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Paramilitarism without Paramilitaries: *Tres Caínes* and the Representation of Paramilitarism on Colombian TV Screens

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to analyse the representation of the Colombian armed conflict in the controversial TV series *Tres Caínes* (2013), which dramatizes the history of paramilitarism in Colombia through a biographical story of the lives of the three brothers Castaño Gil, the leaders and founders of Colombia's biggest paramilitary group, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). I argue that *Tres Caínes* represents the war through a rhetoric that is close to human rights and transnational justice perspectives, portraying its characters according to a dichotomy between victim and victimizer. Although the series purports to take a neutral position in the conflict, and condemns individual paramilitary leaders, it simultaneously salvages the ideology of paramilitarism, and thereby indirectly supports the political project of Álvaro Uribe Vélez. Because of this, despite apparently taking a pacifist stance, the series constitutes a cultural product that works against peace in Colombia, and is an example of how humanitarian discourse can be easily exploited in the service of warmongering and reactionary messaging.

I have always looked for peace, I have always advocated peace. I have always craved peace.

Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria

The Colombian armed conflict is one of the longest ongoing civil wars of the 20th century. At the time of writing it has been waged for sixty-one years (CNMH, *¡BASTA YA!*). In recent decades, movies, books, and TV series about the conflict have abounded, each giving a different perspective on the war, and each provoking different reactions. This article focuses on *Tres Caínes*, a successful Colombian TV series that ignited a national debate upon its airing, and came very close to being cancelled before its conclusion. *Tres Caínes* narrates the history of paramilitarism in Colombia, filtering it through the lives of the three brothers Castaño Gil, Fidel, Carlos, and Vicente, the leaders and founders of Colombia's

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largest paramilitary group, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia [United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia], or AUC. During their historical trajectory between the late '90s and early 2000s, the AUC was responsible for the displacement and murder of the vast majority of the civilian victims of the war (CNMH, *¡BASTA YA!*). Unsurprisingly, the airing of a prime time TV series about the AUC's founders was met with outraged protests, and it spurred a national debate on how Colombia's history of violence should be discussed and represented on national TV, or even if it should be represented at all.

The goal of this article is to analyse the series and the debate that it sparked, focusing on how the content of *Tres Caínes* relates to the history and politics of the war. Starting from the assumption that there are no objective ways to narrate history, and much less recent history in a country that is still at war, I will consider why *Tres Caínes* represents history the way it does and which political factions and armed actors benefit from its version of the conflict. *Tres Caínes* has already garnered a certain attention from scholars who have underlined how its representation of paramilitarism is deeply flawed, and it is sympathetic toward right wing and nationalist positions (Flórez Fuya; Guerrero Apráez and Amaya Rueda; Ospina Raigosa). Unlike these scholars, I focus on how *Tres Caínes* exemplifies the instrumentalisation of human rights and transnational justice rhetoric for reactionary and anti-pacifist purposes. The analysis of the series provides insights which can potentially be applied to historical and geographical experiences other than the Colombian conflict, and ultimately highlights the shortcomings inherent in humanitarian rhetoric.

In order to make my argument, I will analyse which type of historical representation of the conflict is produced by the series, and for what purposes. My thesis is that *Tres Caínes* reproduces the AUC's ideology while simultaneously condemning the individual paramilitary leaders. While doing so, it deploys an ideological representation of the war that is intended to demonise the guerrillas and the FARC in particular, supporting the political factions that have built their historical legitimisation on the anti-FARC sentiment. Because of this, while apparently taking a pacifist stance, *Tres Caínes* culturally supports radical anti-FARC positions that still serve to block the peace process in Colombia.

The article has three sections. In the first, I analyse the public debate over the series, explaining the arguments from both the critics and the writer of the series, Gustavo Bolívar. I then identify its ideological elements, isolating the ethical and moral positions that it expresses, and exploring how the series reconstructs the relations between the characters and Colombian history. In the second section, I reconstruct the AUC's historical trajectory in the Colombian conflict, and compare the AUC's ideology with that of *Tres Caínes*, so to identify similarities and differences between the two discourses. Finally, in the third section, I focus on the relations between *Tres Caínes*' own discourse and Colombian politics, determining which groups and actors benefit from the historical representations that the series displays.

Victims and Victimizers in *Tres Caínes*

Tres Caínes belongs to the genre of *narconovelas*, mainstream TV productions that portray the life and adventures of drug traffickers. The genre originated in Colombia in the early 2000s, and it has gained great national success, becoming one of the most popular forms of entertainment on TV. Most *narconovelas* are produced by the country's two main networks, Caracol and RCN. In 2012, *Escobar, el patrón del mal* was the first *narconovela* that used the genre to reconstruct recent Colombian history, in a biographical narrative of the life of Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel. The cultural phenomenon of *narconovelas* has surged thanks to the commercial success of the productions, but it is clearly problematic, as the armed conflict is still ongoing, and the country has not been pacified, either militarily or culturally (Trujillo Amaya). While *El patrón del mal* riled some critics, public opinion did not consider its storytelling offensive, and generally speaking the series was well received (Rincón). Later, it enjoyed some international success, especially after Netflix added to its online catalogue. *Tres Caínes* followed a year later. It was produced by Colombian network RCN, that aired it between March and June 2013 in 70 episodes of approximately one hour each.[1] Unlike *El patrón del mal*, *Tres Caínes* was immediately met with dismay. The series faced strong criticism, and private citizens confronted RCN on social media, demanding the cancelation of the show and asking private companies to stop airing their ads in between the episodes' breaks (Ortiz Franco; Uribe).

The confrontations in the national media saw the series' writer, Gustavo Bolívar, debating academics and journalists and justifying the legitimacy of his work and the decisions of RCN. To synthetize, the criticisms revolved around three main points:

1. The series is *offensive* and *hurtful* toward the victims of paramilitarism, as it celebrates the lives of their victimizers. Not enough space on the screen is given to the victims, and the correct way to represent paramilitarism would be from their perspective, and not the Castaños'.

2. The series represents paramilitarism as the consequence of the murder of the Castaños' father by the guerrilla, and thus, paramilitarism is portrayed as an understandable reaction against the violence of the war.

3. The series is particularly damaging for children, as it exposes them to violence, and the goal of RCN should be to educate future generations and to spread pacifism, not to feed them violence to increase its ratings (this argument was central to the protests on social media).

