

The Ch'orti' Maya Myths of Creation

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Introduction: The Ch'orti' Maya

Ethnic Ch'orti' Maya live in southern Guatemala in the *municipio* of Chiquimula, principally in Jocotan and in many surrounding communities such as La Union, San Juan Ermita, San Francisco Quetzaltepeque, and Camotan. The Ch'orti' are primarily subsistence farmers, growing corn (*nar*)—their most valued produce—as well as a wide variety of other types of fruits and vegetables.¹

The Ch'orti' language is part of the Eastern Branch of Ch'olan Mayan languages, related to Ch'ol and Chontal in the Western Branch. Ch'orti' today is spoken by roughly 12,000 people, though the number of speakers has been in decline over the last century. Bilingualism in Spanish is pervasive among Ch'orti' speakers, and monolingualism in Spanish is becoming all too common among Ch'orti' children and youth. Acculturation into the *ladino* (non-indigenous) lifestyle is happening at an accelerated pace, which is contributing to the loss of knowledge of and belief in many oral traditions (such as the Creation as discussed in this study).

Oral traditions among the Ch'orti' Maya span numerous genres, such as folktales, legends, jokes, myths, and others (Hull 2003:212-29). A sizable percentage of oral traditions today are those of the “how-it-came-to-be” variety, explaining how monkeys got their tails, how bald vultures became such, and so on. These are a particular favorite among the Ch'orti' since they are most often humorous.

Another important genre of oral tradition is that of myth. For Ch'orti' who believe in traditional myths in their culture, one particular myth stands out in its significance in shaping Ch'orti' worldview—Creation. The details of the Ch'orti' Creation myth (and its accompanying repeated destructions) inform many other aspects of Ch'orti' daily life, healing traditions, and customs, even though, remarkably, the Ch'orti' themselves are only tangentially aware of the core narrative of their own Creation myth today. In the discussion that follows I reconstruct various elements of the Ch'orti' Creation narrative and show the extent to which aspects of daily and ritual life for Ch'orti' trace back to the foundational myths of the creation and destruction(s) of the world.

¹All translations are the author's unless otherwise noted.

The Myth of Creation

The myth of Creation is one of the seminal traditions held by various Maya groups of Mesoamerica. The epic narrative of the *Popol Vuh* of the K'iche' Maya doubtlessly contains one of the best known versions of this myth (Christenson 2003). While there exists no single Creation myth among the different Maya populations, there still remain numerous common threads of what must have been a more unified set of stories among these groups. In this paper, I present the story of Creation from the perspective of the Ch'orti' Maya of southern Guatemala. Using details from my fieldwork data, together with all other known relevant Ch'orti' sources, I reconstruct this narrative as far as is possible from its scattered remnants in Ch'orti' oral tradition. I first describe the conception of the world and the universe in the eyes of the Ch'orti' and how the world came to be. I also show that the creation of humans was not a one-time occurrence, but rather a series of events that included their destruction on various occasions through great floods. Also I show that many animals are said to have once been human, but through disobedience or other means they were transformed into their present state. Finally, I detail the creation of corn and other major agricultural products as found in Ch'orti' myth as an integral part of the creation process, many of the salient details of which can be found dispersed throughout a broader Mesoamerican tradition.

The World According to the Ch'orti'

The Ch'orti' visualize the earth as a flat plane resting upon a great body of water² comprising five seas (or lakes): a white sea, a red sea, a green sea, a brown sea, and a black sea of tar (cf. Girard 1995:140). Each of these subterranean bodies of water corresponds to one of the four cardinal directions and the center position (cf. Fought 1972:373). The notion of the earth floating on a great body of water is well-known throughout the Mesoamerican area. Among the ancient, colonial, and several modern Maya groups, the world is conceived as the back of a crocodile or a turtle floating in a pool, an idea tracing back to at least Classic period times (Houston, Stuart, et al. 2006:95; Taube 1993:67). For the Ch'orti', the physical geography of the earth's flatness makes it highly susceptible to being "immediately covered" with large waves that can arise from "the sea [which] lay all around the edges of the world" (Fought 1972:354).

At each of the four corners of the earth stands a great *oy*, a "pillar" or "corner-post," as well as a fifth center post, to which specific rain-making angels are appointed.³ While these pillars provide stability to the earth, they can also be a cause of devastating earthquakes. For example, one tradition states that an angel decided to shake the corner-posts of the world, which caused the surface of the land to be submerged in water and the world to be destroyed (Fought 1972:377).

²According to one of Fought's consultants: "*che'nob' ke' insolo ja' yeb'ar e rum. Tuno'r e ja' ch'u'ron no'n*" ("they say that there is just water under the earth. And over the water we are floating") (Fought 1972:372 [orthography altered and one spelling inconsistency corrected]).

³Traditional healers, or *curanderos*, often make reference to both the four and five corner posts of the world (for example, *A'si tamar e 4 pilastre, tamar e 4, 5 pilastre*, "They [the evil spirits] mischievously cause illnesses around the four pillars, around the 4 and 5 pillars").

