federico Mastrogiovanni have highlighted that in these fictions "se activan los elementos que definen los juicios morales del mal y el bien: la organización criminal frente al estado, así como temas universales como el crimen, la venganza, la corrupción o la violencia" (96) ["the elements that define moral judgements of good and evil are enabled: the criminal organization against the state, as well as universal themes such as crime,

vengeance, corruption, or violence"]. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that we are witnessing the huge success of shows in which the criminal is portrayed in minute detail, while government bodies are misrepresented or absent (Rodríguez-Blanco and Mastrogiovanni 99). This partial, yet highly marketable, depiction of reality is detrimental to the search for the truth behind the anti-state myth and, in depicting organized crime as omnipotent, it corroborates the hegemonic discourse.

In sum, regardless of the genres to which crime-based dramas are ascribed, the success of hegemonic discourse of the anti-state has corrupted the depiction and comprehension of Mexican organized crime. From the 1970s onward, public discourse surrounding the political, social, and economic elements of narcotraffic very quickly embraced its spectacle. The gruesome violence, endless money, and gory myths[5] and fiction, both Mexican and foreign, have persistently glamorized these same phenomena further.

In this article, I analyse how two recent works of fiction—Gregorio Ortega Molina's novel *Crimen de estado* [State crime] (2009) and the Netflix TV series *Ingobernable* [Ungovernable] (2017–2018)—provide examples of fictions that re-politicize Mexican organized crime.[6] While both works are part of larger trends in recent Mexican literary and filmic fiction—the fictionalization of historical events and the dramatization of the political establishment, respectively—they stand out because of certain unique features. In regard to *Crimen de estado*, by the time Ortega Molina wrote the novel, he had worked as a governmental representative, a collaborator of some of the most important Mexican newspapers and magazines, and a writer. He found a way to merge these three worlds in his book, despite the ideological chasms between, for example, the government and the media. *Ingobernable*, on the other hand, is notable for being one of the few political dramas that features a woman as its main and only protagonist. In the show, the Mexican first lady is framed by the government for murder and hunted down. This occurred even as its star, Mexican actor Kate del Castillo, was being pursued by the Mexican government because of a meeting she helped organize between Sean Penn and Sinaloan drug lord Joaquín Guzmán Loera. Both in fiction and in life, the del Castillo/*Ingobernable* case speaks to the role of gender in the re-politicization of organized crime, as I will explain in more detail below.

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[5] Loudis, for instance, summarizes the close relationship between historical figures such as Joaquín Guzmán Loera and his representation in works of fiction.

[6] The concept of *re-politicization* constitutes the core of Zavala's work. Zavala argues that "desde su inicio [Operation Condor in the 1970s] esta matriz discursiva del 'narco' tuvo su origen en la compleja relación binacional entre México y Estados Unidos" (16) ["since its inception (Operation Condor in the 1970s), the discursive matrix of the 'narco' phenomenon has been the result of the complex bi-national relationship between Mexico and the United States"]. For decades, this rhetorical construction of the *narco* has eroded the complex political features that characterize the relationship between Mexico as a sovereign state and the widespread phenomenon of violence that keeps being attributed to ever stronger cartels. By attempting a re-politicization of the discourse on narcos and organized crime, Zavala aims to illustrate both the political responsibility for the Mexican situation and the creation of a scapegoat. It is with this precise meaning that I adopt the term *re-politicization* and its variants in this article.

Crimen de estado and *Ingobernable* portray organized crime as, simultaneously, both an armed wing of the state and as the scapegoat of politicians and the law enforcement corps. They shift discourse away from commonly glamorized features to cast light on the responsibility borne by government bodies—the very culprits Zavala identifies in discussing the de-politicization of organized crime. Mexican politicians, he argues, have constructed a hegemonic discourse that blames narcos while ignoring state responsibility. But both *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* avoid glorifying narcotraffickers by portraying them instead as subordinates of Mexico's political machine.

The two works are also pertinent because they are set at the beginning and the end of the historical trajectory that Zavala establishes to analyse the inception and development of the hegemonic discourse. *Crimen de estado* takes place during Miguel de la Madrid's presidency (1982–1988); *Ingobernable* is set in the the late 2010s, without specific historical reference. Set a decade after the War on Drugs declared by Nixon in the early 1970s, *Crimen de estado* ties together, through fiction, watershed events in recent Mexican history that consolidated the idea of a collaboration between criminals and governments at the time of those events (e.g. the murders of DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar and Mexican journalist Manuel Buendía). *Ingobernable* pivots on the idea that the government is the author of all crime to the extent that it persecutes even innocent citizens. The relationship between criminals and the state, however, did not start in the 1970s. In fact, the process of the criminalization of the state dates back to at least the Mexican Revolution, as Escalante Gonzalbo (*El crimen* 89–90) and Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba (16–17) argue. The two fictions analysed in this essay depict only the latest phase of blending of organized crime and the state.

In my analysis I also address the role of fiction as an artistic medium. Both works present an intertwining of history and fiction that I demonstrate to be necessary for the process of re-politicization. In addition to more recent scholarship, I employ Wolfgang Iser's notion of the *fictionalizing act*, the way texts synthesize historical and fictional elements in such a way that the new reality that emerges is at the same time unified with and separated from objective historical fact. Escalante Gonzalbo explains that "[l]a idea del crimen organizado es la piedra de toque de un nuevo lenguaje para explicar el ejercicio del poder en México" (*El crimen* 111) ["the idea of organized crime is the cornerstone of a new language to describe how power is exercised in Mexico"]. The "new reality" of *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* is therefore a re-politicized reality, as opposed to the version constructed by Mexican politicians. Through narratological analysis, I show how *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* achieve two goals: they dismantle the hegemonic discourse about organized crime, and they reveal how this hegemonic discours is, in fact, constructed by a complicit governing state.

Finally, I add that in creating the anti-state myth, Mexican government bodies have unconsciously generated a parallel discourse, in which the criminal world presents a well-defined alternative to the constitutional state. This rhetoric echoes through fictional representations of Mexican organized crime and has social reper-

cussions. As Diana Palaversich has shown, these depictions are dangerous insofar as "traffickers portrayed tend to be sinister but ultimately attractive and likable men who epitomize the figure of the *gran macho* cherished by mainstream Mexican culture" (86). The attractiveness and likability of crime figures undermines the serious threat that criminal groups are posing to Mexican society. Drawing attention to socially responsible fictional representations of crime thus constitutes the first step in re-politicizing a matter that has plagued Mexican society and culture for decades.

