**Prof. Brett Troyan**

**Title of Paper: By and On Manuel Quintin Lame: an exploration of counterhegemonic writings and narratives on Colombian indigenous identity in the 20th and 21st centuries.**

**General historical context to the Colombian indigenous movement**

One of the most remarkable developments in recent Colombian history is the success of the indigenous political movement. The indigenous people, which represent only 3. 43 percent of Colombia’s population, have rights over almost 25 percent of the national territory. Scholars have attributed the success of the indigenous movement to the strength of the indigenous grassroots organizations (Avirama 1994, Findji 1992), to the weakness of the central state (Van Cott 2000), to the exceptional indigenous intellectual leadership of Colombian indigenous communities (Rappaport 1990) and, recently, to successful intercultural relationships established with non-indigenous sectors of society (Troyan 2002 and 2008, Laurent 2005, Caviedes 2000, Rappaport 2005). While these factors played an important role in the success of the Colombian indigenous movement, this paper will explore the importance of the narrative that was constructed around the indigenous Colombian movement that made visible the indigenous Colombian population and that challenged the hegemonic vision of indigenous people that portrayed them as ignorant, backwards, and consigned them to lower status and that denied them full citizenship rights. **The paper will first concentrate on the narrative that the premier Colombian indigenous leader Manuel Quintin Lame elaborated that countered the dominant, racist, and exclusionary discourse on indigenous communities.** It will focus on the indigenous leader’s **circular narrative** that blurred Western notions of chronology and that upended the existing social, economic, and racial hierarchy of Colombia in the twentieth century.

In many regards, Manuel Quintín Lame (1880-1967) was predestined to become Cauca’s most famous indigenous leader. Manuel Quintín Lame’s life was an intersection of Colombian national politics and of the economic and social trends in southwestern Colombia, specifically the Cauca. In 1880, he was born on a hacienda, *La Polindara*, located near Popayán that belonged to one of Cauca’s most elite families, the Arboledas. His parents, both indigenous, were sharecroppers/*terrajeros* like many indigenous people of central Cauca. The fact that they did not own their land was a reflection of earlier historical periods of conquest and colonization of indigenous people in Cauca. In the central valley of Cauca many indigenous people experienced land dispossession; they went from collectively owning the land they farmed to becoming tenants of the same land. However, in other parts of the Cauca, communal landholding of indigenous communities survived; the premier indigenous leader sought to defend and preserve these communal land grants.

Throughout the twentieth century, Manuel Quintin Lame was an indigenous leader (of Nasa ethnicity) who challenged the dominant narrative about Native Americans (indigenous people) in Colombia, South America. This indigenous leader fought against the economic, social, and ethnic dominant hierarchy with his extensive legal correspondence that utilized the laws that protected indigenous communal landholding and with his mostly non-violent actions that led him to be imprisoned 108 times. His prolific writings (he wrote thousands of pages and a memoir) used a circular chronology and emphasized the continuity between the then contemporary issues that plagued indigenous communities (land dispossession, forced labor, and systematic oppression of native values and culture) with pre-Columbian notions of land ownership and religious values. He used Native American imagery and founding “myths.” His narrative reversed the reigning social order by portraying indigenous values and traditions as superior to Western values. Manuel Quintin Lame emphasized the interconnectedness between nature, human beings, and the cosmos. His writings were rooted in indigenous spirituality. The political aim of this narrative was to emphasize that the land of Colombia belonged to the indigenous/Native American communities and delegitimized the ownership of the descendants of Spanish conquistadors.

**The second part of the paper will concentrate on the analysis of a recent documentary (2015) on Manuel Quintin Lame “Raiz de Pueblo/ Root of the people.”** This new documentary (which has recently won prizes) highlights the contributions that Manuel Quintin Lame made and weaves in his writings and circular narrative on indigenous communities. The documentary alternates between interviews of present day indigenous activists who recount their struggle for recognition of their indigenous identity with sections that are extracts of Manuel Quintin Lame’s writings. Although the Colombian indigenous movement was very successful in obtaining legal recognition of its communal landholdings, the recent neoliberal policies have placed their land and cultural values in jeopardy once again. In particular, large mining companies have placed enormous pressure on indigenous communities to either leave their land and/or have destroyed the environment and ecology of their territory so that traditional indigenous agriculture can no longer be practiced. While Colombian scholars and indigenous activists are familiar with the story and activism of Manuel Quintin Lame, the Colombian public at large is not. This documentary begins the attempt to change the general Colombian public’s perception of indigenous communities by emphasizing the unique and valuable history of indigenous activism. The values that the indigenous movement of Colombia promote are of respect of individuals, communities, and of the environment that are in direct contradiction with the neoliberal policies of development and of government austerity programs. The second part of my presentation will highlight the importance of this recent and circular narrative on the indigenous movement. On a personal note, I was honored to be invited to view the documentary before its release to check its English subtitles since the director of the documentary ( Pedro Tattay) intends to show this documentary to English speaking audiences as well. I came to meet Pedro Tattay through his parents whom I interviewed for my book on the Colombian indigenous movement. His parents were both important activists in the earlier stages of the indigenous Colombian movement; the continuity and commitment of activists of the Colombian indigenous movement can be seen in this intergenerational effort to change the dominant narrative on Colombian indigenous communities.

The paper will hopefully communicate to other proponents of social activism the unique strategies of re-representation of indigenous communities in Colombia that have worked effectively to counter exclusionary and racist hegemonic discourses towards certain racial groups. The narrative by Colombian indigenous communities (pioneered by Manuel Quintin Lame) not only counter the exclusionary discourse but root their counter-discourse in cultural traditions that blur time boundaries and that emphasize the importance of mutual respect and recognition of all peoples.

**Biographical Note**

A Ph. D. in Latin American History from Cornell University, Brett Troyan lives in Ithaca, New York. Before she began her graduate studies at the State University of New York at Stonybrook, she lived in Bogotá, Colombia for four years. She is a Professor of History at Cortland College, State University of New York. She is the author of a book, *Cauca’s indigenous movement in Southwestern Colombia: Land, Violence, and Ethnic Identity in Colombia* (2015). She has also published a number of peer reviewed journal articles on the Colombian indigenous movement as well as essays on Afro-Colombians; one of her articles, published by the European journal CEDLA, was republished and translated into German in 2010. The article, which accompanies a Colombian indigenous artist’s work and an anthropologist’s annotations, is now part of a book, Unsere Leute Namuy Misag: Land, Bräuche und Glaubensvorstellungen der Guambianos. Nacherzählt von Gregorio von Hernandez de Alba. Her research was funded by the Fulbright, National Endowment for Humanities (summer and year long fellowships), United States Institute of Peace, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation for Democracy (junior grant).