Bolívar expressed his counter arguments in a debate that aired on *Semana en Vivo* in March 2013 (Revista Semana). These were:

[1] The DVD version is composed of 80 episodes of roughly 40 minutes each.

1. The show gives space to the representation of the victims, and it does not exclude them from the narration. The critics should wait to watch the whole series, as the victims' perspective becomes central in the late part of the show.

2. The goal of the series is to condemn violence in any form, and the murder of the Castaño's father shows how vengeance is not the solution to the violence, as it converts the victim into a monster.

3. The series aims to educate the viewers, as it is only by getting to know its history that the country can avoid repeating the same mistakes. The presence of violence in the story is inevitable when talking about a war.

To analyse this debate we should start by considering *Tres Caínes*' narrative form: the biography. The writers represented the story of three specific individuals in order to describe the war through their personal lives. What characterizes this style of storytelling is that every person or event is portrayed in relation to the Castaños, who constitute the center of the story. Thus, the biographical focalization makes it impossible to represent history as a conflict or tension between different actors, as the only actors that we acknowledge are the Castaños, while all others merely serve as foils for the protagonists' actions. While critics attack the writers for making their story about the Castaños, it should be noted that their desire to see a story *about the victims* would undertake the same style of narration, as it would simply switch the centre from the Castaños to their victims. On this issue, both the critics and Bolívar expressed the same worldview, because they divided the subjects they were discussing into victims and victimizers, and the argument stems from the choice to make one or the other the centre of the narration.

The focus on the category of victim by Bolívar and his critics hints at the normalization of the concept in Colombian political discourse. This rhetoric represents the war through the binary dichotomy between active and passive actors—which is to say victimizers and their victims. The use of this distinction and the rearticulation of the events under this paradigm are key elements to *Tres Caínes*. This logic, which is normally associated with, but not exclusive to, non-violent and humanitarian movements, aims to exclude the perspective of armed actors as illegitimate, to draw a line between those who suffer and those who abuse, rearticulating any relation in the war through a paradigm that constantly distinguishes between the powerful and the powerless, the executioner and the martyr. The victims' status is an identity that it is given, and as such it cancels other complexities and nuances that it is important to be aware of in order to understand the people who make up the groups of victims and victimizers. Crucially, it must be emphasized that the armed actors would not kill randomly, but would rather select their victims according to their particular military and political project. The social, racial, and political origins of the conflict's victims is what made them a target in the first place, but they are erased once the only identity that is recognized is the identity of victim. Similarly, the armed actors are also conflated together in the category

of the victimizers, as the only feature that describes them is their violence against the victims, and not their political position within the conflict. In the series, this is very clear from the start, as among the victims we see the members of the Castaño family who disapprove of the three brothers' actions. In episode 74,[2] the Castaños' mother even participates in a demonstration in support of the victims of paramilitarism, and she steps on the podium to ask for understanding and forgiveness from the crowd, claiming victim status for herself and her family. She is represented as a victim of the Castaños, and she identifies as such.

This concept of victim is not originally from Colombia, but constitutes a key part of the contemporary framework for analysing conflicts from a human rights and transnational justice perspectives. The philosopher Daniele Giglioli argues that the victim paradigm is designed to deny the conflictual nature of politics. According to Giglioli victims are used to give moral superiority to the discourse that purports to support them, so as to stifle debate by demanding sympathy for them, and accusing conflictual discourses of being the cause of victimization (111–12). In Colombia, the victim discourse has become the hegemonic rhetoric to describe the conflict, particularly from institutional and official positions. How this discourse clashes against alternative perspectives has already been described by anthropologists Pilar Riaño-Alcalá and María Victoria Uribe, who have worked as members of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica as part of the first state-sponsored effort to reconstruct the memories of the war from the survivors' perspective. As they noted, the victim is a political subject that necessarily homogenizes all different survivors of the violence. Moreover, it only acknowledges those who express themselves in accordance to its rhetoric, celebrating their vulnerability, weakness, and impotence. Anybody who might privilege other emotions, perspectives, or calls for action, would not be acknowledged as an authentic victim or as a victim at all, and her testimony would be canceled or stigmatized.

Some critical accounts of *Tres Caínes* have underlined how the victims in the series are mainly represented as passive subjects, but it should be noted that this is implicit in the very concept of victim: the victims are categorized by the violence they suffered, and they exist strictly in relation to their victimization, as passive figures (Van Dijk 13). By their nature victims cannot have an active role, and all they can do is support the action of somebody else, usually the State, to punish the victimizers. Thus, the victim can only exist in a very specific space, a space of inaction. Any transition from such space would imply the loss of victim status. This aspect is crucial to understanding the ideology behind the series: the storyline is constructed as the Castaños' transition from victims to victimizers, and the family serves as a metaphor for the entire country.

In the first episode we are introduced to the Castaño family enjoying a peaceful existence in the countryside. The patriarch works on his farm, and Carlos is a sweet little boy who helps him out. It is hinted that Fidel probably traffics cocaine, but violence is absent from family life. The equilibrium is broken when a local

[2] This reference and all others throughout the article will refer to the DVD version of the show.

group of guerrillas kidnap the older Castaño for ransom, and even though they get paid, they kill the old man. The Castaños then swear, literally on their father's grave, to exterminate every guerrilla in the country. The killing of the father serves as the historical origin of the war. The Castaños are all turned into victims by the attack, and a first division among the family emerges when some of them choose to stay victims, while the others take action and turn into victimizers. This is metaphorically extended to the entire country, as the conflict expands as a conflict among brothers. The following fights and murders between the three brothers intensify this element of the narrative logic. The guerrillas fall outside it as they do not belong to the family: their actions do not arise from a previous victimization, and they represent a greater evil that first creates victims and then forces them into taking action.

