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OJEO, SUSTO*, HIJILLO* AND ACUAS, DISEASES OF THE KEKCHI INDIGENOUS PEOPLE*

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The Guatemalan indigenous people have a special concept about the causes of diseases and beliefs of the Kekchi indigenous people of Cobán, Alta Verapaz, who do not differ much from those of other indigenous groups in Guatemala. For them, diseases can have two different causes: those that have their natural origin, like the flu, stomach pain, etc., and those that are produced by the evil influences of other people or animals. Here we deal especially with the latter, of which the most common are: *el ojeo* or non-physical *ojo*, *el susto*, *el hijillo*, and *el acuás* (or secret).

The non-physical *ojo* disease. This disease mainly affects young children and small animals, or newborns. The Ladinos believe that this disease is produced by the following causes: 1) by a man or woman "rubbed" (discomfort that remains after

***[Ojeo refers to the belief in the "evil eye" or "mal de ojo," a superstition that a jealous or envious glance can cause harm, especially to children.]**

***[Susto is a cultural belief that a soul can leave the body due to a frightening or shocking experience, leading to illness and misfortune.]**

***[Hijillo refers to a sickness or ailment believed to be caused by the "vapors" or "emanations" released by a deceased person, especially during a wake or funeral.**

***[Acuás refers to a belief of disease that occurs when a person brings fresh jugs into their home and passes by a child.]**

drunkenness); 2) a pregnant woman; 3) a man or woman who is drunk. When these people look at a child or a small animal, they produce the "*el ojeo*" or "*el ojo*". To cure this evil, proceed as follows:

1. They pass a chicken or duck egg through the whole body of the child; then they place this egg in a container with *jiquilite* water (1), and if the egg is cooked, it shows that the disease suffered from the child or animal is "*mal del ojo*".

2. When the disease has been found, a duck is passed through the whole body of the sick man to be thrown out of the water so that he may bathe. It must be this kind of bird, for it is the only one that can bathe, because according to the belief, if the bird is not bathed, it dies from heat, and at the same time, water removes the disease of the bird.

El susto. Children are very susceptible to this disease, which is produced by the impression received from another person or some animal.

To cure this disease, Guatemalan people do the following: for example, in case it is a cow that frightens the child, they take a handful of hair from it, burn some with rosemary leaves, and make the child inhale the smoke. Then they make a figure of wood or wax, about five centimeters high, which represents the child; to this figure, they glue the rest of the cow's hair. They take the figure, preferably to the place where the child was frightened, and there they beat it with their hand, with warblers or simply with a handful of bush, and then bury it.

Hijillo. This disease is caused by the emanations of animals that are about to give birth or are giving birth. It is called in kekchi "*bok*" (steam or gas) and consists of the fact that the children, mainly swell and deflate constantly and successively, until they form a kind of deep anemia which produces death.

(1) A macerated leguminous plant that produces a colored liquid (indigo).

This disease can also be caused by a parturient woman or her clothes when the midwife takes her to the river to wash it and passes near a child, then it is called "*hijillo de gente*". In some cases, this disease is intentionally produced when the midwife is asked to pass close to a particular child to produce the disease.

When the disease is caused by animals such as cows, dogs, etc., the disease is called "*hijillo de vaca*" (bok cwacax), "*hijillo de perro*" (bok tzi'), etc.

When a person brings fresh (2) jutes to their home and passes near a child, he produce the "*hijillo de jute*" (acuas pur). In each case, its manifestation depends on the cause; for example, with the *hijillo de vaca*, the sick person loses weight completely and his hair falls off. To cure it, they apply fresh cow manure on the head and wrap it with a canvas; it stays for a few hours and then is bathed in hot water.

The *hijillo de jute* consists of the patient forming a paste in the dry mucus nose and curing it with a jute obtained in some places, removing it from Cobán, grinding it, and preparing a drink that is given to the sick to drink. They also give it baths with water prepared with this jute.

The disease of *el hijillo* is regularly cured by the Indigenous people with cow manure baths, to which other herbs are added. These baths are made every two days in a place where the sun is full and if it is cloudy, the bath is carried out until clear, because they say that you do not see the steam that they smell; because the object of these baths is precisely that the sick person to discharge steam, which, according to the Indians, is the cause of the disease.

These baths are repeated every two days and prevent another child from breathing in the steam that the patient's body releases to avoid infection. In addition to the baths, the indigenous people give the patient prepared drinks with some herbs.

(2) Mollusk of the river with the shape of a snail.

Indigenous people are classified as “strong-spirited” and “weak-spirited,” and the disease of the child mainly affects adult children with weak spirits.

El Acuás. Generally “*hijillo*” is confused with “*El acuás*” a name given in the Kekchi language to what they call “secret,” and which is the condition received by the child since he is in the mother’s womb by any impressions unwittingly received by her. So we have that an unsatisfied desire can produce in the child the “*acuás*”. For example, suppose the mother-to-be has a craving and cannot satisfy it. In that case, the child is born with a disease which they call “*hijillo de chicharrón*” when she develops, which mean that the child has scabs on the head similar to a chicharrón; or if the mother had craving for a boil egg and she was not satisfied, the child born with an abscess on any part of the body, or if the mother had craving for pineapple. She did not eat it, the child was born with a cracked tongue, and so on; any craving not satisfied can cause *el acuás*.

The way to heal this disease is special in every step, for example, to heal “*hijillo de chicharrón*” grind *chicharrones*, then pour them in water and the child is bath with this water, at the same time that the child drinks it. This treatment is done daily until the child heals completely.

The impression received by the mother may be in another sense, such as the case of a woman who watches a worm while being pregnant, and is scared, most likely the child can be born scared, or their movements are likely to worm’s moves. Also, if the mother stares at other people with some physical defects or antipathy for another person, the child will be born with the same defects as this person.

The difference between “*hijillo*” and “*acuás*” is that in the first one, the child get sick when he is little and in some cases adult people; and “*acuás*” get sick when the child is still in the mother’s womb.

Apart from the diseases mentioned above, there is another one that could be categorized as a “baby” and which is produced by people, and regularly, almost exclusively, has adult men. For example, if a man is a alcoholic excessively, it is said that another man (perhaps a drunkard) spat on the moonshine he was going to drink, or a woman may have given hu, some specially prepared drink, either with water from his own bathroom or with some plants and even with mil from the pig, making the man look like an idiot. In these cases, to cure this disease, give the sick person broth of zopilote, and indigenous people assure that it is cured, but not completely normal.

A more complete and comparative research in various areas of the country could contribute to the knowledge of the Guatemalan indigenous people regarding their understanding of diseases and how to cure them.