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TRADITIONS OF GUATEMALA



**SAN CARLOS DE GUATEMALA UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR FOLKLORE STUDIES**

TRADITIONS OF GUATEMALA

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POPULAR BELIEFS ABOUT BIRDS AND DOMESTIC* ANIMALS.

Renée de Mahler

INTRODUCTION

From the research carried out for the purposes of this work, the following is noted:

C A T

- I. The “theme” is similar in the 12 different versions provided by the informants.
- II. The phenomenon occurs “anywhere” and is not limited to a single specific place.

- III. In the zoomorphic description, there are, indeed, differences, but the “theme” is the same.
- IV. The belief that the “black cat” has the 7 hairs of the devil and that its presence, along with that of “evil spirits,” causes the illness known as *ESPANTO* (a folk illness caused by a strong fright, believed to affect both body and spirit, often treated through traditional healing) is widespread, and “its cure” turns out to be the same among all the informants.

D O G

- I. In all the cases consulted, it is seen as a sign of bad luck, death, and the presence of “restless souls” wandering in the area where the phenomenon occurs.
- II. The zoomorphic description also varies from one case to another, but the “theme” remains.
- III. The phenomenon occurs in any region or area; it seems to be a general belief (as with the cat), and although it is not as feared as the “black cat,” the presence of the animal is still feared by all the interviewees.
- IV. In the case of the dog, most people indicated that the phenomenon occurs especially during the full moon.

B I R D S A N D O T H E R F O W L

- I. *Tecolotes* (owls) and *piscoyes* (a type of bird) predominate in the belief related to birds as omens of misfortune. It is a widespread idea, not only among those interviewed for this study but also in various other places, that the singing owl foretells death.
- II. As in the previous paragraph, it is generally believed that when the *piscoy* sings on the left side, it is announcing some personal or family disaster.

- III. The “theme,” once again, is the same, although there are variations in each version. It is worth highlighting the belief that “on the coast” a greater number of these birds or animals can be found and that they also represent evil spirits roaming the world where they once lived “in life.”
- IV. Regarding the research on canaries and other “household birds,” there is no predominant idea or harmful belief.

And, to conclude, I would like to note that thanks to the guidance and teaching of *Licenciada* (a Guatemalan university degree) Braidy de Santos, I personally had the fascinating opportunity to work, though for a very short time, as a researcher, conducting interviews with people ranging from domestic workers to the *curandero* (healer) of the Cueva de San Jorge in *Panajachel*. Besides listening to the entertaining accounts, I have once again come to value the innocence that exists among the towns and their people, full of tradition, moral integrity, and whose collective spirit offers us the beautiful folklore that we hope will always endure.

However, twelve interviews and several conversations on the subject with different people from Guatemala do not constitute a sufficient number nor an in-depth investigation to claim that the phenomenon exists or explain why it might. Furthermore, lacking appropriate texts to investigate its origin or cite bibliographic data, I am content to present this work in a folkloric manner, remaining faithful to the exact words expressed by each informant.

ACCOUNT FROM RECORD No. 1

"I was leaving the house when I heard the meowing, and the closer I got, the more I heard it. As I entered the property, there it was, right where I had to pass, it wouldn't let me through. I tried to scare it away so it would let me pass, and after I passed, it tried to attack me from behind while I was filling a water jug. I

kept trying to scare it away again, and it kept following me, almost all the way to the house. At the moment, I didn't feel scared. I told the others, but my parents didn't believe me. Then my younger brother grabbed a machete and told me to come with him, he had one too, and we went to look for it. He couldn't find it; only I could see it. So I told him where it was, and he struck at it, but the ground split where it had been, and the cat wasn't cut, it jumped forward instead. It disappeared again, but I kept seeing it, and every time I pointed it out, he kept swinging the machete, but never hit it. It led us all around the property, and when it finally reached a wide field, my brother wanted to go down to follow it, but I didn't let him. We ended up fighting because I stopped him. The cat was wailing like a demon-possessed child and disappeared after my brother argued with me. The cat only followed me, no one else could see it. When my father went to look for it, it would vanish, so they didn't believe me. But in the end, they did believe when he saw it too. We went back home, and about six months later, I started getting sick. I was fainting, didn't want to eat, and didn't want to do anything. And about seven months later, I was near death, it happened on Holy Thursday night. They took me to the doctor, and he said it was *espanto* (a traditional folk illness caused by a powerful fright, believed to affect both the body and spirit) that I had because of the cat, and the medicine they gave me was nine baths with rosemary; and every day, for 9 days, I had to drink a glass of milk in the morning straight from the black cow, the milk had to be only from a black cow, and they had to pray for me for 9 days, but I wasn't supposed to feel it, they had to pray while I was asleep; they gave me 9 bottles of water mixed with spirits, and that's how I was cured, though it wasn't until about 5 months into the treatment that I started to feel better."