Action is the greatest sin in the face of violence. In the series, this idea is articulated through a Christian rhetoric that goes hand in hand with the humanitarian perspective described above. The ideology of victimhood not only homogenizes all victims regardless of their history, it does the same with the victimizers. The violence that the brothers unleash in their war is not considered to be different from the violence of the guerrilla or of the state forces who supported paramilitaries. Violence is de-historicized by being discussed in simple moral terms. The first episode shows the Castaños as good people, and not because of what they have done, but exactly because they have done absolutely nothing: their passivity and vulnerability gives them high moral status, which is then broken when they decide to react. In *Tres Caínes*, the absolute refusal of violence is mandatory for a person to be "good", and martyrdom is the only appropriate form of self-defence. This concept is clearly articulated in a conversation between Romualda, the youngest sister of the Castaños, and her boyfriend Aurelio. They both sympathize with the Left, and are in contact with a university professor who is close to a guerrilla group. Following the death of her father, Romualda rejects violence as a way to achieve equality, but Aurelio still believes that the armed struggle is the only possible solution for an equal Colombia. Romualda objects that:

> Todo los seres humanos tenemos derecho a la vida, y nadie es quien para arrebatarle a uno ese derecho. Aurelio, después de enterrar a mi papá, yo me di cuenta que quiero hacer parte de una revolución pacífica, así como la que hizo Jesucristo, como hizo Gandhi allá en la India. Pero claro, ustedes no entienden eso. Ustedes creen que la única manera es con las armas. (*Tres Caínes*, ep. 3)[3]
>
> [All human beings have the right to life, and nobody can take that away. Aurelio, after having buried my father, I realized that I want to take part in a peaceful revolution, like Jesus, or Gandhi in India. But obviously you don't get that. You all think that the only way is with weapons.]

Aurelio is later moved by her words, and distances himself from the professor. But when the Castaños find out their sister is dating a communist, they arrange for his

[3] All the translation from Spanish are mine.

murder. The death of Aurelio sanctifies him as a victim: he is close to becoming a monster, but his love shows him a peaceful way forward. The fact that he disarms himself is what turns him into a martyr.

According to this perspective, weakness and vulnerability should be embraced as a sort of badge of honour, because they grant an unimpeachable moral status. The only appropriate form of (in)action is to ask for state protection. Moreover, violence is perceived as the only cause of the war, because the conflict starts with a victimization that is divorced from its sociohistorical causes, starting a cycle of revenge which cannot end without a moral redemption. Violence cannot be an instrument to achieve a goal, due to the fact that its use corrupts the original purpose. As a consequence, society is divided between the passive, who are good, and the active, who are evil. In between them stands the State, the only entity that can legitimately use violence. Therefore, the victimizers are all those who fight outside of the State, but also those inside the State who abuse their position to pursue self interest. The latter are defined as "corrupted". Bolívar clarified this last point during a formal ceremony in Congress that honored the memory of a victim of paramilitarism. On that occasion, while confronting criticism of *Tres Caínes* Bolívar asserted that "corruption" was the original cause of the war ("Libretista").

Bolívar's vision of history is fairly simple, as he rejects any socio-economic analysis, he simply finds answers by identifying an original sin that is responsible for moral decay of society. Applying this ideology to Colombia, the conclusion is that neither the violence nor the actors can be analysed from a social or political perspective, as their immorality is the only element that counts. In an interview with *El Tiempo*, Bolívar sought to defend *Tres Caínes* from its critics:

> La violencia existe en Colombia no por la televisión, sino por una ecuación: hay guerrilla porque hubo corrupción en el Frente Nacional, y hubo paramilitares porque hubo guerrilla, y esa ecuación no me la aceptan ni la guerrilla, ni los paras, ni los corruptos. (Posada Tamayo)
>
> [In Colombia, violence does not exist because of TV, but because of a formula: there is a guerrilla because there was corruption in the National Front, and there were paramilitaries because of the guerrilla. And nobody accepts this formula of mine: neither the guerrilla, nor the paramilitaries, nor the corrupted.]

He thus conflates the guerrilla, the paramilitaries, and a group which is only defined by a moral connotation, "the corrupted", into the category of the victimizers. Bolívar also victimizes himself, as he points out how the victimizers do not accept his analysis, which puts him in opposition against them, and thus, closer to the victims. It is important to note that Bolívar is far from being a right-wing figure. He is currently a Colombian senator who was elected for the leftist party coalition Lista de la Decencia. His political positions read as a blend between populist and Christian rhetoric, in line with a mainstream humanitarian call for pacifism while condemning all armed actors as immoral or corrupt.

To give a clearer example of how the war is discussed on the show, let us consider this scene: in episode 69, the character of Jairo, who represents the murdered Colombian comedian Jaime Garzón, decides to use his TV show to document the struggle of a group of war victims, and he interviews Gloria, a political activist (based on Gloria Cuartas). During the interview, she offers the following analysis of the conflict:

> Gloria: La mayoría de estas personas [referring to the crowd that surrounds her] son víctimas. Pero son poquitas para las miles y miles que han dejado ambos grupos en todo el país.
>
> Jairo: Duro, sí o qué?
>
> Gloria: Sí. Más que duro, infame. Y le han matado sus familiares. Y se los han matado porque sí. Por sospecha, por capricho. O por lo que es peor: por sed de sangre. Porque esa, en últimas, es el único motivo que tiene este conflicto absurdo, infame.
>
> [Gloria: The majority of these people are victims. But they are few compared to the thousands that both groups [guerrilla and paramilitaries] have left throughout the country.
>
> Jairo: That's tough, isn't it?
>
> Gloria: Yes, it is awful. And they killed their families. And they killed them just for the sake of it. Because of suspicion, or on a whim. Or what's even worse, for their thirst of blood. Because that, ultimately, is the only reason behind this absurd, heinous conflict.]

Tres Caínes and AUC

Having analysed *Tres Caínes*' ideological positions, in this section I compare the show's narrative with the AUC's historical trajectory, in so doing seeking to determine which elements of paramilitarism the show chooses to overlook or even hide. As mentioned before, one argument of the show's critics was that to portray the Castaños' war as revenge for the death of their father acted as an apology for paramilitarism. The show does portray paramilitarism as a reaction to an attack, and thus, a form of self-defence. This justification for the events was not created by *Tres Caínes*, having originally been provided by the Castaños themselves, Carlos in particular.

As the AUC's leader and spokesperson, Carlos Castaño was charged with taking advantage of interviews and public appearances to seek political and moral legitimation for paramilitarism, and just like *Tres Caínes*, he portrayed his life and the life of his family as a metaphor for the country and the conflict (Ronderos 302–11). Castaño adopted the position of victim by locating the origin of his struggle in his father's murder, and extended this origin to the entire organization, reconstructing the history of the AUC as a defensive reaction against the guerrilla (Aranguren Molina 83). While Castaño would obviously not agree with *Tres Caínes*' apology

for passivity and martyrdom, the idea that it was an original act of victimization that had sparked their paramilitarism was originally his. In Castaño's discourse, the AUC became avengers, but also protectors of the "good people" against the savagery of the communists. According to him, paramilitarism was a spontaneous movement that arose due to the lack of state protection for the citizens of northern and western Colombia, who had to take up arms to defend themselves against the guerrilla. Because of this, the AUC conceived themselves as allies of the Colombian state, their presence as temporary, and intended to lay down their weapons once the State was able to retake control of the country (Angarita Cañas et al. 189–210). Later in 2008, Salvatore Mancuso, who was one of AUC's highest leaders, changed the story, claiming that the AUC were in fact "the state's illegitimate son", and that their entire trajectory was sparked and supported by the State to fight the guerrilla and any other leftist force in Colombia (Angarita Cañas et al. 196). The reason Mancuso gave this declaration was that the Colombian government had decided to extradite him to the US along with other incarcerated ex-paramilitary leaders, despite agreements that they brokered with the Administration between 2003 and 2006 (Daly 64–71; Ronderos 722–26).