Crimen de estado, or the Invention of a Scapegoat

Crimen de estado fictionalizes the collusion between the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) and the three major drug lords of the time: Rafael Caro Quintero, Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, and Ernesto Fonseca Álvarez,[7] all of whom operated in Guadalajara. In the opening pages, Ortega Molina sketches Mexico's situation in the first months of de la Madrid's presidency, characterized by a severe financial crisis. The novel opens in September of 1982 with a meeting between the kingpins and Emilio Romero and Justo Patrón, proxies for de la Madrid.[8] Besides the country's financial issues, the early 1980s were marked by a turmoil that led to the political reconfiguration of Mexico's hegemonic party—the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)—and indeed the nation as a whole, as Roger Bartra explains (48). Carlos Monsiváis described the moment as one in which "la realidad era mucho más alarmante que los rumores" (cited in Bartra 48) ["the reality was much more alarming than the rumours"].[9]

In this moment, the kingpins from Guadalajara emerge as "quienes pueden dar viabilidad al futuro gobierno" (Ortega Molina 13) ["those who can give viability to the future government"]. Ortega Molina constructs his novel on the assumption that Mexico's economic crisis would be overcome thanks to an agreement between organized crime and the state: the former will lend the money to pay Mexico's debts, the latter will reduce interference by law enforcement. In the realm of fiction, the expansion of organized crime, the story of which is also central to the 2018 Netflix show *Narcos: Mexico*, plays a pivotal role at the beginning of de la Madrid's presidency.[10]

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[7] It is unclear why Ortega Molina decides to modify Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo's name to Ernesto Fonseca Álvarez. Carrillo was, alongside Caro Quintero and Félix Gallardo, one of the leaders of the Guadalajara cartel.

[8] Justo Patrón might be an alias for Justo Ceja Martínez, who would be President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's *secretario particular* [private secretary] between 1988 and 1994 (Ward Anderson et. al). The character of Emilio Romero might be based on Emilio Gamboa Patrón, *secretario particular* for de la Madrid and *secretario de comunicación y transporte* [secretary of communications and transportation] during Salinas's presidency (García Cabrera 278).

[9] Luis Aboites Aguilar writes that in 1982 the Mexican Secretary of Finance recognizes the collapse of the Mexican national economy (291). José Agustín, in his *Tragicomedia mexicana*, entitles the chapter dedicated to de la Madrid's presidency "La caída del sistema" ["The Fall of the System"].

[10] The centrality of Guadalajara and Jalisco in organized crime's operations during the 1980s is

Ortega Molina's novel thus begins in a moment in which Mexico witnessed the simultaneous re-configuration of political power and organized crime. Supposedly, de la Madrid's presidency was to inaugurate a so-called *renovación moral* [moral renovation], grounded in the fight against corruption, social injustice, and a new idea of "Mexico" and what it means to be "Mexican".[11] At the same time, however, the 1980s and the 1990s were decades of exponential growth for narcotraffic, mostly due to the rising consumption of cocaine. Astorga describes how these criminal organizations grew so much in size and visibility that it became impossible to overlook their relationship with the law enforcement corps at a local and national level (Astorga 155). The novel takes advantage of this specific aspect of organized crime's re-configuration in the 1980s, pivoting on one of the aspects that undermines the credibility of the anti-state theory: the idea that organized crime could fight the state on equal terms. Here is where Iser's fictionalizing act is instructive in highlighting the process of the re-politicization of organized crime in *Crimen de estado*. According to Iser, a fictionalizing act creates a new reality built on a triad: the real, the fictive, and the imaginary (2–3). For Iser, the purpose of fiction is not to reproduce reality in a verisimilar way, but to create something new by grounding fiction on features of reality (3). *Crimen de estado* hypothesizes a new reality that opposes the hegemonic discourse of the time—one that is based on evidence of the expansion of Mexican organized crime.

Escalante Gonzalbo writes that information about Mexican police operations is almost always scant, partial, and disputable although it presented as quite the opposite: "el relato de la guerra entre los 'cárteles' se explica con una seguridad absoluta: mapas, fechas, organigramas" (*El crimen* 55) ["the narrative of the war on 'cartels' is told with absolute certainty: maps, dates, organigram charts"]. Elements of the reality always remain obscure, "[e]s un rasgo fundamental del espacio público mexicano, la convicción de que lo que verdaderamente sucede permanece oculto, no se puede ver: pero es indudable que está ahí" (47) ["a fundamental feature of Mexican public space is the certainty that what actually occurs remains untold and cannot be seen: but surely it is there"]. *Crimen de estado* uses the plot thread about de la Madrid, his proxies, and the three Guadalajara kingpins to elaborate this kind of untold story. However, this does not suffice to construct a new reality. In order to do so, Ortega Molina adds a parallel plot thread that substantiates the other.

This second storyline revolves around journalist Rogelio Salanueva, his wife Jesusa, and their family, inner circle, and colleagues. Rogelio and Jesusa often

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the result of a relocation process from Sinaloa, the main site for the production and smuggling of marijuana in the previous decades. Sinaloan politicians saw this as a victory. As Luis Astorga reports, in 1977 the governor of the state and the mayor of Culiacán declared that "el narcotráfico ha sido abatido en su totalidad" (147) ["narcotraffic has been thoroughly vanquished"]. Concomitantly, such a declaration was mocked by Sinaloans and the local press. As an example, Astorga quotes a column from the newspaper *Noroeste* in response to the above-mentioned declaration, in which the author suggests that narcotraffic was dead, "pero de risa" (147) ["killing itself laughing"].

[11] This expression is used repeatedly in *Crimen de estado*. José Agustín writes that "[e]l lema de campaña de de la Madrid fue 'por la renovación moral de la sociedad'" (21) ["the motto of de la Madrid's campaign was 'for the moral renovation of society'"].

reflect on the tough times Mexico is undergoing. In addition to discussing the progress and poverty of Mexico City in the early 1980s (76–77), the Salanuevas also reflect on the decadence of society in regard to its declining values and ethics (152–53). The uncertainty faced by these characters, all from Mexico's middle and upper-middle classes, some related to the world of Mexican journalism, underscore the success of the hegemonic discourse: such individuals must parse what is true from what is mere façade. Throughout the novel, Rogelio often sees how Mexican reality differs from the accounts given by the national media and by politicians. And Jesusa repeatedly asks him to explain "cómo el gobierno de la renovación moral modificó los conceptos, el sentido del lenguaje, para hacer de las complicidades virtud del poder, sinónimo del arte de gobernar" (64) ["how the government of the 'moral renovation' modified the concepts, the meaning of language, in order to make complicity a feature of power, a synonym of the art of governing"].