(The preceding story was transcribed exactly as told by the informant. Equipment: tape recorder.)

Guatemala, July 20th, 1971.

**COMPARISON OF THE EVENT FROM RECORD SHEET No. 1
THAT HAPPENED TO THE INFORMANT'S SISTER ON THAT
DATE**

"It turns out that since I wasn't baptized right away, my mom says I cried like a cat, a lot, a lot, and that's also why the house is haunted by little cats."

"The dog caused some mischief behind the house, and I went to look for him, and just when I was about to hit him, he ran under the bed. After that, I didn't even touch him, but I kept hearing the animal's cries. Then, because I was so angry, I didn't hit him, I just wanted to get him out, but I couldn't. So when my sister went to open the door so the dog could go out, she saw a little white animal and called me to come see it, but I couldn't see it. And she kept saying, 'It's right there, it's right there,' but I couldn't see it. And in the end, it appeared, transformed, big and white, and when we saw it, it disappeared again, as the earth opened up."

Note: The dog was ours, but she says, "He didn't come out from under the bed until the little animal was at the door and then the dog stopped crying. My sister said the little cat came out to cry for the dog because of the beating, because the dog was kind of black, and then he never left and always stayed there."

(Transcribed exactly from the interview with the informant.
Equipment: battery-operated portable recorder.)

RECORD No. 1

Annexes on beliefs related to the existence of adverse phenomena or sources of domestic harm.

RESEARCH ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES

1. Informant's name: Juana Monzón
2. Age: 25 years
3. Occupation: Domestic worker
4. Education level: 3rd grade, primary school
5. When she learned about it: Five years ago, through personal experience and stories previously heard in her village and from her family.
6. Where and from whom she learned it: She heard it in her village, and her family had spoken of it before. Her personal experience occurred on her parents' farm.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Espitia Village, Municipality of Yupiltepeque, Department of Jutiapa
8. Date of investigation: July 20th, 1971

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (CAT)

1. Color: Black with reddish hairs.
 - 1.1 Variations: Red eyes when it attacked, very bright red.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: Yes. How? At 1:30 in the afternoon.
At night: Yes. How? It changes color to white. This happened to her sister while she was treating a dog.
2. Size: Very small, about the size of a one-month-old kitten.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? It was very clever, did not change in size or shape.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? It was clever, when my brother attacked it, it would jump ahead.
3. Attitude: It seemed like it was going to lunge at me.
 - 3.1 Threatening? Yes. Does it isolate itself? No. Does it attack? I didn't let it.
 - 3.1.1 In what way? It fell to the ground from where it was

and stood next to me, I scared it off, but it followed me to the house, meowing, and stayed there until I went out with my brother to attack it.

4. Environment: Strong sun (September).
5. Other characteristics: I fell ill from *espanto*.

STORY FROM RECORD No. 2

"Any black cat that is seen, whether it belongs to your house or not, if it lives in the house, it gets desperate when another one from a different house shows up. That newcomer brings misfortune, because it causes fights with the wife or with neighbors. Since they are black, they get angrier and scratch people; right at the spine, in the middle, they have 7 hairs, blacker than the rest of their coat, those are the devil's hairs."

"When you try to drive it away, it lunges at you and gets even angrier. Then, if you're spiritually weak, you get frightened and it takes over you. If you're not cured of the *espanto*, you die, and your soul transforms into a cat and always prowls around the roof of your house. The cat captures your spirit, then it's not God's, it's the devil's."

(Transcribed verbatim. The interview was recorded using a portable recorder.)

Guatemala, July 12th, 1971

RECORD No. 2

RESEARCH ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES

1. Name of the informant: Nazario Ordóñez.
2. Age: Around 40 years old.
3. Occupation: Workshop worker, industrial woodwork.
4. Education: Almost none.
5. When he learned about it: Through personal experience.

6. Where and from whom he learned it: "Here in any village, it's always the same."
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Everywhere he's been.
8. Date of investigation: July 12th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (CAT)

1. Color: Black
 - 1.1 Variations: Red eyes and seven "devil's hairs".
 - 1.1.2 During the day: Yes. How? It turns white
At night: Yes. How? Black, with red eyes
2. Size: Large
 - 2.1 Is there any change?: No
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how?:
3. Behavior:
 - 3.1 Is it threatening?: Yes Does it isolate itself?: —
Does it attack?: Yes
 - 3.1.1 In what way?: It doesn't let you sleep, appears only at night, jumps on you
4. Environment: Mostly at night
5. Other characteristics: If you hit it, it gets angrier

STORY FROM RECORD No. 3

BLACK DOG

The dog is big and has very red eyes. It's black, starts barking, and then begins to cry. Every time someone goes out to hit it, it gets very angry and bites. It cries at noon and at night, and they say it's always because it sees the devil. That's why its eyes look like flames. Only the dog can see him, people can't see anything. And since it also has seven hairs in a small patch on its back, they say it's because it fights with the seven devils from the seven hells. That's what people say. I don't know about the hells,

but I myself have seen dogs trying to attack shadows, and you don't see anything, only they do.