The portrayal of the AUC as a spontaneous reaction to the guerrilla is constructed by excluding the issues of class and land from the history of the Colombian conflict. Moreover, it falls short of explaining why the vast majority of the victims of paramilitarism were civilians, and not guerrilla members. According to the data of the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH), among all armed actors (guerrilla, paramilitaries and state forces), paramilitary groups were responsible for the death of 94,754 civilians, or roughly 70% of the total non-armed victims whose death could be attributed to an actor (C. Romero). During their trajectory, paramilitaries (*paras*) focused on mass killing and forced displacement of civilians, and mainly targeted rural population (*campesinos).* Their other main goal was the selective targeting of civilians, activists, journalists, politicians and anybody who could be associated with leftist movements (CNMH, *Todo pasó*; Steele). Actual confrontation with guerrilla forces was much less frequent and much less successful, as the paras never focused their strategy on the military destruction of the guerrilla, aiming instead at marginalizing them socially and politically, as I discuss below. This is an important distinction between guerrilla and paramilitarism, as the former would focus on military actions against state forces, and on the development of a social base among the rural population, while simultaneously targeting the middle and upper rural class with extortion and kidnapping for ransom (Leech 36–67). Unlike the paramilitaries the guerrilla did not consider civilian massacres an integral part of their strategy. This is not to deny that both FARC and ELN have massacred civilians, but they did not conceive of theirs as a war against certain segments of the rural population, which is the reason for the disparity between the massacres attributed to the guerrilla and the paramilitaries. However, guerrilla groups have been known to target civilian communities when they believed them to be working with the enemy. And moreover, they often showed disregard for civilian casualties by conducting attacks against their foes

in the proximity of villages, or by using car bombs in densely populated areas (CNMH, *Tomas y ataques* 222–26; Leech 122–40).

More than a reaction to the guerrilla, paramilitarism in Colombia should be understood as a military and political project in defense of the status quo. Paramilitarism developed to avoid any redistribution of resources in favour of the poor population, and to salvage the privileges of the heterogeneous elites who financed it: landowners, industrialists, US-American and Colombian corporations, and drug traffickers. What these actors had in common was the need to avoid an expansion of the guerrilla, which might "tax" them or take away their land, and a general fear of trade unions and political organizations that might mobilize workers and peasants against them (M. Romero). Among the paramilitary supporters were also small landowners who feared kidnapping, but in terms of funding and support for paramilitarism this latter group was almost irrelevant when compared to the elites (Ronderos 32–140).

Paramilitarism developed in the '80s, with regional, small groups throughout western and northern Colombia, the most relevant being the group in Puerto Boyacá led by Henry Pérez, and the group in Córdoba led by Fidel Castaño. The Castaños were already deeply involved in drug trafficking and organized crime even before the murder of their father, and they later created a paramilitary group with the support of drug traffickers and elites in the province of Córdoba to fight guerrillas and accumulate land for themselves and their allies. In this phase, paramilitaries defended local interests, utilizing terror and selective killings to marginalize the growth of the guerrilla and the Left in the region. In the late '80s, they focused on the killing of members of the Unión Patriótica (UP), the FARC's political party. To allow the FARC to have a political party had been one of the terms of the 1985 peace accord between FARC and the Colombian government. By exterminating thousands of the party's members, from the leadership to its base, they successfully pushed the FARC toward more radical positions, as they made it clear that communists could not safely participate in democracy and would be exterminated if they ever disarmed (CNMH, *Todo pasó*). The Castaños also targeted towns and communities who voted in members of UP with terrorist attacks, acquiring a reputation for brutality and the use of beheadings to intimidate the campesinos (see Guarín and Ramírez Ortiz).

After the death of Fidel Castaño, who may even have been killed by his brothers, paramilitarism evolved into a more powerful force. The remaining Castaños first expanded into the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá (ACCU), and in 1997 created the umbrella organization Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The AUC could count on the tacit support of the army, much of the State, and the country's elites. Its sudden growth in the mid and late '90s was favoured by the CONVIVIR national programme that started in 1994 on the initiative of Álvaro Uribe Vélez among others. At the time, Uribe was governor of the Antioquia department, who in 2002 became the country's president.

The CONVIVIR were armed groups of private security whose status as self-defence forces was recognized by the State, which granted private citizens the

right to arm themselves against the guerrilla. The programme was a de facto legitimization of paramilitarism, and the CONVIVIR were all co-opted or completely constituted by paramilitary groups (M. Romero). Moreover, after the collapse of the big drug cartels in the early '90s, paramilitaries shifted from being financed by drug traffickers to becoming drug traffickers themselves (Guizado Camacho). Most of their funds came from trading in cocaine, while donations and extortion made up the rest of their revenue. At their height, they could count on around twenty thousand fighters, spread throughout Colombia with the exception of the FARC strongholds in the country's southeast. Between the late '90s and early 2000s, they fought a bitter territorial war against FARC and ELN, and the mass killing of civilians became their core strategy. The massacres were conducted with exceptional cruelty in order to terrify the population. The violence displaced large numbers of civilians, making it impossible for the guerrilla to develop a social base in the areas that they wished to control.[4]

The AUC made great efforts to politically justify their struggle. They rhetorically defended their war by denying accusations regarding the brutality and indiscriminate nature of the killings. They claimed that all victims were guerrillas, and that executions with firearms were the only method they used to kill. Carlos Castaño would describe the guerrillas as soldiers by night and farmers by day, claiming that they would hide among the rural population to make it impossible for their enemies to target them (Caracol Televisión). Moreover, the AUC and the Army accused NGOs, politicians, journalists, and activists of being bought by the guerrilla, turning all opposition to them into a military target by constructing a gigantic and hideous enemy supposedly hiding in civilian clothes and working to destroy Colombia (Angarita Cañas et al. 202–06).

