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The animal threads among the Wixaritari people

Abstract

The *Wixaritari* (*Huicholes* in Spanish) are an indigenous ethnic group. They live in the western central part of Mexico, mainly in the Sierra Madre Occidental range in the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, Durango and San Luis Potosí. They call themselves *Wixárika* (the people). The role the animals play in the Wixarika life reflects relationships with nature that are characteristic of their own ethos. These links begin to appear from the *mythopoetic* stage where some particular animals represent features of goodness, or wickedness. These relationships include symbolic representations of various animal species, mainly eagles, deer and snakes that play vital roles in the everyday lives of people and are endowed with sacredness and special powers. The rituals are related to the farming cycle and the search of healing powers, as well as the achievement of visionary experiences. All these processes ensure a constant harmony in the relationship between nature and culture.

In this paper we aim to provide an overview of how these roles played by animals are developed and reproduced throughout the Wixárika world. We have to consider the various forms of relationships that human beings establish with non-human animals, and how they are semiotically articulated. Thus, we focus on the interactions of the Wixaritari people and non-human animals by stressing three main aspects:

- 1) Their relationships through the everyday life
- 2) Inseparable interactions with the own mythopoetic world
- 3) Symbolic depictions reflected by means of art and new media

For the purposes of this paper, rather than grappling with ethological zoosemiotics we

are going to consider a second branch of zoosemiotics, namely *anthropological zoosemiotics* (AZ) that refers to those studies that deal with the semiotic interaction between human beings and other animals (Martinelli, 2010).

However, we will also be dealing with the branch of communicational anthropological zoosemiotics –the so-called *significational/representational* (s/rAZ), which refers to the cases when the non-human animal is a "pure source of meaning, an object, rather than a subject, of semiosis".

References

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