These dogs are stronger than other dogs of different colors; it's very hard to fight them. But sometimes they can be defeated by performing a PROTECTIVE RITUAL and sprinkling holy water at the door of the house or inside the living room. When someone has a dog of that color alone in the house, it's not good because it cries a lot and sees devils. To keep it from being so scared and to have it stay peacefully inside, you have to cut a cross into the hair on the back of its neck, and then it stops crying and causing trouble.

When someone isn't in good spirits, they get frightened easily and it becomes easy to see the shadows of the devil. If you don't get rid of the bad spirit, then your own spirit is taken by him, and you could even die, and then your spirit becomes one of theirs. Without the PROTECTIVE RITUAL, it (the dog) will always keep crying, and if you get scared, then you die.

(This version has been transcribed literally from the conversation with the interviewee. Taken in shorthand.)

Guatemala, July 12th, 1971

RECORD No. 3

RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES

1. Name of informant: María Ordóñez
2. Age: 38 years old
3. Occupation: domestic worker
4. Education: none
5. When did she learn it?: "People have always said it, and I myself have seen it; my husband and everyone around here has seen it too."
6. Where and from whom did she learn it?: "In the village where I lived, and right here in Guatemala, everyone knows."

7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Jutiapa and zones 7 and 11 here in Guatemala City.
8. Date of research: July 12th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (DOG)

1. Color: black.
 - 1.1 Variations: eyes with flames.
 - 1.1.2 By day: — How? —
 - 1.1.2 By night: — How? —
2. Size: large.
 - 2.1 Any changes? It stretches.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? At night when it barks.
3. Attitude:
 - 3.1 Threat? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack? Yes.
 - 3.1.1 In what way? With the strength of tigers.
4. Environment: Any day, when evil spirits are present.
5. Other characteristics: They fight against shadows.

STORY FROM RECORD No. 4

VULTURE (bird)

"It happened in a cold land, and my aunt told me that one should never become lazy. What must be done, must be done, she said, because the animal talks to people, and then it says that the man who's going to clear the cornfield is a lazy man who just goes to sleep in the pasture; so she said that when the vulture came down, it supposedly told him: aaayyy (then, she told me, better write first what the woman told him...) so get up early to clear the land for the cornfield and work because we have nothing to eat. Then the man told her he would go early and asked her to make him food so he could leave. She told him there was no food because they were poor, and since he was so lazy,

he didn't provide anything for his wife; just a little firewood. Aaayy, I'm so tired, he said, I can't bring the wood, go get it yourself. In the end, he went to the pasture, and when the vulture passed by, the man said: aaayyy you, who only fly and have food, I work and sweat just to have something to eat.

The vulture spoke to him, saying that he was lazy and appeared to him under the tree. We, being vultures, only eat "shit," and if you want to give me your cloak, I'll lift you into the air while flying, and I'll stay working in the cornfield. After they switched cloaks, the vulture told him: you won't want to work or go over there, because we only eat shit. Yes, said the man, I'll go, and you go to my house.

In the end, the vulture flew and flew above the fool, and the man removed the cloak, it's said, it went over his head, and the vulture took the man's skin and became like a man. Then he took the cloak, the machete, and when he was going to the house, the man said: my wife will give you coffee. The vulture cut a lot of firewood and took it to the wife. When he arrived, she offered him coffee, but the vulture kept making a humming noise with his nose, and he smelled bad. When he lay down, he told her: tomorrow I'm going early to prepare the land for the cornfield, and the corn will grow, and I'll bring you the leaves that are big and thickening the brush.

A month passed, and the man flying couldn't take it anymore, and one day he fell in front of the house. The woman said to the vulture: what is this thing that's fallen? Such a big animal, and it looks dead. Then the vulture replied that he was the devil, that the man had sold him his cloak, and they made the switch in the woods because of the man's laziness. That the big animal was the husband. Then the woman ran to the priest to tell him that they had exchanged souls with the vulture in the woods, and because the man was lazy, he died. When the priest came to bless him, the vulture stayed with the woman.

Then my aunt said that laziness turns people into animals and that many vultures are lazy people. You can tell because they stand on the rooftop of the house where they once lived as humans. And it's true, that I've seen with my own eyes, there are

vultures that don't fly away from the rooftop and poke holes in the roof to see who the woman is sleeping with, and they go out at night to eat shit and return all day long. So when someone sees that in my hometown, they already know that the vulture used to be the lazy neighbor or someone else who didn't know how to do anything."