To return to *Tres Caínes*, the first element to consider are the similarities between the AUC's historical discourse and the storytelling in the show. These are hardly surprising, given that the series's historical sources are the paramilitaries themselves: the show utilizes the paramilitaries' testimonies that were given after their surrender as established by the law of Justicia y Paz [Justice and Peace] in 2005. Moreover, it is obvious that Carlos Castaño's memoirs are also a source (Aranguren Molina). Because of this, while the series makes efforts to paint the brothers in a negative light, it inevitably tells their stories from the paramilitaries' perspective.

In the first episodes, for example, the brothers are shown to prevent the kidnapping of landowners in Córdoba, thereby gaining their gratitude and support. While we also see how the Medellín Cartel financed the brothers, it is striking that the paramilitaries are portrayed as responding to the legitimate fears of their compatriots. As the narrative progresses, the viewer is always presented with clear differences between the Castaños and the FARC. Every action of the Castaños

[4] See CNMH (*La masacre*) and also García de la Torre and Aramburo Siegert for a detailed account of the paramilitaries' strategies in Urabá. The role that land and territory played in the conflict has also been reconstructed by Alejandro Reyes Posada.

is constructed as a reaction to the guerrillas' actions, and FARC members are represented as cruel, sadist fanatics, who kill and destroy for no reason. In the show's world of dichotomies, the guerrilla are the opposite and complement of the Castaños—the permanent living origin of all the brothers' actions. In episode 58, they attempt to kidnap the brothers' family, including their mother who has already broke off all relations with Carlos and Vicente and is attempting to live an honest life. The incident serves to justify the escalation of violence of the AUC. In episode 59, Carlos, furious because of the failed attack on his family, decides to intensify military operations with these words:

> ¡Venganza! Eso es lo que quiero, ¡venganza! Les vamos a matar todos los familiares al secretariado de las FARC. Que se den cuenta que cometieron el error más grande de sus vidas. ¡Se metieron con mi mamá! ¡Se metieron con mis hijos! ¡Se metieron con mi familia!
>
> Vamos pueblo por pueblo averiguando quiénes son sus familiares. Los vamos a sacar, los vamos a descuartizar. Le vamos a dar la orden a la tropa: que les corten las cabezas y que juegen fútbol con ellas. Los vamos a llenar de terror. A los colaboradores les vamos a acabar los negocios, les vamos a descuartizar los hijos, les vamos a violar las hijas.
>
> ¡Y no vamos a parar ahí! ¡Vamos a pedir más sangre! A los periodistas que le ayudan a esos facinerosos, los vamos a matar también. Las ONG que vinieron a este país a decirnos cómo es que tenemos que manejarnos, diciéndole a la comunidad internacional que los malos somos nosotros, a ellos también los vamos a matar.
>
> [Revenge! Revenge! That's what I want! We are going to kill the families of the FARC secretariat. They are going to learn this was the biggest mistake in their life. They came after my mother! They came after my children, my family!
>
> We go from town to town and we find their relatives. We're going to root them out and dismember them. We will give the order to the troops: they must cut off their heads and play football with them. We are going to fill them with terror. We are going to destroy the businesses of those who collaborate with the guerrilla. We will rip their sons apart, and we will rape their daughters.
>
> But we won't stop there! We are going to demand more blood! We are going to kill the journalists who help those insurgents; the NGOs who came to this country to tell us what to do, and who told the international community that we are the bad ones, we are going to kill them as well.]

The scene represents the AUC's transition from a small-scale war to a massive deployment of troops and perpetration of massacres throughout Colombia. Playing football with campesinos' heads was an actual practice in the AUC massacres,[5] and, along with the attacks on journalists and NGOs, it serves as a reference to locate

[5] The analysis of the survivors' testimonies shows patterns of brutality in the paramilitary's massacres, which hints to the fact that the atrocities were much more organized than it would appear.

the discourse historically. While the father's death was a myth produced by the Castaños themselves, the events leading to this scene are entirely the product of the show's authors: the attempted kidnap never happened, and the intensification of the AUC's terrorism was not due to Carlos Castaño's victimization.

It is important to underline that the use of fiction in a historical drama is not wrong per se, as what matters is the interpretation of the historical phenomenon that the drama wants to display. Because of this, when analysing such a product the attention should not be focused on *what* is told, and whether or not it is "true", but *why* it was told, what kind of order and relation in the events it produces, and why it was told in a certain way rather than another. The point is not to determine what is fiction and what is real, but how the portrayal of a certain event determines the final understanding of the historical phenomenon in question. In this case the fictional portrayal of paramilitarism is constructed as the violence of victims, who were corrupted because of what was done to them.

Comparison of the rhetoric of the show with that of the historical paramilitaries reveals affinities between the two. But the same cannot be said of the guerrilla. Both the show and the AUC reconstruct the origin of paramilitarism as the original victimization of the paras. While the show does not concede that this justified the eventual reaction of the AUC, it maintains that such reaction had this original cause. Moreover, *Tres Caínes* denies that the existence and behaviour of the guerrilla is due to sociohistorical causes and it represents the FARC as essentially evil. On the contrary, the guerrilla portray their own struggle as motivated by sociohistorical circumstances, and they consider the paramilitaries to be the savage reaction of the *oligarquía* (Angarita Cañas et al. 167–86). Far from taking a neutral position between the two, *Tres Caínes* reproduces the paramilitary representations of the conflict. The ideological construction of the AUC as victims serves to erase the social origin of their own victims and the real reasons for their killing. The series accepts the justifications of Carlos Castaño, who claimed the AUC were only after guerrillas and their supporters. While *Tres Caínes* does make clear that many victims were civilians, their deaths are put down to the paras' mistaken belief that they were guerrillas. Because of this, while *Tres Caínes* morally condemns the paramilitaries, it also accepts their explanation and version of events.

If we consider the AUC to have been the frontline fighters of a counter-revolutionary program, the social origin of their victims matters, because they were targeted on the basis of their intersecting characteristics of class and rural location. The erasure of this allows for a representation of the victims as individuals who are disconnected from Colombia's social structure: in *Tres Caínes*, this is evident when the show portrays the marches of the victims who chant "the victims have a name and a face". Support for victims is demonstrated by reconstructing some of their personal lives, while simultaneously disregarding the social origins that made them targets. The victim category blurs any possible distinction among the victims, to the point that it is logical to consider the Castaños' mother a victim as well, just like the displaced campesinos. If what binds the victims together is simply the suffering, and not its historical causes, then there is no need to qualify

that pain in political terms, as the ethical position against violence is sufficient to account for all those affected.