The stories of the second set of characters are woven into historical events that provide evidence of the "crimen de estado"—state crime. For instance, the death of the journalist Manuel Buendía, a historical event from 1984, is characterized in the novel by Rogelio as the epitome of state control to prevent the truth from emerging and offers an example of the construction, albeit a fictionalized one, of the hegemonic discourse. In the chapter that ends with Buendía's funeral, the Salanuevas reflect on the "proceso de descomposición social" (152) ["process of social decomposition"]. They recognize that law enforcement corps are no longer able (or willing) to contain widespread delinquency (152–53). But what they mostly argue about is the inauguration of a new historical phase, related to the diffusion of information through the media:

> Jesusa y Rogelio meditan lo que oyen en las reuniones a las que son invitados. [L]os tecnócratas de nuevo cuño [. . .] dejaron de confiar en las inversiones de los políticos-políticos, [. . .] ansían transformarse en multimillonarios para conservar el poder económico, la fuerza del dinero que les compra medios de información y les garantiza impunidad. (Ortega Molina 153)

> [Jesusa and Rogelio reflect on what they hear at the meetings to which they are invited. [. . .] New-style technocrats [. . .] have stopped trusting the investments of the hard-core politicians, [they] are desperate to become multimillionaires to maintain economic power, the power of money that allows them to buy the media and guarantee their impunity.]

In delving into the technological-political revolution, Rogelio adds that "[l]os satélites y la cibernética modificaron los esquemas tradicionales de desarrollo. [. . .] Este señuelo de diversión, de comunicación, de información, modificará la manera en que ven el mundo las clases gobernantes" (154) ["satellites and cybernetics have modified traditional development plans. [. . .] This lure of distraction, communication, information, will transform the way in which the ruling classes look at the world"]. In the end, the transformation of power vis-à-vis control over the media becomes engrained in the everyday, to the extent that the Salanuevas read the

news "para constatar si los rumores sobre el crecimiento del narcotráfico, o de la aparición del nuevo fenómeno de la narcopolítica, han dejado de serlo para convertirse en noticia consignada en los medios informativos" (157) ["to verify whether the rumours about the growth of narcotraffic, and the appearance of the new narco-politics phenomenon, are still rumours or no longer, turned into news to be transmitted by the media"]. With the Salanuevas, Ortega Molina offers a concrete example of how the hegemonic discourse is constructed from the perspective of the Mexican middle-class at the time in which such discourse is being created.

The Salanuevas' commentary notwithstanding, Buendía's death still comes as a surprise. But their commentary prepares the reader to understand how the murder might be a state crime irrespective of the fact that the alleged perpetrators were apprehended. When Rogelio meets with Javier Wimer, a public officer close to the government, Wimer admits that "ese crimen abre el despeñadero de la inestabilidad política de la nación, y el desvelamiento al público de la narcopolítica como instrumento económico del gobierno para evitar la quiebra financiera y moral de México" (163) ["this crime brings the nation to the brink of political instability, and the public unveiling of narco-politics as an economic means for the government to avoid financial and moral collapse"]. In Rogelio's circles, there is no doubt about who was responsible for murdering Buendía and why the murder case has been solved: so as not to leave room for conspiracy theories. At the funeral, watching the president converse with Buendía's widow as he ignores journalists' questions, Rogelio and his wife have no trouble believing that Buendía's death might have been a "crimen de estado" (169) ["state crime"].[12]

In the novel, the combination of historical and fictionalized events sheds light on the construction of hegemonic discourses and the anti-state myth. Rogelio knew Buendía, and was aware of his investigations, as well as of the obstacles and threats posed by politicians. When Buendía is killed and the government promises justice, Rogelio grasps the degree of control exercised by the political apparatus over the media. In the end, this proves that even those whose acquaintances and jobs draw them closer to Mexico's higher levels of power are limited to only making conjectures:

> porque nada, nadie, puede pretender opacar o ensuciar la conocida como verdad oficial, pues lo demás sólo serán rumores, incluidos los no desmentidos, los publicados por la prensa como verdad absoluta, ya que lo no registrado por los libros de texto no será material de recuerdo de fundamento para la razón de ser de la patria. (Ortega Molina 255)

> [because nothing, no one, can claim to blur or dirty what is known as official truth, for anything else is only gossip, including what hasn't been proved to be false, what has been published by the press as absolute truth, since what does not appear in the textbooks will not be remembered as fundamental for the raison d'être of the country.]

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[12] Agustín indicates that Buendía was murdered by "funcionarios públicos al servicio del Estado" (232) ["public officials in the service of the State"] and that thirty-three journalists lost their lives during de la Madrid's term.

In light of the examples provided, in *Crimen de estado*, "the fictive" and "the imaginary" do not solely transform "the real" into a new reality. In the case under consideration, the fictionalizing act by Ortega Molina answers the questions that "the real" left unanswered. Furthermore, the Salanuevas plot thread sheds light on the construction of hegemonic discourse. Even though *Crimen de estado* remains in the realm of fiction, it creates a new reality that explains *how* the perceived reality of organized crime could have been constructed by government bodies.

The reality depicted in *Crimen de estado* cleaves closer to the reconstruction of scholars and journalists. Domínguez Ruvalcaba writes that historical fictionalizations have been systematically denied by the Mexican political establishment, but confirmed by criminals.[13] In *Nación criminal*, Domínguez Ruvalcaba's discourse hinges on "interpreting" the state and its power "a fin de entender el papel de la oralidad, la literatura, la historia y el cine en el conocimiento del Estado criminal" (99) ["in order to understand the role of orality, literature, history, and film in understanding the criminal State"]. Observing these dynamics, Domínguez Ruvalcaba focuses on two hallmarks:

> *a)* entender que los criminales son protegidos por los policías, pues de otra manera el crimen no se explica en el contexto de un corporativismo totalizador; *b)* la certeza de que cualquier disidencia ante la voluntad del partido/gobierno constituye una causa de persecución letal. (99)
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> [*a)* understanding that criminals are protected by the police, otherwise crime cannot be explained in the context of a totalizing corporatism; *b)* the certainty that any dissidence from the will of the party/government constitutes a reason for lethal persecution.]