Guatemala, July 17th, 1971

RECORD No. 4

RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES

1. Name of informant: Lucía N. (last name unknown).
2. Age: 64 years old.
3. Occupation: Washerwoman.
4. Education: None.
5. When she learned it: 30 years ago or more.
6. Where and from whom she learned it: Her aunt told her, and then she saw it herself; many others know and have seen it, it's not a lie, everyone knows.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: The coast, in San Cristóbal Totonicapán (30 years ago), also in Colombia, and on the Costa Cuca, Department of Quetzaltenango.
8. Date of the research: July 17th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL

1. Color: Black.
 - 1.1 Variations: It gets larger.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: Yes. How? It becomes like a man.
 - 1.1.2 At night: Yes. How? A man, but smelly.
2. Size: At first, like an owl bird.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? Yes.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? At any time, when he makes a pact with the devil, in the forest he turns into a man.

3. Attitude: A little good, it seems.
 - 3.1 Threatens? No. Isolated? No. Attacks? No.
 - 3.1.1 In what way? —
4. Environment: Any time, because he wants to eat well and not feces.
5. Other characteristics: He becomes a man himself and lives.

STORY FROM RECORD No. 5

THE DOG

“Yes, I’ve heard about it sometimes, and it has happened to me too. The last time, remember? Not long ago, when my granddaughter died. That day, it was Sunday, a dog came near the house, its color was like cinnamon, and it dug a hole there. Then María Luisa came and said: ‘Look at that dog digging a hole near the house, it’s a bad omen.’ Well, I told her, that’s what they say, and I know it too. ‘It’s death,’ she told me. ‘Ah, yes, that’s right, that’s how it is. It must be something close to your family because the hole was dug near her bed.’ ‘Aahh,’ I said, ‘who knows.’ We threw water at the dog to make it leave, and only when we threw the water did it finally go. But since I didn’t go to church or anything, five days later I got the news that my little granddaughter had died.”

(Transcribed verbatim. Taken in shorthand.)

Guatemala, July 17th, 1971

RECORD No. 5

RESEARCH ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES

1. Informant’s Name: Lucía N. (surname unknown)
2. Age: 64 years
3. Occupation: Washerwoman
4. Education: None
5. When she learned it: A long time ago, “fuu,” many years back

6. Where and from whom she learned it: Since she was a child, she heard it, and then she herself saw and suffered because of devilish dogs.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: In my land (San Cristóbal, Totonicapán), here in Puerto San José, everywhere, it is well known and I've seen it.
8. Date of investigation: July 17th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL

1. Color: "*Canelón*" (a mix between black and brown)
 - 1.1 Variations: It bristles when it digs.
 - 1.2 During the day: Yes. How? Its hair stands up like spines. At night: Yes. How? It turns black.
2. Size: Neither very big nor very small
 - 2.1 Is there any change? It hides its tail.
 - 2.1.1 When and how? When it digs in the dirt.
3. Attitude:
 - 3.1 Does it threaten? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack? —
 - 3.1.1 How exactly? When it is looked at
4. Environment: At any hour, it announces death.
5. Other characteristics: It disappears, but you can't see where it goes.

STORY FROM RECORD No. 6

BLACK CAT

"By day they're white and pretend to be good so they can enter houses, and they carry the devil's spirit with them, that's why their eyes are red, red. At night, they turn black again and spy from the rooftop to send evil spirits through the holes. Their brains are soft, very soft, and they can only be killed with seven days of prayer, crosses, and holy water. They howl like, well, all night long, they don't let you sleep, and if you get up, they attack

you. Everyone says you end up fighting with your husband or your neighbor when you hear them howl like that. And it's true, listen, it happened to me once, my husband wasn't even a real husband, I only had kids with him, he split my head open because I got up to chase away the cat that wouldn't let us sleep. And so, many people are afraid of black cats because they only bring bad moments and are true enemies of a person. One day every full month, it would show up on the roof, and during the day it would sneak into the kitchen. I'd beat it, and it would just howl and cry, you should've heard how it cried, it sounded like a little child with a stomach cramp. And since it didn't seem to feel the beatings, the neighbor, from right there in Costa Cuca, told me to throw holy water on it for seven days and then hit it seven times so it would die, but with a cross in hand, because those animals are the spirits of truly wicked people who lived badly, and when they died in a fight with another man, the devil ate their soul and they turned into animals, but that other man is the devil himself who disguises himself as a man and waits for them on dark roads. He also turns into another devil in the form of a black cat with flames in its eyes. And when husbands and wives fight, they kill each other, and the devil takes their soul, then they become cats and return to the forest or to homes. That's why it's not good to have cats, because they pretend to be white with tiny black ears during the day, but they're black at night. People say they show up where there are bad people, and to keep them away from your home, you have to drink water blessed by good spirits. That's all there is to it. I myself have seen it many times and I know, can't you see I'm already old? And they always say the same thing I do, they've been through the same. So don't keep a cat, and if one enters your house, go to church and throw holy water on it like I told you. Do that, and nothing will happen to you."

