

Storm missionaries: myths and beliefs of volcanic risk. A psychosocial perspective

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Tetela del Volcan is one of the municipalities in the state of Morelos, Mexico. Its population is 20,000 inhabitants, living in the southern slope of the volcano Popocatepetl, in the Zone of highest volcanic risk. The goal of this study was to identify myths and beliefs concerning volcanic risks. Qualitative study was made using personal interviews. We have identified the existence of traditions and activities that a group called "Storm missionaries". This group exists in the community since the prehispanic period. Such congregation appoints the Popocatepetl as "Holy Face" and has a mission to perform rituals and bring offerings to ask for rain and crops to help farmers work in the region. The missionaries support that they communicate with the volcano spirit called "Face Divine" in their dreams revelations. In addition, they have some analogies of the mountain. For example the volcano spirit is represented in a seeds warehouse called "cuexcomate" inside their houses; another one is a representation of the volcano mountain as a big office where God and divinities as angels work to protect them. This group does not consider volcanic activity as a risk to the environment. They think that volcanic risk activity is caused by the lack of faith and responsibility of people. Actually this group would like to have a better control of people who go with them to rituals to keep save their holy places. They also want to collaborate with Civil Protection Organization to help people to be prepared in the case of a volcanic eruption. In spite of their beliefs they are aware that an eventual *disaster* threatens their community. It is important to consider all community groups to better understand de social construction of volcanic risk.