

Social, Cultural and Historical Aspects of Fog in Colombia

Henry Jiménez Escobar, Universidad del Valle - Director Sede Zarzal
A.A.25360 Cali, Colombia – hjimenez@mafalda.univalle.edu.co

Abstract: Fog occurrence frequency in some regions of Colombia, affects directly, a variety of cultural expressions, social activities and commercial relationships, between communities. According with some historical reports, there was a close relation between fog and ancient central Colombia inhabitants: The Chibchas. For their culture, fog was thought of as protection cover and welfare carrier. Associated with twilight and mystery, fog phenomenon has been the inspiration source for compositions and stories of Colombian popular imaginary. Popular knowledge at rural areas, indicates that the frequent fog occurrence brings good harvest and means water abundance among farmers and peasants. On the other hand fog absence, is related with difficulties and dry seasons. Most colombian poets and writers have had dedicated their lines and couplets to the spectacle and environment created at the fields and mountains during foggy periods. Colombia is a pluricultural and biodiverse country; where different celebrations and festivities take place throughout the year according with the local culture of their inhabitants. At the municipality of Versalles – Valle del Cauca Department, every year by summer, there is the Fog Fest (Fiestas de la Neblina) celebration. In this small town in the middle of the west range of the Colombian Andes, the fog is a common phenomenon at the daily's people life; where the foggy mantle, starts going down the hills that surrounds the town and coverings it creates a particular scenario, and landscape convenient to the festivities, masquerades, parades and diverse artistic shows and ecological expositions related to the fog.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fog is a common occurrence phenomenon in some traditionally populated zones of Colombia, mainly located along the Andes mountains range. Los Andes range is divided in three branches that cross the country from Southwest to North East; its convenient environment characteristics facilitated the settlement of most Colombians.

Fog is produced frequently in certain zones of the country, because some meteorological, topographical and environmental conditions allow fog formation. Jiménez [1998].

Some conditions as spatial population distribution and surrounding environmental characteristics have created a tight man – nature relationship, in particular between some rural communities and fog. Banco de Occidente [1995].

Different natural phenomenon, have attracted mankind's imagination along history; this also has happen to the Colombians. This attraction comes since ancient time, when pre-Columbian inhabitants developed their civilizations in close relationship with nature. In fact several nature elements, were taken as their Gods, whom they respect and adore.

A variety of nature elements, as water in their different physical forms (fog for instance), has been used always by artists, poets, writers and musicians from all over the world. The artist in general uses fog to create different environments and meanings, according with the feeling, situation or depending on the particular message they want to express in their compositions. Bachelard, [1941].

In Literature and mainly in poetry, fog phenomena abandons its physical essence and then it's associated to human behaviour and also takes several different roles as messenger of love, tension, sadness and so on.

Movie industry frequently also uses the optical effects of fog, taking advantage of their visual possibilities; creating supernatural environments, or also as frame or cover for confuse, mournful or stressing situations. Artificial fog (or smoke) machines had been created and are becoming of common use, also for the spectacle world, as in discotheques, theatres, parades, etc.

The particular environment created during fog occurrence, has been an inspiration source for different generations of musicians, poets and Colombian artist in general. Nowadays these communications are still going on, and are the central part of celebrations and popular festivities.

Fog phenomena in Colombia, has had and still has special meaning for life and culture of its inhabitants; this fact is demonstrated based on some historical information, literature compositions and folkloric performances and celebrations.

2. HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Pre columbian Chibchas civilization, developed in the highlands and mountains of the central part of actual Colombia; in this region natural conditions facilitates fog occurrence. It's civilization cultured wisdom for several centuries after Christ, most of it's culture vanished sometime after the Spaniards arrival and conquest on the XV century.

The Chibchas were outstanding nature observers and astronomers. Using their meteorological and phenological observations, allow then to forecast weather, harvesting periods, hunting activities and also to program social and religious celebrations. Triana [1984].

For the Chibchas, water was their most important God, whom they adored and respected. He was called Bochica God of water, who also they related with life origin and with the power of the water. For them, lagoons were sacred places, used for consecrate their chief and also for gods adoration, this became part of El Dorado legend. According with the historical documents, reported by Triana [1984] fog was a sacred element messenger of divine wishes.

Historians mention that during some fog occurrence periods, the Chibchas used to go up certain mountains and the kipping the sun behind; then in this way their bodies' shadows were sheds against the fog. This physical phenomenon is called anthelion.

The real meaning of anthelion for Chibchas is still unknown; it could be ludic, mysterious or mystical. Its interpretation could similar to what other cultures have used. According with Zerda's [1883] description, Saxons were astonished by anthelion occurrence, calling this effect "*Broken Spectre*", as it's still known among people.

Chibchas indigenous never went up the snowed parts of the mountains, because according with their religious believes, these were sacred places. According with Hernández [1936]; during the conquest period, when the aboriginals were persecuted by the Spaniards, and the fog covered the mountains, they believed their Gods sent fog as cloaks to hide and protect them

against their hunters.

3. FOG AND CULTURE

As it usually happens in the universal culture and particularly in the Spanish-American literature as in Unamuno [1983], fog also has been used by colombian musicians, poets and writers to creates different environments and effects in their compositions.

Also it's accepted that there are different folkloric manifestations of the communities, related with their natural resources, landscape and living conditions; being fog one of those inspirational elements or celebration motives.