(Exact transcription of the interview with the informant.
Equipment used: battery-powered portable recorder.)

Guatemala, July 17th, 1971

RECORD No. 6**RESEARCH CONDUCTED ON DOGS, CATS, AND CANARIES**

1. Informant's Name: Telma N. (doesn't know her other name).
2. Age: About 48 years old.
3. Occupation: Market vendor, *San Lucas*.
4. Education: None.
5. When she learned about it: It also happened to my mother, my brother sees these things too, and I also know and have seen.
6. Where and from whom she learned it: Since I was a little girl, and just recently my sister-in-law almost died.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Pinula; Antigua; in the capital too, it's not a new thing, we all know it.
8. Date of Research: July 18th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (CAT)

1. Color: Black.
 - 1.1 Variations: Yes.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: Yes. How? It turns white.
At night: Yes. How? It becomes black again.
2. Size: Large.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? Its eyes turn into flames.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? At night, when it howls.
3. Behavior: "Oh!", it's very scary (makes the sign of the cross).
 - 3.1 Does it threaten? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack? Violently.
 - 3.1.1 In what way? It tears the flesh and bites.
4. Environment: At night.
5. Other characteristics: It hides in the kitchen of houses.

STORY FROM RECORD No. 7**LITTLE BIRD**

“They say it was very tiny, and when it came in, it was bluish, really pretty, and then it turned reddish. She says she had the light on and it turned it off and went under the bed, and then she says it disappeared and she couldn’t find it, and she turned the light back on and it turned it off again, and every time she turned on the light, it would turn it off again. Then, she says, she saw it fluttering between the two girls she had in bed, and it wasn’t until her husband came that she told him the little bird was there, that it was the one turning off the light. So he asked her where it was, and he looked for it but couldn’t find it. Then she told him: here it is, and she says she told him and bent down under the bed and it jumped at him and scratched his face. But before he arrived, it used to do that, she says it would jump at her and scratch her face. The little bird, she says, came in just like that, not singing or anything, just flying, and she didn’t see where it came from because the door was closed.

“She says that when he (the husband) came and bent down to look, it scratched his face, and he couldn’t see it. When he turned on the light, then he realized it wasn’t a good thing. So he turned his hat upside down, she says, and with the sharp edge of his machete, he went looking under the bed. When she told him: there it is, she says he saw it and went to kill it like that, but didn’t even touch it, and it died. Then he grabbed it and opened it up to see if it had a spirit or anything else inside, but she says it had absolutely nothing, no guts at all. It was just an empty shell with only feathers and little eyes, pure water, she says, just two drops of water”.

“(When asked why the hat was placed upside down, she continues:) Well, you see, that’s to keep the spirit from staying around in a bad way, because he then remembered it could be something evil; his mom had told him a long time ago that the same thing had happened to her, that the little bird turned off the

light like by magic, and her little sister died. And in the village, people are always afraid of the little bird; they say it's death with feathers. That's why he remembered to place the hat upside down, because that's what everyone does when the little bird appears. And he says he tried to hit it with the blade of the machete, but didn't even touch it, and it died".

"She says she got sick from fright, but she got better quickly because the little bird died, otherwise, she would've died. She says she felt cold, but just in time he arrived and killed it, and that's why the fright didn't affect her too badly, because he killed it, she says. But later, she says a little parrot stayed singing in a tree in the yard every morning, always looking in the direction of her house, and she kept noticing that every single morning it was there. Then, one Friday night, seven days after the little bird incident, she was alone again, when she saw a shadow come in, like thiss, she says, like it was an owl, and it came in, and they say it jumped on the two little girls, because the younger one wasn't baptized. And it jumped and scared both of them there, and when she went to see, she says it turned off the light again and she wondered what it could be. Eventually it left, but she was left frightened, and the little girl woke up screaming, she says, because she hadn't been baptized. Two months later, the baby girl died. She was 9 months old when she got sick, and she died at 11 months. They brought the healer, but because she had already been scared, they couldn't cure her, and even though they tried with medicine, they couldn't save her. So the little girl died... she died..."

(Transcribed verbatim from the interview. A battery-powered portable recorder was used.)

RECORD No. 7

1. Name of the informant: Regina María.
2. Age: 36 years, maybe (my opinion is at least 65, R. de M.).
3. Occupation: working.
4. Education: I believe so; I went to school when I was a girl.

