

## Nebulous/Nebulosa/Desdibujada

By Marcela T Garcés

*Una identidad nebulosa.* While it's all different now, for a long time I felt so distant from that country, *Colombia, allá en el sur...porque había pasado mucho tiempo, yo no había estado allí entre mis 14 y 24 años, 10 años muy importantes en que iba creciendo/cambiando/aprendiendo...ese país...* that was so much a part of me but so ensconced by all the ornaments and gestures I placed on my body and in my speech that would ensure that I blended in growing up in the small-town/Midwest/just-fit-in environment: I was American.

But then there's this: "For the world today, America is just the United States; the region we inhabit is a sub-America, a second-class America of nebulous identity<sup>1</sup>." I suppose, then, that I am America and sub-America, all rolled into one little empanada. Nebulous is the word.

To be more specific:

nebulous |'nebyələs|

adjective

in the form of a cloud or haze; hazy : *a giant nebulous glow.*

• (of a concept or idea) unclear, vague, or ill-defined : *nebulous concepts like quality of life.*

• another term for **nebular** .

DERIVATIVES

**nebulousity** |,nebyə'lāsītē| |'nɛbjə'ləsədi| |- 'lɒsiti| noun

**nebulously** |'nɛbjələsli| adverb

**nebulousness** |'nɛbjələsnəs| noun

ORIGIN late Middle English (in the sense [cloudy] ): from French *nébuleux* or Latin *nebulosus*, from *nebula* 'mist.' The sense [cloudlike, vague] dates from the early 19th cent.<sup>2</sup>

*niebla=fog. está nublado=it's cloudy. hay neblina=there is fog.*

*¿acaso soy yo la niebla?*

*Allí en la niebla encuentro preguntas y de hecho esta definición tiene mucho sentido...*

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<sup>1</sup> (p. 2) Galeano, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America. Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford Dictionary. 2005-2007. Apple, Inc.

For a cloud of misunderstanding, of uncertainty, falls over their eyes when they ask me their questions:

what are you? (not a typo, it's been said)  
where are you from?  
what is the origin of your last name?  
what is your background?  
how come you speak Spanish so well?  
or, my latest and greatest: you speak English really well!

When they make their assumptions, the clouds clear, at least for them:

you're not Hispanic.  
Oh, that explains the shape of your eyes and your dark hair.  
But you don't have dark skin.  
*¡hablas muy bien!*  
but you're white.  
you're not Latina.

*¿Y qué digo?* Thanks for letting me know? I don't know what to say. At times, I get a bit mad. I take it too personally. I realize I don't need to take it personally but I sometimes wish that these questions would lift like the fog lifts and then go away so that it's clear who I am, where I'm from, etc., etc., etc. I've become a bit used to causing confusion. Sometimes.

But clear is my antonym, look, at the end of the list:

nebulous  
adjective

**1** *the figure was nebulous* indistinct, indefinite, unclear, vague, hazy, cloudy, fuzzy, misty, blurred, blurry, foggy; faint, shadowy, obscure, formless, amorphous. antonym clear.

**2** *nebulous ideas* vague, ill-defined, unclear, hazy, uncertain, indefinite, indeterminate, imprecise, unformed, muddled, confused, ambiguous. antonym well-defined.<sup>3</sup>

→ Well-defined is my antonym, but I've made it work for me. I've created a well-defined story that makes sense to people.

myparentsmetingradshoolat Ohio University (not Ohio State, no, this is smaller school, in Athens, Ohio—in glamorous Athens, not Greece, nope, Ohio) in 1969, yes, the summerof69, maybe, ormaybebeforethat. He was a ChemistryPh.D./She was a Master's student in Hispanic Literature—yeslikeme. Theymet,theyfellinlove,theygotmarried...my grandma Nanny, blessherheart, was unsure about this skinny Colombian, afraid he would

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<sup>3</sup> The Oxford Thesaurus. 2005-2007. Apple, Inc.

whisk her daughter away, nevertoreturn...but they did it, TheymovedtoColombia. They lived there for

a  
few  
years

and returned to  
make a life, made possible in part by a certain corporate sponsor which will remain nameless. (*Ya ves, cuento este cuento mucho*).

*Tres niñ@s después*, in 1981 I emerged from the blurry fog, two weeks late, because I liked it there...I was born into being nebulous, I suppose.

*Entonces me quedo con esa palabra y con otra: desdibujada.*

*Casi que me gusta esta palabra más que todas las otras, porque no tiene una buena traducción: yo tampoco.*

*Al final sé que tengo que seguir intentando traducirme, intentando crear definiciones bien definidas para la gente*

*que se pone incómoda con la niebla,  
que necesita etiquetas  
y que intenta ponérmelas*

*Pero yo me quedo con “desdibujada, nebulosa,”  
porque a veces se me acerca la gente, I won’t name any names,  
and they ask me what all this means “Hispanic, Latin@, Chican@...”*

*y yo siempre digo que lo que es más importante es: el acto de autodefinirse. O sea,  
¿cómo te identificas?*

*Digo yo que desdibujada, nebulosa, ni de aquí, ni de allá, ni de pa’ca y ya está.*