3.1 Fog and literature

It could be say, that few Colombian writers, had been escaped from the magical attraction of fog; using it in a broad spectrum according with their imagination request. To illustrate this condition will be mentioned next some cases.

The well known Colombian poet Porfirio Barba Jacob, in his poem "*La Neblina Perezosa*" (*Lazy Fog*), made a clear description about horizontal precipitation occurrence. A part of this poem was recovered according with Vallejo [1985] narration.

<i>La Neblina perezosa</i>	<i>Lazy fog</i>
<i>Va subiendo alla</i>	<i>is going upward over there</i>
<i>Y en jirones impalpables</i>	<i>and in untouchable shreds</i>
<i>Viene y va;</i>	<i>comes and goes</i>
<i>Y en los ramajes</i>	<i>and in the branches</i>
<i>Blancos y trémulos,</i>	<i>white and quivering</i>
<i>Las gotas de agua</i>	<i>drops of water</i>
<i>Se ven caer. ...</i>	<i>can be seen falling.</i>

Another case of use of fog, as a support element for poetry, can be found in José Asunción Silva's [1944] compositions. In Silva's poem called *Psicopatía* (Psychopathy), fog appears as a fresh caress bringing vitality, good wishes and promising times. On the other hand, in other Silva's poem called *Muerte* (Death); he uses fog as a mysterious scenario and for mournful situations.

Colombian writers, also have been using the fog characteristic, adapting it's use in their works. In his story *Ignis Ardens*, Pedro Uribe Gómez, uses fog as a transportation mechanism for thoughts, as a time for travel in time and also comparing it with the Milky

Way. Ministerio de Educación [1936].

3.2 Popular culture

For the rural inhabitants of Colombia, generally talking, fog has been a water abundance indicator and consequently of good harvests and future good times. But also fog has been used as a medium to create, spread and reinforce legends and myths.

A large number of Colombian myths have been created and spread during the mountains colonization time and also have been used as persuasive and corrective elements for human behavior, mostly for children. This is described in "*La Marquesa de Yolombó*" (The Yolombó Marchioness) from Tomás Carrasquilla [1952].

In general, according with the peasants habits, the narrations of the myths and legends, use to take place during night time, when fog covered fields and towns, creating certain kind of mystery around; a propitious condition to generate fear, suspicion and remorse feelings between the audience.

Different musical Colombian composers, also use fog in almost the same ways that the poets do; fog could be found in a variety of situations, from happiness explosion to pathetic lament.

4. FOG FESTIVITIES

One of the most clear and popular cultural Colombian expressions around the fog phenomenon, is held in Versalles, where every year in summer time, there is a celebration of The Fog Festivities (Las Fiestas de la Neblina).

Versalles has around 12.000 inhabitants, spring weather year round with working hard and friendly people. The town is located on the Western mountains in the Valle del Cauca Department, surrounded by evergreen hills and mountains at 1860 meters altitude. Most of the population occupation is related mainly with agriculture, livestock and dairy products.

Before the mid nineties, Versalles was connected with a non paved road to the rest of the country, creating difficulties to bring their products to the market and almost keeping it isolated. This isolation condition, promotion of the town to attract investors and tourists and some other cultural reasons, were connected the

origin of the fog festivities.

The celebration begins with the return of their fellow citizens, in a noisy and happy parade coming from outside town; celebrating their meeting with families, old friends and hometown.

During the celebrations, there are parades, masquerades and contests between rural communities suburbs and town quarters. The parades go through the town and suburbs of the Versalles streets, accompanied by local folkloric bands and also disk players with local and modern fest music.

The central motive for the parades and masquerades is always related with fog. People prove their inventiveness using cotton, textile and all kind of raw material for based decoration in order to creates and simulates o fog.

During the Festival's nigh time, the population meets at the town's Central Square for concerts and different artistic performances. When the fog comes into town, covering the square; the crowd celebrates happily. Local people also see and called fog also as "The white cape or the white poncho" (La ruana blanca) a typical common use cover dress in most colombian mountain populations.

The fog fest celebrations also includes in its program several eco tourist activities; as the hiking on the Aguas Lindas pathway, which takes people from the town to the View Point located in the top of the mountain. On the way to the top of the mountain, there is an area that the community recovered planting trees sometime ago, improved the town's water supply.

Ones in the top, at the View Point location, there is a nice view over the town and the surrounding area. From this strategic place the people can enjoy the green landscape and the movement of the fog along the slopes.

During certain hours the fog descends from the mountains and covers the whole town. Later on, when the fog goes away slowly and one can see how the town emerges from the fog curtain, beginning with the church tower and the tall green pines from the town's central square.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According with historical information, folkloric and cultural expressions, colombian inhabitants have kept a close relationship with fog phenomena since ancient times.

The pre columbian aboriginals, The Chibchas, gave fog a kind and protective character, according with their world view, were water represented their most important God.

Colombian culture, expressed through its writers and artists, has adopted fog as a rich and common metaphorical element. In fact, fog receives a variety of meanings according with the scene, situation or the message to be expressed.

Fog Festival in Versalles, shows how deep rooted is fog in some Colombian people, mostly among rural peasants and communities. Also it should be underlined that for most of people fog is always related with general welfare.

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