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Mauricio Caviedes

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JOSÉ TOMBÉ
An anthropologist's novel
and its predictions about the indigenous leaders
and their struggles in Colombia

Mauricio CAVIEDES*

José Tombé: Between reality and literature

This article examines the historical impact of the novel *José Tombé* in anthropological and political representations of indigenous people in Colombia, during the second half of the twentieth century. It looks at how the contradictory representations of peaceful yet dangerous, intelligent yet irresponsible, powerful yet incapable, are used in order to explain indigenous subordination. It attempts to identify elements in the writings and language of contemporary indigenous leaders that recreate those representations in recent indigenous autobiographies. Finally, it examines the author's contradictory position towards the claims of indigenous people's land rights. From a theoretical standpoint, this paper is inspired in the ideas of Edward Said, to explain the political role of intellectual discourse, as a form of political communicative action that can, either reinforce the establishment, or strengthen political struggles

* Department of Anthropology. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana – Cra 7 N° 40-62 – Edificio Manuel
Briceño (Facultad de Ciencias Sociales) – Bogota (Colombia) – ZIP code
110231
Email: mauriciocaviedes2009@gmail.com

from excluded groups. The aim of this paper is to think of the consequences of such literary representations in political and public opinion, as well as the responsibilities of anthropologists as authors in considering the influence of their ideas in public opinion.

If contemporary anthropologists seek to present a critical, politically informed point of view of indigenous people and their rights, it seems useful to rethink the sources of our contemporary representations. Only that could lead anthropology to create new forms of writing that overcome the misunderstandings between indigenous people and national non indigenous citizens.

The novel *José Tombé* was first published in 1942, but written in the late 1920's by a young intellectual from the city of Popayán, in the Colombian Andes. As a young man, Diego Castrillón, its author, was already involved in the Colombian conservative party and the intellectual life in Popayán. Castrillón was born in a family of landowners in the region and was to become, later in his life, a representative of the conservative party in local government, as well as one of the first trained anthropologists in Colombia. His novel presents indigenous struggles for land rights both in admiration and in fear, as these struggles were perceived by local elites at the time. The hero in the novel represents the struggles of Andean indigenous people to recover lands that they claimed to be theirs before the arrival of Spanish conquerors. But this hero is also represented in the novel as feared by the local political elites in Popayán.

The life of José Tombé, as presented in the novel, resembles in many ways the everyday life of indigenous leaders from the region. In the novel, the relation between indigenous people and local landowners is presented as a tension based on economical exploitation and abuse. The life of indigenous people is very similar to feudal exploitation. The novel presents the Andean indigenous people as societies struggling against injustice, and longing for peace, away from white man's power.

In the novel, to escape this feudal exploitation, the hero, José Tombé, leads his people into the mountains, away from the haciendas, to create a free and peaceful society without the presence of

“white” or “mestizo” landowners. But the hero in the novel also represents the danger of a young, strong, fearless leader that threatens political and economic power, rising against his oppressors, followed by a raging mob of warriors, blinded by hatred against historical injustice that started the day “white men” occupied indigenous lands.

Historians, sociologists and other academics have focused on studying the life of similar real life leaders, like Manuel Quintín Lame, who created an organized group of indigenous peasants to expel landowners from indigenous lands. Years after Lame’s death, the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC (Regional indigenous council of the Cauca) has used the image and the name of Lame to gain political approval amongst indigenous population (Rappaport, 1990; Findji, 1992; Pineda Camacho, 1984). Recent biographies, published by indigenous intellectuals with help from non indigenous anthropologists, reveal important similarities with the portrait of the fictional character José Tombé.

Besides, Castrillón did not believe that the indigenous people that inhabited the rural Andean surroundings of the city of Popayán were “natives” in the strict sense of the term. To him, the native indigenous people, rightful owners of those lands, that were later occupied by “white” or “mestizo” settlers, had been extinguished in colonial times. The contemporary indigenous inhabitants of the Andes were, to Castrillón, indigenous immigrants brought as slaves or as workers to build the city of Popayán (Castrillón, 1990).