5. When she learned about it: It happened to my sister, around five years ago too.
6. Where and from whom she learned it: In the village of El Zapote, municipality of Atescatempa, Department of Jutiapa.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Everywhere, but they say on the coast it's more from the devil.
8. Date of the investigation: July 20th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (BIRD): "Tiny, I don't know what breed it would be."

1. Color: Blue, when it entered.
 - 1.1 Variations: It turned very red, she says.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: No. How? ...

At night: Yes. How? It was around 10 p.m.; she says she didn't see it, it jumped when the light was on.
2. Size: Very tiny, like a small swallow.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? Yes.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? When it was killed, it had no blood, no guts, no heart.
3. Attitude:
 - 3.1 Does it threaten? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack? —
 - 3.1.1 In what way? It would throw itself at her and her whole chest was scratched.
4. Environment:
5. Other characteristics: It went to the little girls' bed, and when she turned on the light, it threw itself at her face.

ACCOUNT FROM RECORD No. 8

VARIOUS BELIEFS

"You see, ma'am, one always hears about these things. Well, I personally don't believe they're true, although what my father told us must have been true because it happened to him. I don't believe in it because, you see, it's a sin to believe, but I will tell you what I've heard:

Cats, of any color, are said to be evil. They say they're evil spirits that appear to scare people. When they cross your path, it's bad luck; when they fight on rooftops, it means the people in those houses are going to fight. And those big black ones, they say their fur is the devil's hair, that for sure, they say. You shouldn't kill them because they'll curse you and harm you. But you have to drive them out of the house with holy water and a cross in your hand, because since it's the devil inside them, only the cross will scare them. And they do come back, but later on, not right away. As I said, cats of any color are bad, but black ones are worse.

Dogs that dig holes are also a sign of bad luck. If someone is sick, it means they're going to die. And when they howl at night like they see someone, they say it's wandering souls visiting the places where they lived in life, and so when the dogs cry and get scared... My father used to say that you should never hit a dog when this happens, because if it bites you, the soul of the person appearing in the shadow, the one the dog sees, will pass into you. And if that person was bad, then you're doomed, because you'll become evil too, or start drinking a lot and even kill people.

"In the Coast, where I'm from, you hear a lot about this. People always say someone got sick because a cat attacked them or because the *piscuyes* chased them. When a *piscuy* whistles from the left side, they say it's bad luck and you should never keep walking that way, or you'll be attacked by robbers or die in a fight. And if a driver hears it and doesn't stop, they say for sure he'll crash and die. But if it whistles from the right side, that's good luck, and it means you'll make good money in business.

"Owls (*tecolotes*) are also a sign of bad omen. If they come to your house and whistle, you have to cross yourself, because

something is definitely going to happen. My dad once had this happen — one night he was eating, and on his way home, some owls followed him, whistling and whistling. Then my dad said that since he was drunk and didn't remember they were bad luck, he mocked them and whistled back at them. When he got home, my little brother was dead, and the owls kept circling right over our house's patio. That's when my dad realized everything, because he was so heartbroken that my little brother had died. You see, I believe that because I experienced it myself and I remember it — I was just a little girl then, but I remember it like it was yesterday, and I still clearly remember the owls' whistles. It still scares me."

(Verbatim transcription. Equipment used: portable tape recorder.)

Guatemala, July 24th, 1971.

RECORD No. 8

1. Name of the informant: Chaba Isaura.
2. Age: 25 years.
3. Occupation: Domestic worker.
4. Education: Primary.
5. When she learned about it: I've always heard it.
6. Where and from whom she learned it: From my dad several years ago when I was a little girl.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: When that happened to us? In Puerto Barrios.
8. Date of investigation: July 24th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL: CATS, DOGS, AND OWLS

Color: Cats, especially black ones; dogs, any color.

1.1 Variations: None.

1.1.2 During the day: ... How? ...

1.1.2 At night: ... How? ...

Size: Medium.

2.1 Is there any change? No.

2.1.1 At what time and how? ...

Attitude:

3.1 Threatens? Yes.

Isolates? ...

Attacks? Yes.

3.1.1 In what way? Furiously when they are driven away.

Environment: Happens more often at night than during the day.

Other characteristics: ...

1. Color: Cats, especially black ones; dogs, any color.

1.1 Variations: None

1.1.2 During the day: — How? —

At night: — How? —

2. Size: Medium.

2.1 Is there any change? No

2.1.1 At what time and how? —

3. Attitude:

3.1 Threatens? Yes. Isolates?— Attacks?—

3.1.1 In what way? Furiously when they are driven away.

4. Environment: Happens more often at night than during the day.

5. Other characteristics: —

RECORD No. 9**DOGS**

“They say that all black dogs are evil. Now, what I can confirm is that when they dig holes in someone’s yard, it’s a sign that someone in the family is going to die. And that has really happened. I remember that some time ago, while I was cooking and my mother-in-law was very sick in bed, she told me to shoo away a little dog that was out there, that she could see it

because otherwise she wouldn't recover and would die. I went out to the patio, but I didn't see the dog, yet the hole was there, just as if a gardener had dug it to plant something, and indeed, by the early morning that day, she passed away.