When committing their massacres, the paramilitaries would pretend to select the campesinos based on their allegiance, utilizing informers or lists of names to identify the "subversives". But the number of their victims and the testimonies of the survivors clearly show that even though they were keen to kill the actual guerrilla supporters, they would butcher neutral civilians as well (see CNMH, *La masacre*). This is because from the AUC's perspective the campesinos were not neutral at all. They conceived of the masses as part of the body that was the nation in which the "subversion" (any type of leftist movement, whether armed or not) was a "cancer" to be extracted. The rural population had to be "cleansed", educated, terrified, and steered toward capitalism by means of violence, which was simply a tool to use whenever it was needed (Ronderos 473–77). *Tres Caínes* reconstructs the events by pretending to take a pacifist stance, against all forms of violence, but favours paramilitarism while condemning the individual paramilitary leaders. Moreover, while claiming to support the victims "who have a name and a face", it erases their origin, blurring the distinctions and taking a political position that is far from neutral.

Tres Caínes, Uribismo, and Peace

Having highlighted *Tres Caínes*' ideological components through how it reproduces the AUC's discourse, I now turn to the relationship between the series and Colombian politics. To understand *Tres Caínes*' political significance it is necessary to locate it within the conflict. To synthesize the previous arguments, I have asserted that:

1. *Tres Caínes* portrays paramilitarism as a reaction to the violence of the guerrilla, and it considers the discourse of Carlos Castaño and other paramilitary leaders a legitimate historical source.

2. By failing to include class and land in its story, *Tres Caínes* does not find any other reason for the conflict than the evil of men, and it reconstructs history by focusing on the morality of individuals.

It is important to consider who benefits from this historical representation, and who does not. I shall term *Tres Caínes*' ideological position *paramilitarism without paramilitaries*, to underline how the series reproduces the AUC's representation of the conflict while simultaneously condemning the members of the organization on a moral level. This ideology is connected to the phenomenon of *Uribismo*—the political project of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who was president of Colombia from 2002 until 2010, and remains a very important and influential figure. Uribe came to power after Andrés Pastraña, who had negotiated a failed peace accord with the FARC in 1998. Uribe had already identified himself as a fierce enemy of the guerrilla when he was governor of Antioquia, during which time he was the

originator of the CONVIVIR project that allowed the growth of paramilitarism in the '90s. He ran his presidential campaign expressing a radical position in terms of peace: he excluded any possible dialogue with the FARC and proposed a renewed military offensive against them with the full support of the US. Under Uribe, the AUC were recognized as a political actor and they demobilized between 2003 and 2006. During this process, it was revealed that the Congress had been heavily infiltrated by the AUC, and that roughly a third of the congressmen had ties with the paras, a scandal that became known as *parapolítica*. Moreover, the negotiations between Uribe's government and the AUC proposed a demobilization that would have granted amnesty to the entire group, left the AUC commanders most of their wealth, and even allowed them to form official political parties and NGOs. The process failed because of national and international outcries, when it became clear that the AUC had infiltrated the parliament and were being offered generous concessions (Daly 60–71; Ronderos 722–26). The scandal worsened the position of those paramilitary commanders who had already surrendered, because the public pressured the Supreme Court into establishing that war crime tribunals were needed to investigate the paramilitaries and their connections. AUC members who refused to give a complete and truthful testimony could be severely punished and prosecuted for their crimes. Shortly later, Uribe extradited all the high-ranking commanders to the United States on drug trafficking charges, making it impossible for them to testify about their allies in the military, the government, and the country's elites (Daly 60–71; Angarita Cañas et al. 103–24). A significant number of paramilitaries did not demobilize, reorganizing instead (Daly). Over time, members of the Uribe government have been shown to have a significant number of links with the AUC and to be implicated in war crimes against the civilian population (Casey).

While fighting the FARC, Uribe devoted his propaganda machine to demonize the guerrilla, and to focusing attention on himself as a strong, political, and military leader in the war against the FARC, which was painted as a conflict between good and evil. Fabio López de La Roche has proposed the term *anti-fariano* (anti-FARC) to describe a new sense of national identity that formed in Colombia under Uribe, with the citizen conceived as a member of a national community in opposition to the FARC (*Las ficciones*). The entire concept of *Uribism*o revolves around the contrast between good Colombians and the guerilla, with the latter defined as "terrorist" without admission of any possible historical or political causes (Angarita Cañas et al. 57–102). As for the paramilitaries, Uribe officially declared them to be terrorists and narcoterrorists, no different to the guerrilla, but he also pointed out that they arose because of the guerrilla's violence (Angarita Cañas et al. 107–09). Public condemnation of the AUC allowed the State to hide its true links with paramilitarism, while positioning itself as the only legitimate actor in the conflict. This depiction of the AUC as terrorists ended during the peace process, as the government needed to acknowledge them as political actors in order to reach a negotiation, but it remained valid for those who refused to demobilize (Angarita Cañas et al. 221–27).

In his speeches, Uribe denied the existence of political motives behind the guerrilla's actions, as he considered all armed actors to be the product of either evil or greed, as expressed by the labels of *terrorist* and *narco* respectively. Because of this, Uribe did not concede that the term *war* could be used to describe violence in Colombia. Rather, Colombia suffered from the presence of "narcoterrorists", who falsely claimed political cause to legitimize themselves. *Tres Caínes* reproduces this same depiction of the conflict. While it acknowledges the existence of the war, it maintains that the armed actors were simply fighting out of evil or greed.