During the 1940, Castrillón became one of the first trained professional anthropologists in Colombia and defended those ideas against the indigenous claims of historical rights to such lands. How, then, did he create a novel that, in a way, predicted the appearance of leaders such as Manuel Quintín Lame? How can indigenous leaders’ descriptions of their own past resemble José Tombé’s story? Why did the image of the bravery and cruelty of indigenous leaders and commoners become so popular in the minds of contemporary intellectuals?

To answer these questions, it is important to think in terms of theories that attempt to explain the political role of intellectuals in contemporary societies. The purpose of this article is, therefore, to ask about the influence of intellectuals and their representations of indigenous people on society and on the rights of indigenous people. Many authors agree that intellectuals play a political role in contemporary societies. However, there is a debate about whether the consequences of that role played by intellectuals is a contribution to democracy, or an instrument for perpetuating conventional power.

Jeffrey Goldfarb, on the one hand, suggests that intellectuals make a contribution to democracy independently of their political position, or party. Opposing the establishment or defending it, intellectuals turn the communicative instruments of power into public political instruments, according to Goldfarb (1998). In other words, they create new political subjects, and identities by performing communicative acts that define a group of people and their relation to society. These communicative acts, or discourses, have consequences in the relation between society and these new groups.

On the other hand, Said suggests that intellectuals use communicative acts that change political relations, but underlines the responsibility of intellectuals that oppose the establishment by creating communicative instruments for those politically excluded by power. Said does not ignore the actions of intellectuals that stand on the side of the establishment, but believes that those who create new forms of discourse to put in the hands of the excluded have bigger influence in social changes (Said, 1996).

This paper seeks to demonstrate that *José Tombé* is part of the creation of a communicative act, a political discourse, that determined the way indigenous people are perceived and see themselves in their political struggles for rights.

Indigenous struggles: contradictory indigenous representations

José Tombé, the hero in the novel by Diego Castrillón, is an indigenous leader from the Andean region, born from a people

proud of their prehispanic ancestors, but subordinated to humiliation and economic exploitation. In the novel, the indigenous population is condemned to poverty by “white” mestizos that occupy their lands, and make them work for others in their own territory, in the benefit of those “white” invaders (Castrillón 1973).

In the novel, Tombé experiences a growing hatred towards all white men. Humiliations imposed on all by the landowner, who attempted to rape the hero's mother and murdered his father, feed this hatred. During his youth, he reveals himself as reckless and fearless and slowly becomes a leader who tries to expel the white men from indigenous lands, and even attacks the city of Popayán, center of the white man's power. But his life is divided by his own desires as the leader of a monumental empire and his experience in pain from poverty. Among his people, Tombé is different because he is not controlled by his impulses and emotions. On the contrary, he is careful, and calculates the dangers and possibilities before attacking, but he is also ambitious in his political purposes. He is scrupulous and generous with his enemies too. At the same time, Tombé is a warrior that knows how to talk to his people, how to awaken their emotions. The mountains he inhabits are sometimes described as a paradise of a simple agricultural life. But sometimes those lands are presented as a wild environment, where his people are exploited with cruelty, a cold unfertile world, the battle field where he and his followers hide to attack.

Just like his territory, Tombé is a contradictory character. Two personalities live inside of him and tear his emotions apart, leading him to death. His uprising against white-man's power is also fed by contradictory emotions. On the one hand, he is fighting for his people's freedom from landowner's exploitation, to live a free and simple life in the mountains, away from the city and the white-man's power. His first actions in the novel are led by these desires. But his hatred against white men increases his need for vengeance, his acts of cruel robbery and the occupation of stolen lands. Amongst his own men, Tombé is always superior: if his men jump to attack at the wrong moment, he stops them. When they act by rage to murder

white men, Tombé reprehends them. When he finds his men drunk fighting each other, Tombé controls them.