In line with such a perspective, *Crimen de estado* portrays a criminal landscape that pivots on the central role played by the Mexican government, as the title itself suggests. Not only does the novel dare to say that the state is criminal, but by doing so, it proceeds with dismantling the hegemonic discourse and discrediting the theory of the anti-state. Regardless of its increasing power, organized crime remains an asset for the government without challenging its sovereignty. Gewecke presents the notion of "narcoestado" ["narco-state"] as a situation in which organized crime has taken control of different aspects of the state apparatus thanks to corruption and violence and concludes that the *narcoestado* is a failed state (27). Contrary to such an assertion, I would suggest that the *narcoestado* is a failed state in terms of legality, but not in absolute terms. The *narcoestado* would represent, from a political point of view, the worst-case scenario for the anti-state theory. I do not engage in a discussion about the possibility that the *narcoestado* exists. However, *Crimen de estado* presents a situation in which legality is vanquished by the state itself—the "Estado criminal" or "nación criminal", as Domínguez Ruvalcaba puts it. The novel depicts how the government positions itself above the law and administrates power by acting outside the boundaries set by the law itself.

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[13] In one of the most famous and recent cases, a witness asserted that President Enrique Peña Nieto accepted a 100-million-dollar bribe from Joaquín Guzmán Loera (Feuer).

The title of Ortega Molina's novel draws attention to the indissoluble link between crime and the state. In fact, the *estado* [state]—by which Ortega Molina means the president and his closest collaborators—is the sole culprit with regard to the violence of *Crimen de estado*. In spite of the presence in the novel of three of the main drug lords of the time, they perpetrate none of the murders that take place within it. Although the author takes some liberties in depicting such an improbable scenario (and the deaths of Enrique Salazar and Alfredo Zavala have always been attributed in real life to the cartels, which executed them when they found out that they were DEA agents who had infiltrated their ranks),[14] what emerges is the breadth of manoeuvre enjoyed by the government, which perpetrates crime indiscriminately thanks to the control it exercises over the justice system.

The political power of the PRI and its uncontrolled hegemony reach its peak at the end of the novel. Four days before the 1988 presidential elections, Francisco Javier Ovando and Román Gil Heráldez, the electoral operators ("operadores electorales") of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the opposition presidential contender most threatening to the PRI's own candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari, are murdered. In *Crimen de estado*, the outgoing president sits in his office, "[e]stá cabreado [. . .]: al saldo de su gobierno caen dos muertes más, éstas innegablemente políticas, incuestionablemente ordenadas desde su gobierno, irremisiblemente ligadas a su futuro histórico" (267) ["he is pissed off [. . .]: his government is now responsible for two more deaths, these ones undeniably for political reasons, unquestionably commissioned by his government, irredeemably tied to his legacy"]. Once more, state power demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice human lives in order to guarantee its survival. *Crimen de estado* embraces the version according to which the murders of Ovando and Gil Heráldez were a state crime, as Agustín describes (141–42). However, fiction does something more than simply present theories. By tying together historical events through a fictionalizing act, fiction provides a more complete picture of how political power in Mexico can be understood.

In one of the final pages of the novel, the president summarizes his idea of power by affirming that "el poder no se ejerce con la verdad, sino con la astucia montada sobre la mentira disfrazada de costumbre" (283) ["power is not exercised with truth, but rather with cleverness built on top of lies and dressed up as routine"]. The president, here, presents hegemonic discourse as a rhetorical practice that is foundational to the display and enforcement of power in Mexico. What is not known and what has not been proved in our reality might find an explanation in Ortega Molina's reconstruction of political power, which epitomizes the main argument made by Zavala: the presence or absence of truth, and the dissemination thereof, has been in the hands of Mexican governments.

At the end of *Crimen de estado*, the president and his party prove to be the most powerful and most dangerous villains in the country. It is, indeed, an extreme

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[14] Astorga points out that, after the abduction of Enrique Camarena Salazar and Alfredo Zavala on 7 February 1985, the Mexican and US-American authorities began to blame each other for the corruption of Mexican police officers who protected and supported local drug lords (169–70).

proposition, but it hides a deeper truth: that the main culprit for the repressive events in 1970s and 1980s Mexico was the political ruling class, as they took action to preserve their status and long-term existence. Justo Patrón emphasizes this in one of the last moments of the novel: "está consciente [Patrón] de que han arriesgado la viabilidad del país y han cometido un grave error al ceder una parte del poder, mínima si se quiere, al narcotráfico, por obra y gracia suya [del presidente] transformado en narcopolítica" (270) ["[Patrón] is aware that he has risked the viability of the country and that they have committed a grave mistake in conceding some power, no matter how minimal, to narcotraffic; by both the will and deed of the president that power has become narco-politics"]. Patrón's doubts, however, are not related to the viability of political power, which retains control over narcotraffic. Rather, Patrón recognizes that the criminalization of the state will have severe repercussions over state sovereignty and the relationship between the state and its citizens.

It is worth adding that *Crimen de estado* also re-politicizes the phenomenon of organized crime by paddling against the recent mainstream portrayal of criminals. Diana Palaversich has written that the portrayal of narcos on the part of the official media was widely derogatory until the end of the 1980s (85). Borrowing from Federico Campbell, Palaversich adds that from the 1990s onward, criminals started to be perceived differently from "the lower strata of the society" (86). In the recent past, she concludes, the traffickers have been presented under a more appealing, yet problematic, light, and in line with the *macho* figure that to date remains popular in mainstream Mexican culture (86). Currently, the glamorization and glorification of narcos constitutes the primary (and sometimes the only) focus of literary and filmic fictions. As Rodríguez-Blanco and Mastrogiovanni argue, the figure and the voice of the criminal have taken over, and often conceal their legal counterpart—government bodies (100). The idea of the anti-state conceived in the 1970s was responsible for this cultural process—as the state empowered criminals and deflected attention toward them.

In line with this view, Escalante Gonzalbo has analysed how the current role of organized crime in contemporary Mexican society is understood discursively. Even though organized crime is constantly presented as a chaos-driven entity, its long-established success is due to its structure and rules, replicating that of any legitimate company or institution (298). In an analysis in which conflict can be equated to the anti-state and order to the state, he affirms that "la organización del conflicto, incluso del más destructivo, replica las características del orden" ("El orden" 298) ["the organization of the conflict, even the most disruptive, replicates the characteristics of order"]. Ortega Molina's novel serves, then, to clarify a common misconception. In *Crimen de estado*, it is not Mexican organized crime that adopts a state-like structure. It is the Mexican state itself that, by its process of criminalization, maintains its functionality, constitutionality, sovereignty, and credibility. *Crimen de estado* therefore reveals how the hegemonic discourse is not just a smokescreen, but specifically a smokescreen that conceals a process of criminalization.