Another thing: when dogs howl at night, it's a bad omen. When we hear dogs crying, we get scared and go to church, because something is surely going to happen. If it's not death, there will at least be conflict within the family, or some loss in business, but something bad always happens.

The same thing happens with hens. When they crow at night, it's definitely a bad sign. Oh, my God, something is going to happen, and we've always seen it come true. Dogs, cats, and hens are bad news when they're heard crowing or seen fluttering around at night. So, ma'am, be careful not to let those animals into your home. Sometimes an enemy of yours sends them without your knowledge to do you harm. If that happens, know right away that someone is trying to do you evil, and go to church and pray, and avoid anything risky, because honestly, it's bad."

(Verbatim transcription)

Guatemala, July 10th, 1971

RECORD No. 9

1. Name of the informant: Rosa Inés de Velarde.
2. Age: 58 years.
3. Occupation: Household chores.
4. Education: Primary.
5. When she learned: Since she was a child.
6. Where and from whom she learned: In my village, here in the capital, in Antigua when I lived there.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: Everywhere, only this generation doesn't believe in it, and that's why God punishes them.
8. Date of research: July 10th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (DOGS)

1. Color: None in particular.
 - 1.1 Variations: No.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: — How? —
 - 1.1.2.1 During the night: — How? —
2. Size: Medium.
 - 2.1 Does it change? Yes.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? At night, it burns the eyes like with fire.
3. Behavior:
 - 3.1 Threat? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack? Yes.
 - 3.3.1 In what way? It jumps at you when it is scared off.
4. Environment: Happens more often at night than during the day.
5. Other characteristics: —

STORY FROM RECORD No. 10

BLACK CATS

"Look, ma'am, I am already old, and as my wife says, it has always been known and seen, but nowadays people pretend they don't believe it, and they criticize you when they hear you talk about it. It has happened to me, and I remember since I lived with my parents, around 45 to 50 years ago, when bad women turned into black cats and fought at night, scratching each other everywhere. One early morning, when we went out with my father, we heard in the town that 'the furry ones' had been naked near a house of ill repute, and the man from the bar saw them at night turned into black cats. They found him dead in the street, his face all scratched, bleeding. Likewise, I was already a young man when one night I stayed drinking with friends, and on my way back home, a cat followed me and wouldn't leave me alone. After trying to hit it several times, I threw a stone at its head, and

it disappeared right there, as if the earth swallowed it. Then, since I was drunk, I got so scared that I ran desperately. When I got to the house door, the black cat, bristling as if to attack, jumped and scratched my face, tearing all the skin. My father then punished me because he thought I had come from where 'the furry ones' were, as they called them. I got sick for several months. I thought I was going to die; I couldn't eat or sleep, and I sweated a lot. They sent me to a healer who used incense and removed the *ESPANTO* from me. That's when we moved to another town. Since then, I never go out at night, at least after 8, because there's no reason to. In the street or on the road, you'll see these animals, which they say are the devil, and it's bad luck when one crosses your path, even if it doesn't touch you, just crossing your path is already bad. When you hear them fighting, you know there will be trouble, and even if they don't believe it and say you're ignorant for believing it, it's the truth. I, who have worked as a driver for good families in big houses, have seen what's happened, and there have always been cats involved."

RECORD No. 11

1. Informant's Name: Mateo González.
2. Age: 45 years.
3. Occupation: Various jobs, mostly working with leather.
4. Education: None.
5. When he learned it: I don't remember the last time, but it always happens.
6. Where and from whom he learned it: *About the tecolote?* Everyone knows about it, we've always known. I've known this since I was a little boy.
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: It happens more often on the Coast. What happened to my friend was in the Escuintla area.
8. Date of investigation: July 26th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (BIRDS IN GENERAL)

1. Color: The “*chuchitos*” (small black birds, possibly bats or nightbirds) are black.
 - 1.1 Variations: They look like little airplanes.
 - 1.1.2 By day: No. How? — By night: Yes. How? They fly in groups.
2. Size: Medium-sized, about the size of a parrot.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? No.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? Around 10 p.m., that’s when I saw them myself and we heard them at home.
3. Behavior:
 - 3.1 Threatens? — Isolates? — Attacks? —
 - 3.1.1 In what way? —
4. Environment: At any hour, though it’s always at night.
5. Other characteristics: —

STORY OF RECORD No. 12

DOGS

“They say, though I don’t believe it, that when dogs dig holes in the ground, it’s a sign of bad luck, and for sure, it means someone in the family is going to die.