But as the indigenous army following Tombé gains battles and approaches the city, Tombé changes from noble leader to a wild, cruel dictator. The principles of a free life for indigenous people guides his leadership and makes him superior. Hatred, instead, overwhelms him, and deteriorates him to the point of impeding him to love, even for the young indigenous woman that represents for him the freedom and peace he claims to fight for.

Finally, after defeating the army in Popayán, Tombé's followers are consumed by the feeling of power and destroy the city, only to get drunk in celebration of their victory. At this point, the Popayán army recovers and takes the city back. But as this happens, Tombé has forgotten every political purpose, and cares only about killing the landowner that murdered his father. Once the landowner dies, Tombé recovers his conscience, repents from vengeance, realizes that his men are being defeated, but it is too late to fight back, and commits suicide.

The political ideas at that moment in Latin America may help in understanding where the author got his inspiration for this novel. During the first half of the twentieth century, Latin-American intellectuals created unforeseen representations of indigenous people. Such new representations, according to anthropologists such as Roberto Pineda Camacho (*op. cit.*), Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1983) and Carlos Iván Degregori (2000), were a result of an intellectual effort to find a role for indigenous people in the construction of modern Latin-American states. For some of those intellectuals, indigenous people were a threat to modern societies. For others, those indigenous people were capable of making a social and economic contributions. And some thought of indigenous people as a potential social and political movement to achieve a new type of society (Pineda Camacho, *op. cit.*). But, above all, the representations of indigenous people were ambiguous and contradictory.

Hoping to find in indigenous people the fountain of an authentic culture for a new nation, away from European influence,

Colombian and Mexican intellectuals created monumental descriptions of prehispanic societies, whose greatness resembled that of empires. But contemporary indigenous societies were depicted as subordinated and poor, a race defeated by European domination (Pineda Camacho, *op. cit.*; Bonfil Batalla, *op. cit.*; Degregory, 2000).

According to Pineda Camacho (*op. cit.*), in Colombia, among leftist intellectuals, the idea of an imaginary monumental indigenous society, probably inspired by Mexican indigenism, grew strong and was related to the belief that Colombian lower classes inherited traces of those monumental societies. It was thought that these were, therefore, capable of constructing a new, better nation. Indigenous leaders in the decades of 1930 and 1940, such as Manuel Quintín Lame gained interest from intellectuals that searched for leaders within and for the popular classes. They were seen as inheritors of a great society that was defeated, but still capable of gaining back their place in history. This view is visible in the work of influential leftist intellectuals such as Gerardo Molina (1986).

Other intellectuals thought of indigenous people as the source of an impoverished peasant Colombian population, incapable of economic progress and an obstacle for the national “mestizo” society, struggling for a place in progress and history. For these intellectuals, indigenous people kept their lands, and the natural resources in them, and refused to give them away to the Colombian elites, to make them pay the cost of domination. Therefore, their existence could only be understood if explained as a result of an insoluble relation between them and their lands. They were, then, the source of poverty in the whole nation. And they were part of their lands, linked to their territories. An important example of this representation can be found in texts written by the influential right wing conservative leader, Laureano Gómez, where he explained his theories about the difficulties to overcome, in order to achieve economic progress in Colombia (Gomez, 1970).

This double image of indigenous people remained and expanded: Indians were depicted as monumental, but poor, wild but

dominated, ignorant and wise, hopeful and desperate, noble and villain. Indigenous people have been represented in these contradictory terms in Colombian literature, and political language.

Indigenous people were part of their lands. The metaphors and literary descriptions in the novel “José Tombé” represent the hero and describe him in scenarios that are compatible with his character. His hatred made him insensitive as he got older. And this hatred is described in moments when he observes the horizon, surrounded by cold infertile mountains, covered by the mist, where he and his army hide silently, waiting for revenge. The character of the indigenous leader and the character of the lands he inhabits are compatible. He and his land are one.

This image of indigenous leaders remained as part of anthropological, artistic and political descriptions of indigenous people. The real leaders of the 1930's seemed to demonstrate the accuracy of such representations. Nevertheless, these representations remain long after the decades of 1930 and 1940. To understand the motives for such representations amongst Colombian intellectuals and indigenous leaders, a brief context of the origin of indigenous organizations shall be helpful.