In the final analysis, *Crimen de estado* re-politicizes the phenomenon of organized crime in three ways. First, it includes an alternative to the official accounts of the period that is corroborated by evidence regarding the status of organized crime. Second, it adds to this fictionalized reality, where the state comes to terms with organized crime, a storyline that explains how the hegemonic discourse was built by using historical characters and events, and how these were misrepresented or hidden by the government. Third, it does not offer the mainstream, glorified portrayal of criminals—the unavoidable consequence of the anti-state myth offered by the hegemonic discourse—and instead focuses on political responsibility and the responsibility of politicians.

Ingobernable: An Ungovernable Country and Untamed Citizens

THE main character of the Netflix TV show *Ingobernable* is Emilia Urquiza, a fictional Mexican first lady who is also the daughter of one of Mexico's wealthiest entrepreneurs. Upending her initial privilege, the events of the pilot episode place Emilia in a new (or perhaps merely latent) position of subalternity. Framed for murder, Emilia has to flee and attempt to clear her name without relying on her socio-economic advantage. Her loss of wealth and political status coincides with the physical and symbolic distancing of Emilia from two male figures: her husband, who is dead, allegedly at her hand; and her father, who is one of those responsible for Emilia's framing. The plot thus highlights how gender is entwined with political representation and power.

My use of the term *subaltern* in this section borrows from Jean Franco, Antonio Cornejo-Polar, and Lorenzo Meyer. In her essay "La globalización y la crisis de lo popular" Franco discusses the hybridized nature of popular culture and the problems related to postmodern society's use of the adjective *popular*, characterized by heterogenous pluralism. Analysing the figure of the subaltern in postmodern society, Franco suggests that, for this subject, it is possible to talk about inclusion without participation. Emilia is considered a political subject, but she can no longer participate in political life and she is hunted down because of a crime she has not committed.

Writing on the relation between crime and political life, in *Escribir en el aire* Cornejo-Polar states that the conceptualization of the subject in the Latin American context cannot ignore two factors: extreme violence and extreme disintegration (16). These two extremes produce a reality that is, in fact, the "ejecución reiterada de injusticias y abusos, ocasión siempre abierta para discriminaciones, maquinaria que insume y produce miserias insoportables" (16) ["repeated execution of injustice and abuse that leaves the door open for discrimination, a system that employs and produces unbearable misery"]. Therefore, in a context in which "los constrastes más gruesos se yuxtaponen" (16) ["the most disparate distinctions are juxtaposed"], any subject can at any time become a victim.

Meyer relates subalternity in contemporary Mexico to narcotrafficking. In *Nuestra tragedia persistente* he explains that, under normal circumstances, the state

operates to guarantee the safety of citizens. Under the current circumstances, however, the state employs the war against organized crime as a means to justify the suspension of its constitutional duty to protect citizens, in order to pursue the common good: the eradication of cartels (311). Those who fall under this state of political exception, which is at the discretion of law enforcement corps and state authorities, are excluded from the state's constitutional duty. This is the case of Emilia in *Ingobernable*. The show does not revolve around narcotrafficking, however, rather showing a secret organization composed of high-level politicians, army officers, and entrepreneurs to be the puppet-master of political power. As Emilia must unveil the organization in order to clear her name—and openly oppose political power structures—she is cast, despite her previous wealth and class privilege, into a position of political subalternity.

Using the above as a point of departure, I use the term *subaltern* to refer to a subject who remains under state sovereignty but is not guaranteed safety because of their misconduct. In a context such as *Ingobernable*—dominated by criminality, violence, and disintegration—subalternity becomes a concept in flux, tied to the government's discretion. Also, as mentioned above, Emilia's new status as an outcast on the run is entrenched in her womanhood: as will be discussed shortly, her storyline contributes to the re-politicization of the phenomenon of organized crime through its exploration of gender.

In recent years, the number of films and TV shows about crime and politics in Mexico has ballooned. These shows can be categorized under two labels: fictions about crime, and fictions about crime based on historical events. The former label can be applied, for instance, to the TV shows *Ingobernable* (2017–2018), *Monarca* (2019), and *Queen of the South* (2016–present). The latter, an English-language TV series based on Arturo Pérez-Reverte's novel *La reina del sur* (2002) had already been adapted into an eponymous Spanish-language TV show, the protagonist of which is also played by del Castillo (the first season of *La reina del sur* was broadcast in 2011, and then in 2019 a second and third season were announced). Some examples of the many recent TV productions that exist at the intersection between the reality and fiction of Mexico's recent criminal history, are *El Chapo* (2017–present), *Narcos: Mexico* (2018–present), *Un extraño enemigo* [*An Unknown Enemy*] (2018–present), and *Historia de un crimen: Colosio* [*Crime Diaries: The Candidate*] (2019).

Notably, many more of the fictional productions feature women protagonists than the history-based fictions, which are consistently male-centred. In *Ingobernable*, the centrality of women is also accompanied by a characterization that opposes the common stereotypes of women in crime-centred fictions, such as sentimentalism linked to their roles as mothers, sisters, or partners. The women of *Ingobernable*, against the prototype used in fictions like *Narcos: Mexico*, *El Chapo*, and *Historia de un crimen: Colosio*, do not depend on men to fulfil their own destinies. However, the show does emphasize how this stance clashes with Mexico's patriarchal structure, thus bringing into play a socio-cultural conflict that is absent from male-centred fictions.

Within this context, *Ingobernable* adopts a series of narratological and stylistic choices that make it unique amidst similar shows that depict crime—and politics—in Mexico. Firstly, *Ingobernable* is not based on true events but addresses some of Mexico's present-day problems: political corruption, media manipulation, social divisions, and the abuse of power by law enforcement. As del Castillo has summarized, *Ingobernable* offers an "entertaining way of telling the truth and getting to know Mexico in a very raw way", but without relying on official accounts of historical events (Kahn). Secondly, the protagonist is a woman who, overnight, goes from being Mexico's first lady, to the country's most wanted person—thus having to cope with the subalternity of her new status as a criminal. Thirdly, the show intersects with issues related to organized crime, but exclusively from the point of view of the political establishment. In other words, while the show does not avoid depicting criminal groups that perpetrate crimes (e.g. kidnapping and torturing innocent people), the writers reject the idea of extra-political criminal groups, and construct a setting in which high-level politicians and high-ranking army officials orchestrate crime and criminal actions. Finally, and most importantly, *Ingobernable* is a criminal-political drama that suggests solutions to some of Mexico's current problems. It tackles the hegemonic discourse and, through Emilia's proactive intervention, posits options for the political reconstruction of the social fabric of the country.