As I mentioned before, while the show represents the FARC as pure evil without any nuance, the Castaños are initially shown in a tragic and sympathetic light, due to their recent victimization. Their moral decay progresses through the episodes, as they complete their transition toward victimizers. This is true for all three brothers, but it is particularly noticeable in Carlos, who unlike his brothers is less keen on making money from drug trafficking and is most coherent in his anti-communist sentiment. In fact, Carlos reaches a sort of moral redemption in the last episodes, when he tries to dismantle the AUC because he realizes that the group has become a narcoterrorist organization. As he is trying to make amends, however, he is killed by Vicente's man before he can see his project through. An illustrative scene is in episode 7, when the brothers decide to start their own cocaine operation to fund their struggle. While they discuss where to build their laboratories, they have a confrontation:

> Fidel: Lo que hace falta es donde montar las cocinas.
>
> Vicente: Las vamos a montar aquí en nuestras propias fincas, Fidel. No nos vamos a poner ni a comprar ni a alquilar. ¿Entendido? Aquí en nuestras propias fincas.
>
> Carlos: En la finca de papá. ¿La van a montar en la finca de papá o qué?
>
> Fidel: Es que esta finca no es de papá. Esta finca la compré yo, Carlos. Y yo hago lo que quiero.
>
> Carlos: ¿Usted va a faltar el respeto a la memoria de papá, Fidel? ¿En esa finca a donde él trabajó la tierra usted le va a montar una cocina de coca? Conmigo no cuenten para eso.
>
> [Fidel: All that is left to decide is where to build the labs.
>
> Vicente: We will build them in our own ranches, Fidel. We are not going to buy them or lease them. Understood? Here in our own ranches.
>
> Carlos: In Dad's ranch. Are you going to build a lab in Dad's ranch then?
>
> Fidel: This is not Dad's ranch. I bought it, Carlos. And I do what I want.
>
> Carlos: You are going to disrespect my father's memory, Fidel? In this ranch where he worked the land you are going to build a coke lab? Don't count on me for this one.]

The conflict between Carlos and the two brothers regarding cocaine continues throughout the series. In this exchange the memory of the father, which symbolizes Carlos's commitment to revenge, is put into contrast with cocaine, which

symbolizes greed. Cocaine cannot be used to fund a "just" war, because it corrupts the soldiers' souls, leading them to forget their original motives and head down a road of moral degradation. As more the show progresses, the AUC and the brothers get closer and closer to becoming drug traffickers themselves.

The notion of cocaine as morally degrading and depoliticizing does not originate with the show. It formed a core part of the US State Department and the Colombian government's strategy to legitimize the so-called War on Drugs. From the late '90s, and particularly after Uribe became president, the United States and Uribista factions repeatedly asserted that FARC and ELN were drug trafficking organizations and they should not therefore be considered political actors. This allowed for the US to invest funds in counter-narcotic efforts in Colombia without having to acknowledge counterinsurgency operations, and the Colombian state to claim distance from the paramilitaries (Leech 88–117; Paley 64–98). The anti-drugs rhetoric rests on a depiction of cocaine as an evil product, charged with symbolic meanings. According to this rhetoric, cocaine's power is such that those who use it to finance a war will lose sight of their goals and become "narcos"—implicitly not something that could happen if they used other sources of funding. In this logic cocaine resembles a satanic figure, offering riches at the price of one's soul.

The moralist view of cocaine concludes that the AUC got into trafficking because of "greed". In reality, cocaine has helped paramilitarism just like all the other resources favoured by capitalist modes of production, such as bananas, oil, or coffee. The narrative attributes negative values to cocaine because of its illegality, obscuring the economic relations that regulate its production. The high profit margins and capitalist nature of cocaine was recognized by the FARC themselves, who for this reason avoided getting directly involved with it, until the AUC's growth made it vital to find more funds to avoid defeat (Norman 649–53).

In reality, the bad reputation brought about by the association with cocaine motivated Castaño to attempt to cut the links between the AUC and drug trafficking during talks of disarmament with the government. This spurred an internal struggle within the AUC, leading to Castaño's death (Ronderos 691–717). The fierce conflict between Carlos and his ex-allies takes place in the last part of the show. In episode 74, Carlos, Vicente, and other commanders are discussing sources of funding for the AUC. Also present at the table is Serna, whose character is inspired by legendary drug trafficker Diego Murillo Bejarano, aka Don Berna.

> Miembro de las AUC: Como ustedes saben, últimamente el frente que nos da los más recursos son el narcotráfico, las extorsiones, el robo de combustible, y en última instancia los secuestros.
>
> Carlos: Yo se lo dejé claro la otra vez. Yo acepté que el narcotráfico entrara a las AUC para financiarnos. Pero yo no estoy de acuerdo con eso. [. . .]
>
> Serna: [. . .] Y yo también te voy a hablar sin tapujos, Carlos. Yo sé que vos y el Alemán quieren seguir con la línea de atacar primero a la guerrilla. Pero no todos pensamos de la misma manera. Y vos crees que yo voy a perder esa plática? ¡No, m'hijo, no está ni tibio! [. . .]

> Vicente: Un momentico, señores. Bajemos el tonito. [. . .] El reclamo que está haciendo Carlos es un reclamo justo. Nosotros nos hemos dedicado solamente a exportar coca y abrir nuevas rutas. Pero lo verdaderamente importante, que es matar guerrilleros, se perdió. Así que, por favor, ¡bajemos el tono, señores! [. . .]
>
> Carlos: Qué berraquera, Vicente. Ahora resulta que sus nuevos amigos puedan dirigir esto mejor que yo. [. . .]
>
> Ernesto Báez: Carlos, nadie está diciendo que le va a quitar la comandancia. Todos sabemos que usted es la persona perfecta para manejar esto, cálmese.
>
> Carlos: ¿Cálmese? ¡Cálmese nada, señor! ¡Yo me di cuenta de lo que está pasando aquí! ¿Ustedes quieren mi cabeza? A ver, vengan por ella. ¡Párese y venga por ella! ¿O le da miedo? ¿Usted quiere luchar conmigo? Venga a mi trinchera y yo con mucho gusto le ayudo. ¡Usted se sale de mi trinchera y le doy bala señor! ¡A usted, a usted, a los que sea! ¡Yo, 20 años dándome bala con la guerrilla! ¿Y voy a tener miedo de un poco de traquetos?
>
> [AUC member: As you all know, lately our biggest sources of funding have been drug trafficking, extortion, fuel theft, and finally kidnapping.
>
> Carlos: I already made this clear last time. I accepted that drug trafficking would enter into AUC to finance us. But I don't agree with it. [. . .]
>
> Serna: [. . .] I am going to speak plainly as well, Carlos. I know that you and the Alemán want to keep focusing on attacking the guerrilla first. But we don't all think the same way. And you think I am going to lose that dough? No, son, you are dreaming! [. . .]
>
> Vicente: One moment gentlemen. [. . .] Carlos' complaint is fair. We have focused on exporting cocaine and opening new (trafficking) routes, but we've lost sight of what's really important: killing guerrillas. So please, gentlemen, let's watch our tone! [. . .]
>
> Carlos: This is amazing, Vicente. Now it looks like your friends can lead this better than me [. . .]
>
> Ernesto Báez: Carlos, nobody is saying we take the leadership away from you, we all know you are the perfect person for the job, calm down.
>
> Carlos: *(Yelling)* Calm down? There's no calming down! I see what's going on here! Do you want my head? So come for it! Get up and go for it! Or are you scared? You want to fight with me? Stay by me and I'll be glad to help you. But you leave me, I'll give you a bullet! You, you, and whoever else! I've spent 20 years exchanging bullets with the guerrilla! And you think I am afraid of a bunch of drug dealers?]