Liberal and conservative representations of indigenous people between “La Violencia” and “El Frente Nacional”

“La Violencia” is a name used by Colombian historians to refer to a period of political instability (1946 to 1958), with the conservative party in power, but strong ideological opposition led by the liberal party. Colombia had a pool of unemployed workers between 1946 and 1958, due to violent appropriation of peasant lands. Landowners stood on the side of the conservative party, using mercenaries to protect their lands from liberal guerrillas, born as a result of the violent action against peasants. But the liberal party was incapable of keeping popular support (Montaña Cuellar, 1977).

The liberal party defended an agrarian reform policy, but, according to Collier & Collier (2002), the real purpose of the party was to threaten conservative power. This is why, agrarian reforms in

Colombia did not seek redistribution of land property. Liberals believed that peasants should migrate to the cities to work for an industry that needed to grow, or invade useless lands in the wide non cultivated areas (Zamosc, 1978; Le Grand, 1986; Múnera, 1998).

In 1958, liberals and conservatives signed an agreement known as the “Frente Nacional”, a political system, limited almost exclusively to liberals and conservatives. Although liberal leaders continued to defend an agrarian reform, many peasants decided that liberal leaders did not represent their interests.

In 1966, the liberal party promoted new agrarian reform laws, and the creation of the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos – ANUC (Zamosc, *op. cit.*; Múnera, *op. cit.*), but leftist parties saw it as a possible growth in class consciousness, and not too long after, the government started sharing that interpretation. As a result, the government started promoting military persecution of peasant leaders, and support to conservative peasant leadership to stop agrarian reform (Zamosc, *op. cit.*; Pécaut, 1989; Archila, 2005; Múnera, *op. cit.*).

Indigenous leaders started in this peasant organization, but the internal division created by the government led them to create new organizations (Findji, *op. cit.*). Although the language used by leaders reflects nostalgia for a violent revenge, similar to the one represented by Tombé, this warlike language is a metaphor of indigenous struggles against injustice from the national society, and cannot be confused with historical facts. Indigenous leaders in Colombia never ceased to believe that laws were a better political instrument than violence (Findji, *ibid.*; Tattay, 1995).

In his autobiography, Juan Gregorio Palechor, an important indigenous leader in the Andean region, exposes his frustrations with law as an instrument of indigenous struggles. But, even if frustrated by law, he believed it was the right path for the indigenous movement (Palechor & Jimeno, 2006).

Love for the liberal party seems to be central in his evolution as a leader. As a child, he remembers, voting for the liberal party was an act of political defiance (Palechor & Jimeno, *ibid.*). The

liberal leadership of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán gained acceptance amongst indigenous voters, because Colombian elites referred to Gaitán as if he was an indigenous leader himself (Palechor & Jimeno, *ibid.*)

Another important indigenous leader in Colombia, Lorenzo Muelas, describes “la Violencia” as a period of strong proximity between indigenous people and the liberal party (Muelas, 2005). The assassination of Gaitán was one of the motives for the explosion of a period of armed persecution against liberals. During this period, the image of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán remained a motive for peasant movements to identify with the liberal party (Braun, 2008).

In the view of indigenous leaders, both liberals and liberal dissidents betrayed peasants, once they started sharing power with the conservative party (Palechor & Jimeno, *op. cit.*). This betrayal was reflected not only in reducing the importance of agrarian reform, but also in using police and military repression against peasant organizations (Ayala, 1995, 2008; Collier & Collier, *op. cit.*).

Once out of the influence of the liberal party, during the decade of 1960, peasant organizations found proximity in socialist ideas. This was seen as a threat by both conservatives and liberals. Military and police repression against peasant organizations was both the result of internal processes and North-American cold war influence. Between 1958 and 1982, social movements were marked as allies of guerrillas and persecuted as military enemies. Although Colombia did not suffer dictatorships, as did other South-American countries, the legal reforms that Colombia went through during the period were quite similar to those imposed in Argentina, Brazil and Chile during the dictatorships (Blair, 1993). Within this context, modern indigenous organizations were born, the most important and the first of them being the “Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca” – CRIC (Indigenous Council of the Cauca Region).