The story behind the making of *Ingobernable* is also of paramount interest. In a stroke of cosmic irony, the production ran into problems with the Mexican government as a consequence of del Castillo meeting with Sinaloan drug lord Joaquín Guzmán Loera in 2015. As del Castillo explains in the biographical documentary *The Day I Met El Chapo* (2017), she was unable to return to Mexico after the meeting was made public by Sean Penn in an article in *Rolling Stone* in January 2016. This created a reality–fiction paradox, as highlighted by Carrie Kahn, who writes how, in the weeks preceding *Ingobernable*'s premiere, "her image is all over Mexico but del Castillo is not."[15] With regard to the connection between the actor's case and the hegemonic discourse, the documentary shows the actor being prosecuted and persecuted by Mexican politicians, rather than by Sinaloan drug lords.

As in del Castillo's personal story, *Ingobernable* addresses its main criticisms to government bodies. The show casts light on, and unravels, the anti-state fallacy thanks to a surprisingly convincing narrative. In the pilot episode, the first lady of Mexico is forced to "go rogue" to clear her name. Eventually, Emilia realizes that Diego Nava, her husband and president of the country, was killed and she was framed because he had sought to redirect the priorities of his presidency to cleaning up Mexico's political establishment. Therefore, Emilia's search for the truth has a double urgency: she must seek those responsible for framing her and for murdering the president in order to prevent the creation of a new and honest political establishment.

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[15] Kahn explains that the creators of *Ingobernable* coped with the impossibility of del Castillo shooting in Mexico by resorting to editing and the use of a body double, and using San Diego instead of Mexico City for some of the scenes.

In his review for *The New York Times*, Neil Genzlinger compares *Ingobernable* to US-based political dramas like *Scandal* (2012–2018) and *Designated Survivor* (2016–2019) but focuses on *Ingobernable*'s considerably slower pace. He explores how the rhythm of the show results from cinematic techniques that, piece by piece, reconstruct the perverse, elaborate, and criminal scheme that lies behind the pilot episode's events.[16] I would argue that the pace of the show—privileging dialogue, the thorough reconstruction of evidence, flashbacks, and flash-forwards—while frustrating and, at times, unnerving, epitomizes the painstaking work of detailing processes of cause and effect, culprits and architects, and the challenges of un-covering evidence-based versions of events. To draw a comparison between the show and *Crimen de estado*, the plot of *Ingobernable* unravels in a way similar to journalistic work. However, while Ortega Molina's novel pivots on a similar strat-egy through the character of Rogelio—who does not belong to the inner circles of political power—*Ingobernable* relies on an insider, Emilia, whose sudden condition of subalternity is aggravated by her gender.

In fact, *Ingobernable*'s use of gender is crucial to understanding the power dynamics it aims to dismantle. In the show, women occupy key roles in both the political establishment and the criminal underworld. In addition to del Castillo's portrayal of Mexico's first lady, *Ingobernable* features Ana Vargas-West (Erendira Ibarra) as Chief of Staff of the President's Office, and Patricia Lieberman (Marina de Tavira) as Mexico's Attorney General—who is assigned to investigate the death of the president. In addition to the women of the political establishment, *Ingo-bernable* features *las cabronas de Tepito* [Tepito's Bitches], a group of women who oversee one of Mexico City's roughest neighbourhoods: Chela Lagos (Aida López), Meche (Lourdes Ruiz), and Zyan Torres (Tamara Mazarraza).[17] Finally, the leader of the crime syndicate behind the assassination of the president is a woman called Kelly Crawford (Isabel Aerenlund).

Interestingly, the condition of subalternity that Emilia experiences becomes common to all other female characters who work within the political establish-ment, while it does not apply to those who operate outside of it. Ana and Patricia, for instance, are obstructed (and in the case of Patricia, murdered) as soon as they attempt to corroborate versions that are different from those provided by the polit-ical establishment; but this does not happen to Chela, Meche, Zyan, and Kelly. This demonstrates, I would suggest, Meyer's theorization of how subalternity manifests itself in Mexico as the suspension of state protection for citizens. For the govern-ment, safeguarding the hegemonic discourse constitutes the real priority, rather than protecting citizens. Therefore, to dismantle the hegemonic discourse and to re-establish the primary role of the citizenry becomes an act of re-politicization.

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[16] To give an example, the video in which Diego explains his plan for Mexico, and that he plans to broadcast to the whole country before being murdered, is shown to the audience only partially throughout several episodes. By the time the spectator learns the entire content of the message, most of the protagonists have already taken action to either spread it or destroy it. Characters hold extensive conversations about the former president's recording, and the show maintains the suspense, while simultaneously allowing the action to progress.

[17] "Tepito's Bitches" is the English translation provided by Netflix for *las cabronas de Tepito*.

Among the above-mentioned characters, distinct features of Emilia's character define how issues of subalternity and gender make her quest harder. As mentioned earlier, Emilia is not only the first lady of Mexico, she is also the daughter of one of the country's richest businessmen, Tomás Urquiza (Fernando Luján in season one and Otto Sirgo in season two). However, as soon as the president dies, neither Emilia's former political power nor her wealth can protect her, nor can they prevent her detractors from accusing her of murder. Emilia, having been delegitimized (or de-politicized) after the loss of her husband, is now blackmailed through her motherhood, as the political establishment uses Emilia and Diego's children to convince the first lady to give herself up to the authorities.[18] At this point, Emilia recognizes that the only way to regain her reputation is to unveil the truth and bring those responsible to justice. Her wealth might have come in handy for protection and resources. However, Tomás denies help for he does not want to compromise his social position by helping his daughter, as he is more interested in the circles to which he had access through his former son-in-law. Therefore, Emilia decides to embark on a personal mission that ultimately becomes collective and gendered: in the process of clearing her own name she dethrones criminals and reconstructs both the political system and the social fabric, which had been dismantled to favour male-centred economic interest.