If a dog howls, it’s a sign its owner is going to die. My aunt told me that some time ago, she was a cook in the house of a good man, and while the man was still healthy and doing well, the little dog began howling like a tiny child crying and wouldn’t stop for anything. And just like that, the man was found dead the next morning, and then the little dog went quiet. So you see, that’s what she says happened, and people say it always happens that way.

It’s also said that when dogs howl and no one is in the house, it’s because they’re seeing something, that it’s wandering souls

roaming around, and only dogs can see them. So, to prevent that from happening, they say you have to pray and offer a mass for the souls of family members, because the souls come out of limbo to wander and collect footsteps so that the living will remember them. This happens when that soul owed something in life or harmed someone, and so they can't rest in heaven or hell until the debt is paid. And people really do say that dogs can see the souls, and that's why they cry like newborn babies."

(Transcribed word for word. Equipment: portable cassette recorder).

Guatemala, July 24th, 1971

RECORD No. 12

1. Informant's Name: Sebastián Martín.
2. Age: 48 years.
3. Occupation: Driver.
4. Education: Elementary school.
5. When he learned it: Many years ago, everyone talks about it.
6. Where and from whom he learned it: My family, friends. I'm from *Chichí* (Chichicastenango).
7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: You mean what happened to my aunt? That happened on a farm in Sololá, around 7 years ago.
8. Date of investigation: July 24th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (DOGS)

1. Color: Any color.
 - 1.1 Variations: —
 - 1.1.2 During the day? — How? —
 - 1.1.2 At night? — How? —
2. Size: Medium or fairly large.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? They get thinner when they see the souls, they say.

- 2.1.1 At what time and how? Especially at night.
- 3. Attitude: Sad or furious.
 - 3.1 Threat? Yes. Do they isolate themselves? — Do they attack? Sometimes.
 - 3.1.1 In what way? By biting.
- 4. Environment: Mostly at night, they say, but also during the day.
- 5. Other characteristics: —

RECORD No. 10

- 1. Informant's Name: Rafael Velarde.
- 2. Age: 67 years.
- 3. Occupation: Driver.
- 4. Education: Elementary school.
- 5. When he learned it: About 50 years ago, when it happened to me personally.
- 6. Where and from whom he learned it: In the town, there in Zacapa, and later, in my older years, I've seen many cases.
- 7. Area where the phenomenon occurs: What I told you about myself? In Zacapa, but the cat is bad anywhere.
- 8. Date of investigation: July 10th, 1971.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL (CAT)

- 1. Color: Black.
 - 1.1 Variations: Yes.
 - 1.1.2 During the day: No. How? —
At night: Yes. How? It arches its back to attack.
- 2. Size: Large.
 - 2.1 Is there any change? No.
 - 2.1.1 At what time and how? —
- 3. Attitude:
 - 3.1 Threat? Yes. Does it isolate itself? — Does it attack?

Yes.

3.1.1 In what way? It scratches and doesn't let go once it grabs you.

4. Environment: Silent.

5. Other characteristics: —

STORY FROM RECORD No. 11

BIRDS

"It is known that when the *tecolote* (owl) sings, it's because someone is going to die. You see it flying around your house and suddenly it disappears, and you hear a kind of whistle, like this... far away, something is going to happen in your family. This only affects you or someone in your family, not friends, only you, for sure, someone is going to die. It's known everywhere, it's not just something from here or there; wherever I've been, even here in the capital itself, people are always afraid because something really does happen.

Now, going to the coast, since I'm from around there, near Puerto San José, you hear all sorts of things about *tecolotes*, *piscoyes*, and other birds. When the *piscoy* sings on your left side, it's a sure sign you'll have an accident on the road, and it's better to stop the car or truck and stay put until morning, and drive very carefully, otherwise you'll get into trouble. A friend of mine died like that, and the other one who was riding with him said to him, 'Hey Juan, stop because the *piscoy* already cursed us,' but he laughed and kept on driving until he crashed into a huge bus and died. The other guy was badly hurt and he's still alive, but since then he no longer works in trucking, instead, he works at a gas station and never again rides a bus or car or anything. He still lives nearby. Now, when the *piscoy* whistles on your right side, nothing happens; you'll have a safe trip and there's no need to worry.

There are other birds people call *chuchitos*, and when they fly in groups of about eight, they meow like little dogs, and when that happens, you know there's going to be a revolution. That's exactly what happened, and I swear to it, when the President... what was his name... ah hell, I forgot, that military guy who was overthrown, well I don't remember the name, but I myself saw the *chuchitos* flying by, and in the neighborhood we all got scared. The next day there was a revolution and they killed the President, whose name I can't remember."

(Verbatim transcription. Equipment: portable tape recorder.)

Guatemala, July 26th, 1971