Thus, once finished the period known as “La Violencia”, identity with Jorge Eliecer Gaitán gave place to representations of indigenous leaders from the 1930s, such as Manuel Quintín Lame,

whose story resembles that of Tombé very closely. In the 1950s, Diego Castrillón, the author of *José Tombé*, wrote a historical essay on Manuel Quintín Lame, published as one of the first books on the leader (Castrillón, 1973).

What seems important here is the fact that images of indigenous leaders gain importance in indigenous organizations only after the influence from the liberal party decreases. And, as we shall explain, those representations of indigenous leaders resemble the ambiguous image of José Tombé described above. To this purpose we shall present similarities in the descriptions of important leaders of Colombian indigenous organizations. Their own lives, and their stories resemble that of José Tombé.

Resemblances between autobiographies by indigenous leaders and indigenous leadership representations in *José Tombé*

Indigenous political leadership became less visible during the period known as “la Violencia”, according to some authors (Rappaport, *op. cit.*), but indigenous leaders remained active within the liberal party, as Colombian historians Augusto Gómez (2001) and Victor Daniel Bonilla explain (Bonilla, 1982). This participation is confirmed by testimonies written by indigenous leaders in collaboration with academic researchers.

One of such testimonies narrates the life of one of the first leaders of the Consejo regional Indígena del Cauca – CRIC, Juan Gregorio Palechor. In this testimony, Palechor himself tells how it became a family obligation and celebration to participate as voters for the liberal party during elections. Although he admits not having been aware of the national political situation at the time, he remembers how their support in the elections was part of a family loyalty to the liberal party (Palechor & Jimeno, *op. cit.*).

In telling his story, the leader exposes his frustrations defending indigenous rights by learning the national laws but, at the same time, describes his capacity to understand law as a virtue that allowed him to fight for those rights. This capacity lies in his ability to read and write. And writing determines his relation as an

indigenous leader to the national non-indigenous society (Palechor & Jimeno, *ibid.*). His parents perceived school education as a fundamental tool to relate to the non-indigenous society, and gain a different place in it. In his early years, school played a central role. The path to school was a long and painful one. But this sacrifice stands in opposition to his teachers, who treated indigenous children with disinterest and cruelty. Teaching was limited to imposing catholic religious believes (Palechor & Jimeno, *ibid.*).

His learning in the military service is full of pain and frustration. The military service is described as humiliating (Palechor & Jimeno, *ibid.*). In spite of that, Palechor presents his school experience and his experience in the military service as the basis that made him think critically of governments and landlords. Knowledge of agriculture, nature, plants and handcraft is, instead, described by Palechor as transmitted by family, in moments of emotional satisfaction. But his experience as a young leader in political parties appears as a new form of frustration, due to racial discrimination coming from non-indigenous leaders.

Palechor claims to be proud of knowing the law and understanding the government. It is that knowledge that makes him a leader. But laws, he claims also, have been always against indigenous people. It is the law that allows the government to exclude indigenous people, to take their lands from them, to impose believes and behaviors unknown to theirs.

This ambiguous relation to law is present in various descriptions of the relation between indigenous people and the Colombian State. Juan Friede, one of the first researchers on Andean people, claimed that law was the only instrument available to indigenous people during the colonial period, due to their military inferiority (Friede, 1976). The North-American anthropologist Joanne Rappaport explains that Manuel Quintín Lame, the most historically important Colombian indigenous leader, did organize armed groups originally, but died fighting through legal means (Rappaport, *op. cit.*). In a film document from 1972, Juan Gregorio Palechor appears as a leader in an emotional political, addressing the

crowd, talking about the heroic armed struggles led by Manuel Quintín Lame in the 1930s (Rodríguez & Silva, 1982).