Emilia is then forced to hide in Tepito, a notorious neighbourhood in Mexico City with a high level of petty crime and scant police presence. She finds refuge in the house of the sister of her children's nanny, and here Emilia experiences what it means to live outside the state jurisdiction or, in other words, to suffer from a political subalternization. No longer able to count on her political power, Emilia understands that building relationships based on trust (instead of political promises) resides at the core of her mission. Therefore, in order to win her life back, she needs to bridge the social gap that separates the citizenship from the government. Thanks to her political knowledge and acquaintances, Emilia functions as a catalyst that binds together citizens forgotten by the state (the population of Tepito), righteous politicians (José Barquet, Secretary of the Interior and family friend of the Navas), and General Raul Mejía, a law enforcement officer who abhors the criminal acts of the political establishment. In *Ingobernable*, the reconstruction of Mexico's social system begins with the outcasts of Mexico's society and proceeds to the top, in order to weave together righteousness and truth, and to dismantle the rotten components of the political apparatus.

In *Las conspiradoras: La representación de la mujer en México*, Jean Franco dissects the role and representation of women in different epochs of Mexican history. In regard to post-revolutionary Mexico, Franco affirms that the representation of Mexican women during that conflict is turned, by political power, into a figure that is subordinated to the patriarchal figure of the state (189). *Ingobernable* tackles the figure of the woman as a subaltern within Mexican society (and the cultural

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[18] The government does not abduct Emilia and Diego's children. However, for most of the first and the second season, they are in effect under house-arrest and constantly monitored, as the police wait for Emilia to try to get in touch with them.

landscape) by challenging genre-related stereotypes. First, and unlike the majority of shows on crime and politics, the female characters of *Ingobernable* do cover high-level positions and ranks. However, especially in the political sphere, it is men who have the last word, an aspect that emphasizes the ongoing presence of patriarchy. Second, *Ingobernable* takes a stance in regard to female characters whose actions are motivated by their sentiments and social roles. In the show, for instance, women are threatened by multiple forms of violence (e.g. from partners, family members, and children). However, all female protagonists defy these threats or sacrifice their personal interests for a greater good: the search of the truth and the dismantling of a corrupt, dysfunctional system. To give a few examples, Ana sides with Emilia when she realizes that she is being used by an international crime syndicate to deliver the Mexican presidency to a puppet candidate. In a similar fashion, Chela and the other *cabronas* are reluctant to help Emilia at the beginning as she embodies the political establishment that treats them like pariahs. They decide to contribute to her cause only when they realize that the former first lady has to make Diego's video public (thus exposing the political establishment to which she belongs) as the only way to clear her name.

Ingobernable deconstructs the hegemonic discourse about organized crime through women, long portrayed as subordinate figures in fictions about crime and politics. In analysing the discourse of *Ingobernable*, the significance of Iser's fictionalizing act is evident. Set in the present day but with no reference to historical events, *Ingobernable* creates a new reality[19] to oppose "the real", that is, the official account provided by the government.

There are two episodes which exemplify the construction of the hegemonic discourse in *Ingobernable* by showing how truth is tampered with by either government officials or the secret organization that hijacks the Mexican government. In episode five of the first season, "La otra verdad" ["The Alternative Truth"], several characters become aware of the truth behind the murder of the president. Until this point, only the audience is aware that Emilia did not kill her husband, and that someone framed her. In the episode, Ana, the late Mexican president's Chief of Staff, comes into possession of a video of the fight between Emilia and her husband the night he died and realizes that Emilia might be innocent. Nevertheless, the recording, in the hand of other government officers, has not been used to exonerate Emilia. And Pete Vázquez, a member of the secret organization, discourages Ana from spreading the file and threatens her should she act otherwise. The sequence that follows consists of two parallel scenes. In one, the *Secretario de Gobernación* [Minister of the Interior] lies to the Attorney General during his testimony: though he had, in fact, instigated the fight between the couple by showing the president pictures of his wife with another man, the *Secretario*

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[19] Iser argues that works of fiction, whether or not they include historical events or characters, are "not meant to represent reality" (13). He explains that "the reality represented in the text [...] is a pointer to something that it is not, although its function is to make that something conceivable" (13). Fiction, therefore, creates an alternative discourse that portrays reality which, in the case of *Ingobernable*, might adhere to historical events more reliably than the discourse of the government.

invents an excuse as to why the president had wanted to see his wife. In parallel, Emilia infiltrates the hotel where their fight had taken place, to recover the video her husband wanted to broadcast to the nation, in which he announced his plan to denounce state crimes. The video provides evidence for the true motive for—and likely culprits behind—the president's murder, which had so far been explained by a conjugal altercation.

The second example comes from the first episode of the second season, "La justicia como espectáculo" ["Justice on Parade"]. In the opening scene, a news reporter announces that an army detail is about to apprehend Emilia live, in real time. In this scene, the camera angles and takes overlap with those of the reporters who are following the army detail. Emilia is captured in the room of a decrepit building, surrounded by drugs, money, and weapons. On her way out, she stares directly at the reporters' cameras. While she is being taken away, Emilia is asked by press reporters if she killed the president; she replies, "Es cierto. Yo lo maté" ["That's correct. I killed him"].[20] Beyond how far-fetched the narrative spread by the government and media is, what emerges as fundamental with respect to the diffusion and popularity of the hegemonic discourse is a dialogue between two characters who watch the apprehension on TV:

> – ¿Y usted qué cree? ¿Que sí fue ella?
> – ¿Acaso importa?
> – No, pues, ya no.
>
> [– So, what do you think? She did it?
> – Does it even matter?
> – Not anymore.]

Through the conventions of televisual storytelling, *Ingobernable* concretely shows the construction of the hegemonic discourse without resorting to conspiracy theories. The two examples illustrate how information is filtered, reports are altered, and official versions are concocted. In the first example, the show makes repeated use of the same scene by adding or cutting, each time, a detail or a shot that completely alters the version of the story the audience has known until that point. This manoeuvre demonstrates the extent to which visual storytelling can be manipulated ad libitum in regard to its content and perspective. In the second example, the manipulation adopts a more concrete and direct form. In a plot that recalls the Zodiaco Case of 2005—reconstructed by Jorge Volpi in *Una novela criminal* (2018)—, the apprehension of Emilia is staged and broadcast, thus epitomizing how the media and state-owned television support the corrupted political establishment. In the show, the declarations of politicians about violence and organized crime resemble the daily accounts of the Mexican government. The spectator witnesses the construction of a reality in which everything is reduced to a Manichean dichotomy, simplified to the point of falsity.

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[20] All translations of the TV series dialogue are those provided by Netflix.