The show thus portrays Carlos's reservations about trafficking as originating from moral concerns, while in reality he was aware that to be identified as narcos would have complicated the demobilization of the AUC. This scene is important because it constitutes the beginning of the internal conflict between Carlos and the other commanders. While the others seem to be primarily motivated by greed, Carlos is represented as more committed to his ideas. This does not constitute an outright defence of Carlos Castaño, but it does reinforce the idea that the history of

paramilitarism is that of a downfall, that starts from a morally positive origin (that of the victim) and end corrupted by violence and drug trafficking. When Carlos attempts to take the reins and lead the AUC away from drugs, he comes to realize that the war he believed he had to fight has turned him into a monster: just before he dies, he repents and attempts to make amends. Again, this narrative does not come from the writer's imagination. It is exactly how demobilized paramilitaries described themselves during and after the peace process. They asked for forgiveness and reconciliation, while remarking that their motives were good, as they had been victimized as well (Angarita Cañas et al. 227–33; Tate).

This brings us to my final point, which is that while the show seems to call for peace, in truth it perpetuates warmongering masked by humanitarian rhetoric. Given that *Tres Caínes* characterizes the armed actor in moral terms, without addressing social and economic reasons for the violence, the only peace process that it can countenance is one of repentance and forgiveness. The AUC's demobilization is atypical for an armed group, as the paramilitaries demobilized at the peak of their strength, without asking for any political reforms. They did so because once the US funded the Colombian army to fight the FARC, their presence became unnecessary and embarrassing for the government, and they simply surrendered in the expectation of maintaining their wealth and of receiving full amnesty. This is why they were happy to "repent" and play the victims as they did. But this was not possible for the guerrilla, which has always been a military target of the State and is fighting for a revolutionary cause. The peace process with the Left can only be constructed through a negotiation that acknowledges the political causes of the violence and addresses them through reform. To call for the "repentance" of the guerilla is equivalent to supporting military action until their total destruction, which was precisely Uribe's strategy during his tenure.

Hence, it is no surprise that Uribe's far-right party Centro Democrático opposed the 2016 peace process with the FARC since news of the talks between President Santos's government and the guerrilla first became public. Furthermore, RCN, the news network that aired and produced *Tres Caínes*, has strongly supported Uribe's opposition throughout the negotiations and afterwards (López de la Roche, "From Uribe's 'Democratic Security'"). The Centro Democrático has repeatedly criticized and attempted to sabotage the process, and the party's victory in the 2018 presidential elections has put the demobilization of the FARC into a crisis (Hart; Gill; Kincaid).

A recent example of President Iván Duque Márquez's crusade against the peace process has been to insist that sexual crimes against minors not be covered by the peace process's tribunals jurisdiction, which would expose FARC members to ordinary trials for these crimes. Duque stated that, "Nothing, no ideology or absolutely nothing justifies the vile aggression against the most vulnerable of our society. We, Colombians, have to invest all efforts in the protection of minors" ("Cuáles son las tres reformas"). Considering that a common practice among the FARC was to force female fighters to abort in the case of a pregnancy, as a newborn could not be taken care of in a mobile military camp, this would expose virtually

every FARC commander to trial in the ordinary justice system, and it would almost certainly sabotage the peace process ("Cuáles son las tres reformas"). It is clear here how the pretense of "siding with the victims" can be used against peace. The issue exemplifies who truly benefits from the universalization of the category of victim in Colombia: the current government claims to support all victims but in reality weaponizes the victims of its enemy in order to silence its own. Moreover, Duque's statement closely resembles the rhetoric of *Tres Caínes*, as the sordidness of the crime is taken as proof of its lack of ideological, and hence political, component. This causality is then utilized to demonize and deny the legitimacy of the enemy as a political actor. Furthermore, because of how the discourse is constructed, anybody who opposes it can be accused of siding with the criminal against the victims, and the more vulnerable the victim, the worse such opposition becomes.

Finally, *Tres Caínes* narrates the story of the Castaños as a defeat, as the brothers first lose their family, and then they get killed by each other. But to consider paramilitarism itself as a failure is a mistake. While the individual leaders have been killed or arrested, paramilitarism was highly successful in defeating the guerrilla politically. Through acts of terrorism and genocide the AUC were able to cut off the relations between the guerrillas and the population, pushing the FARC toward militaristic positions from which they were unable to achieve the status of the "people's army" that they desired. After the guerrillas' political defeat came the military offensive that defeated them on the battlefield. The AUC have ensured that Colombian ruling classes could maintain their position and avoid revolution. To support the victims from the same political perspectives that lead to their deaths in the first place is not pacifism: it is another phase of the war, in which the victors rewrite history to hide the foundations of the system in which they thrive.

Conclusions

The analysis of *Tres Caínes* is effective in proving how reactionary ideologies and military strategies can be delivered through a language that cleaves to contemporary, widely shared ethical positions and pacifist ideas. The philosophy of nonviolence and the humanitarian discourse can be rearticulated in war to support an armed actor, to demonize the enemy, and to move the country away from peace and an honest, collective conversation about its history of violence. More often than not, in contemporary geopolitics the victim ideology serves to justify wars and to grant the status of protector, defender, or avenger to the attacker, reconstructing history as a timeline where initiators of conflict deserve what they get by dint of acting first.

My article has attempted to deconstruct a rhetoric which, despite a pretence of pacifism and empathy, is in fact dangerously close to fanaticism and hate. It utilizes empathy toward one group to deny it to another and opposes any dialogue or negotiation with an enemy that can be portrayed as a monster, a

criminal, or a terrorist. This radical position is always justified by sympathy toward vulnerability and weakness and accuses any opposition of corruption for its implicit justification of the victimizer. In Colombia, this implies reinforcing the hate toward the Guerrilla, who in the political discourse are often more of an imaginary figure than a real armed actor, and whose cause of existence, rooted in the violent expropriation of campesino land, is completely forgotten.

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