The representation of an indomitable indigenous leader, armed to fight “white men”, followed by an indigenous brave and furious army, willing to recover by all means what history took from them is a metaphor, used in political discourse. It is a metaphor, because those indigenous leaders have not really been military leaders, but intellectual leaders. Their rage against national society is based on the economic exploitation and the exclusion imposed on them, the lands that were taken away from them. Their hatred comes from their sacrifice for that national society that left them with nothing. This hatred resembles that of the novel's hero against landowners. But that hatred leads them to desire a new society away from the mestizo power and, at the same time, desire to take the white man's place in power. This power is represented by law: both desired and hated. Both earned by sacrifice, and denied by history. Law is a metaphor for the white man's power. This is how, in the thought of Juan Gregorio Palechor, the representations of indigenous leadership resembles, in the form of a metaphor, the character created by Castrillón.

The same metaphors appear in a text written by the Andean indigenous leader Lorenzo Muelas. Muelas was the first indigenous leader to be elected senator in Colombia, in the decade of 1990. During the first decade of this century, Muelas wrote a history of the reserve he lives in, based on local narratives of oral tradition. In the version written by Muelas, the Andean indigenous territories where occupied by the growth of cattle haciendas only until the late 19th century. The indigenous lands were considered as government property, and government offered property titles to those who could demonstrate having modified those lands for agricultural production or cattle grazing. Still, some indigenous lands were legally protected by colonial collective property titles, but the government ignored or denied their existence in favor of landowners.

As a result, indigenous families found themselves at the beginning of the 20th century living, without land rights, in privately

owned haciendas. But organized unions of indigenous workers kept struggling to make the government admit the legal validity of colonial land titles. These unions were led in secret, among others, by Manuel Quintín Lame (Muelas, *op. cit.*). Even if his presence in the version of Lorenzo Muelas is brief, the mere mention of the leader shows the historical importance of his figure. In his written version of oral historical accounts, Muelas describes the punishment inflicted upon indigenous commoners, who defied the landowners' abuses, or who were supposed to work harder, or who were obliged to vote for the landowner's party. The descriptions gathered by Muelas, and his collaborator, Martha Urdaneta, told by elders in the indigenous reserve of Guambía, in the Colombian Andes, and those written by Castrillón, hold a significant resemblance. Castrillón admits that Guambía, the indigenous reserve in which Muelas grew and lived, inspired the setting of the novel, an indigenous village named "Tambalimbú", by Castrillón (Castrillón, 2009).

Diego Castrillón, José Tombé and indigenous moments in Colombia

In an interview, two years before he died, in his house in Popayán, a colonial city surrounded by indigenous reserves, Castrillón spoke about his novel to a group of anthropology students known as "Grupo de trabajo estudiantil Rexistiendo". In this interview, Castrillón spoke about his book in relation to his political ideas. In the 1980s, Castrillón was named governor of the Departamento del Cauca, one of the largest territories in Colombia. In this decade, the armed struggle in Colombia had one of its peaks. The region of Cauca became a shelter for guerrilla groups, due to its geographical position. All the guerrilla groups existing in Colombian territory were present there (Peñaranda, 1999; Tattay, *op. cit.*; Grupo de solidaridad con los pueblos indígenas, 1986). One of those guerrilla groups adopted the name of the historical leader Manuel Quintín Lame, in the claim that they represented indigenous people that had decided to engage in armed struggle, to achieve their rights in response to brutal military and police repression, led by

governments and landowners. Nevertheless, this organization, the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame (MQL), did not represent all indigenous organizations of the region, many of which rejected armed struggle as a means to achieve their rights (Findji, *op. cit.*; Tattay, *op. cit.*; Grupo de solidaridad con los pueblos indígenas, *op. cit.*).

During this period, Castrillón, as governor, was confronted with the demands of indigenous people as governor. In the interview, Castrillón explained that he believed that indigenous population needed land, and that governments had to make sure there was enough land for them. However, he insisted that indigenous people inhabiting those lands today, claiming that those territories had been theirs since before the arrival of Spaniards in America, were not the same people that inhabited the same territory five hundred years ago.