Analysing the rhetoric of Mexican politicians, Escalante Gonzalbo writes that "[e]n el lenguaje habitual en México [...] crimen organizado y violencia son prácticamente sinónimos" (*El crimen* 78) ["in Mexico's everyday discourse, organized crime and violence are practically synonyms"]. This has created "una dimensión imaginaria" ["an imaginary dimension"] of organized crime (69). The "imaginary", in Iser's words, "is not to be viewed as a human faculty; our concern is with its modes of manifestation and operation, so that the word is indicative of a program rather than a definition" (305). The "imaginary" then becomes part of the discourse; it is not something tangible. In *Ingobernable* the "imaginary" corresponds to a counter-discourse to the hegemonic discourse about organized crime. Iser explains that "as the fictionalizing act outstrips the determinacy of the real, so it provides the imaginary with the determinacy that it would not otherwise possess" (3). While in the real world there is no counter-discourse that can dismantle the hegemonic discourse from within, in fiction the hegemonic discourse is exposed as an artificial construction in parallel with its manifestation. In *Ingobernable*, Emilia's mission consists of reaching the locus where the hegemonic discourse is enunciated. She knows that it is only from there that the truth can be shown and her name can be cleared.

From a narratological point of view, what *Ingobernable* offers is quite challenging. In recent decades, Mexican literary and filmic fictions that have depicted organized crime have either focused on the theme of personal revenge, or on the search and exposure of those responsible. The narratives of cult movies like *Traffic* (2000), more glamorized filmic fictions like *Savages* (2012), or the recent *Sicario* film franchise (2015, 2018) and the TV show *Narcos* (2015–present), delve—quite convincingly—into the complex Mexican underworld and its relationships with US and Mexican government bodies and the law enforcement corps. However, they all conclude their narrative arcs with understatements or oversimplifications about the War on Drugs. In doing so, these works do corroborate the anti-state theory. Departing from the assumption that the corruption of the political and judicial system will not allow justice to prevail, fictional characters either engage in personal vendettas or they expose those responsible for the sake of narratological and rhetorical reasons.

In their analysis, Rodríguez-Blanco and Mastrogiovanni categorize TV shows like *Narcos*, *El Chapo*, and *Gomorrah* as "melodrama social" (96) ["social melodrama"]. These shows fuel (and are fuelled by) the hegemonic discourse in that they present a never-ending structure—otherwise politicians would have to either admit that the anti-state myth is a hoax or vanquish criminal organizations in contexts such as Colombia, Mexico, and Italy (96). This problematic is common to many fictional representations of organized crime, and what stands out, Rodríguez-Blanco and Mastrogiovanni conclude, is that "la estructura social, política y de relaciones basadas en la violencia—el sistema-estado mexicano—queda totalmente invisibilizada" (100) ["the structure of society, politics, and violence-based relationships—the Mexican state-system—ends up being rendered totally invisible"]. *Ingobernable* goes against this grain: it constructs and reveals the dynamics

of the political establishment in order to show both how and why the anti-state theory is created.

In sum, *Ingobernable* rejects the hegemonic discourse about organized crime and instead re-politicizes the phenomenon by displaying some of the issues concealed by the long-established rhetorical construction. First, the show illustrates, in the realm of fiction, a concrete hegemonic discourse that parallels the storyline. Where other shows have limited themselves to recreating a reality where the political establishment is corrupt, *Ingobernable* demonstrates how this widespread system of illegality is constructed and sustained. Second, the way *Ingobernable* juxtaposes these issues with those of gender and subalternity highlights that, regardless of the socio-cultural changes Mexican society has undergone, patriarchy and the war on organized crime have contributed, and continue to contribute, to relegating a large part of the population to conditions of subalternity. The show, in the end, casts light on the conditions that prevent full civic participation in the reconstruction of a new political establishment. At the same time, it speaks critically about organized crime and directs attention to the political establishment, instead of following the hegemonic discourse that portrays crime as something separate from the realm of politics.

Conclusions

THE question of the discourse on organized crime and the resultant tendency to "hablar míticamente del crimen organizado" (Zavala 14) ["speak mythically about organized crime"], is central to *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable*. Behind the obstacles posed by the hegemonic discourse lies a re-politicizing attempt that cannot remain exclusively in the hand of scholars and journalists. Entrenched in Mexican society's cultural production, the hegemonic discourse on organized crime has created a reality-based fictionalizing act that eschews the truth and ignores political responsibility.

The two works analysed in this essay suggest several stylistic choices when it comes to creating a counter-discourse that responds to mainstream cultural production by problematizing official accounts. Most importantly, *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* focus on the importance of talking about the political system. As Andrew Pepper and David Schmid have emphasized, the major problem in crime fiction nowadays is the gradual "erasure of the state" (4). Becoming increasingly popular as a form of entertainment, crime fiction can no longer ignore its social and civic mission. The critical representation of the crime-justice-truth triad— the elements of which Piccato has identified as the crumbling pillars of modern nations, and especially Mexico (1)—is central in too few works of crime fiction. However, the dysfunctional nature of this triad can no longer be avoided, nor can the consequences of organized crime and its (mis)representation on modern democracies.

Pepper and Schmid also reflect on questions of state sovereignty (6), which are simultaneously central and problematic to the construction of the hegemonic

discourse, as Zavala and Astorga, among others, have underscored. *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* question state sovereignty and, in fact, point out how this has transcended the limits of legality and entered the realm of criminality in contemporary Mexico. Both works provide a fictionalized yet plausible alternative to the hegemonic discourse that insists on the increasing power of narcos and thus justifies the ever-more-common violence perpetrated by government bodies.

From the analysis of these two works of fiction, it is possible to respond to several criticisms of crime fiction in previous years. While neither *Crimen de estado* nor *Ingobernable* spare audiences from polarized representations of good and evil, their scope goes beyond the need to satisfy a public searching for someone to blame. Both works renounce the opportunity to display criminal organizations as powerful enemies of the state, as the hegemonic discourse has done for decades. Instead they portray *lo criminal* as an element under the aegis of state power.

The mission of the re-politicization of Mexican society that *Crimen de estado* and *Ingobernable* have at their core, is enhanced by citizens who are cast out from the political establishment yet who do not belong to the criminal underworld. The utilization of these social groups—ignored or victimized in most crime fiction works—and the civic mission on which they embark, foster discussion on Mexican society. The work and lives of the characters do not place them between two overwhelming poles (*lo político* and *lo criminal*). Rather, the Mexican citizens of these fictions stand to one side and fight the rot on the other. They do not accept conspiracy theories about partnerships between the political establishment and criminals. Instead, they insist on seeking the truth about the political establishment, those truly responsible for Mexico's critical situation.

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