In the 1930s, Castrillón traveled to Bogotá, as a supporter of the conservative party, in opposition to his father, who was a liberal. Castrillón remained a member of the conservative party until he died. After studying law, Castrillón became a student of history, rather than a practicing lawyer and, in that process, he got involved in the study of the history of indigenous people in Colombia. Later, he studied under the influence of French anthropologist Paul Rivet's, at the Instituto Etnológico Nacional. This institution trained the first professional anthropologists in Colombia, Castrillón amongst others (Castrillón, 2009).

How, then, Castrillón, who appeared to reject indigenous claims for land ownership, who distanced himself from defenders of indigenous rights, who represented the interests of landowners at the conservative party as a government official, was capable of seducing the minds of indigenous leaders and other intellectuals? How could he create an image of indigenous struggles that seems to literally represent the feelings and experiences of real indigenous leaders?

The novel written by Castrillón achieves this seduction by presenting Tombé as a tragical leader: however fair his claims and motives to fight landowners were, Tombé was not capable of taking

power in his hands. It is not his political intelligence that leads him into the white man's cities to take power from their hands, but his hatred to the landowner's abuse. In the novel, Tombé is a metaphor of indigenous people's relation to Colombian society. Indigenous people desire to be respected as nationals and, at the same time, due to the cruel exploitation they have suffered throughout history, resent national society for having excluded them.

Castrillón did not create this image as the result of his anthropological knowledge. On the contrary, his anthropological view was the result of the fear of a landowner's class toward indigenous rebellion. This landowner class is the class Castrillón was raised in. Although Colombian anthropologists rejected his anthropological theories about the origin of indigenous people, indigenous organizations and their representation of indigenous leadership were impregnated with Tombé's tragedy. By writing a novel, Castrillón fulfilled a communicative act that imposed itself in the minds of indigenous and non-indigenous Colombian intellectuals.

What Castrillón did was to create a new representation of indigenous people materialized in the character of Tombé: intelligent as an individual, he was incapable of imposing reason upon his savage emotions, and let historical hatred control his decisions. In Castrillón's mind, Tombé represented indigenous organizations. On the other hand, Tombé reflects the characteristics that indigenous people saw in Lame and which inspired them to keep struggling, mostly by legal means, occasionally by other means, to defend their land rights.

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Summary

Can a novel predict reality? This paper explains the contradictions present in the main character of the novel *José Tombé*, his similarities with real indigenous leaders of the Colombian indigenous movements, and the author's real life actions and contradictions with the message of his novel.

Written in the early 1930s portraying the life of an imaginary indigenous hero capable of freeing indigenous people from the exploitation imposed by “white” landowners. The novel reveals a representation of indigenous organizations and leaders that prevails in the heads of academics and other intellectuals dealing with indigenous rights. This representation implies that indigenous people are both heroic for having stood the domination and exploitation of the national society but, at the same time, are incapable of dealing with the responsibilities of national political life, and lack capacity to make their own political decisions.

Key-words: History of anthropology, Colombia, indigenism, indigenous movements.

Résumé

José Tombé : Le roman d'un anthropologue et ses prédictions sur les leaders indigènes et leur lutte en Colombie

Un roman peut-il prédire la réalité ? Cet article examine les contradictions que recèle le héros de *José Tombé*, ses ressemblances avec les véritables leaders des organisations indigènes en Colombie ainsi que la vie de l'auteur et ses contradictions avec le message contenu dans le roman. Écrit dans les années 1930, le roman décrit la vie d'un héros indigène imaginaire qui parvient à libérer son peuple de l'exploitation imposée par les propriétaires « blancs ». Le roman trace un portrait des leaders et des organisations indigènes qui prévaut dans les représentations des universitaires et des intellectuels engagés sur la question des droits indigènes.

Mots-clefs : Histoire de l'anthropologie, Colombie, indigénisme, mouvements indigènes.

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