The surface of the land is also said to meet the sky on the horizon. According to a tradition recorded by Fought (1972:361, 373-74), at the edge of the world there is *insolo ja'*, “just water,” which is known as “the sea of tar.” It is called the sea of tar since it is thought to be the adhesive that holds the land and sky together. There are no humans at the edge of the world; indeed, they would be “struck with lightning” by the angels who reside there if there were. Even airplanes and ships cannot pass since that area is said to be “sealed” (*pegado*), “because they say that the world an—the sky are like—like—the back of a wasp, coming together at a

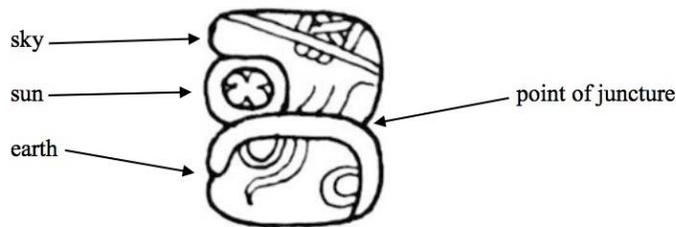


Figure 1. The “dawn” glyph comprised the sky and earth signs connected at one edge with the sun wedged between (drawing by Linda Schele).

joint” (Fought 1972:361, 374). As Hull (2011) has noted elsewhere, a visual antecedent to this description of the edge of the world looking like the point where the wings of a wasp attach to its body can be seen in the Classic-period “dawn” glyph (read *pas*), clearly depicting the sun wedged between the earth and the sky, with the edge of the sky and earth a joined at a

single point. The viscous sea of tar provides the seal at the point where the sky and the earth meet.

The Creation of the World and its Inhabitants

As to the method of the creation of human beings, we know precious little from the extant Ch’orti’ sources. Two of Girard’s consultants, Esteban Pérez and Lorenza Ruchjá, elders of Titikopot, simply state that “At the beginning of the world it did not rain. Then the souls brought our Lord down to the earth” (Girard 1995:401).⁴ This “bringing” of the souls seems to mark the first effort to populate the earth. Gregorio Suchite, an elder of Tunucó, stated the following: “The first man he made of *maicito* (“young maize”), when heaven and earth were solidified” (Girard 1995:400). This places the creation of the first human soon after the creation of the earth itself, that is, when dirt that was poured into the sea hardened up.

Also noteworthy is that the first man is explicitly said to have been created from young maize. The concept of birth from maize accords well with the final creation of mankind in the *Popol Vuh*, where after the first attempts at forming humans from various substances, such as mud and sticks, failed, humans were lastly created out of maize.⁵ The Ch’orti’ likewise believe that human beings, just like the earth, were created and destroyed more than once.⁶

⁴In a version of the Creation recorded by Hull in 2002, the text states that rain was created around the same time as the earth and sky (prior to the creation of the sun and stars), but before humans and animals were placed on the earth (Hull n.d.). Therefore, as for the timing suggested here by Esteban Pérez and Lorenza Ruchjá, we could interpret a space of time allowing for the creation of rain before the “bringing of the souls” to the earth.

⁵See Christenson (2003:78-79).

⁶For a Tojolab’al Maya creation myth that also mentions failed and repeated creations, see Brody (1988:319).

According to the Ch'orti', the earth has gone through various creative and destructive cycles. As mentioned above, in one instance a disobedient angel of God was the cause of one of the destructions of the earth, necessitating its creation again (Fought 1972:357-80). The angel intended to cause an earthquake by shaking the four corner-posts of the world; however, his actions plunged the earth into the water. God was angry with the angel and commanded him to "fix" what he had done. Therefore, certain angels who "hardly knew what they were doing" took dirt and poured it into the water in hopes of restoring the land. This action, however, just caused the earth to sink further as it dissolved in the water. The angels were then scolded by God for having only the power to destroy but not create. At this point, another angel, "Angel San Reimundo," made an attempt at it. Fought records the angel's actions as follows (1972:378):

The Angel San Reimundo went, and took a little earth, and dropped it on the water. And they say that as the earth fell on the water, it swirled all over the water, and the water was covered over by it, and it immediately began to harden like foam on the water. They say that it went on floating on the water, until it thickened all the water of the sea; the world came back again and the people increased upon it; they say that from that day, the world has no longer been destroyed again, with mankind. And that is why they say that today there are many people, because the world has not been destroyed now.

The sprinkling of dirt into the flood waters and the re-forming of the land by Angel San Reimundo thus marked the final creative act for the earth. In a related version recorded by Hull (2002), it was not Angel San Reimundo but rather God himself who scattered the dirt: "*K'ani inturb'a a'xin imb'ijk e rum najtnajt*" ("I [God] will go about placing bits of dirt all around"). The reintroduction of dirt eventually led to the creation of large mountains, which then protected the land from ever undergoing a similar flood again.

Creation of Plants and Agriculture

After the earth was formed and populated with the human race, according to Ch'orti' tradition, there was a time when there was no corn, no beans, and no sorghum, so the people had no seeds to plant and nothing to harvest. As I discuss below, leaf-cutter ants are said to have brought the first seeds from the "Otherworld" that had been stored in the deep recesses of a cave. The world at this time also lacked a crucial counterpart to seeds necessary for their maturation: rain. "At the beginning of the world it did not rain," we are told by two of Girard's consultants, Esteban Pérez and Lorenza Ruchjá (Girard 1995:401). The creation of the first rains for the Ch'orti' is a mythically significant event directly linked to an ancient sacrificial act involving God (*Katata'*) himself.

In this early Ch'orti' myth, before the creation of the world the God of Agriculture (*Katata'*), also known as the "White Giant," fought against the Black Giant (a physical representation of all evil)—an epic battle re-enacted in the traditional dance known as *El Baile de los Gigantes* ("The Dance of the Giants"). In this ritual drama, no longer performed in the Ch'orti' area, the Black Giant overpowers the White Giant and cuts his body up into pieces (Girard 1949; Girard 1995:397). According to Ch'orti' tradition, when the blood of the God of

Agriculture fell to the earth, it fertilized the earth for the first time, allowing all plants to then grow.⁷ Thus, as Girard states, the Ch'orti' "equate the blood of the deity [the God of Agriculture] with the fertilizing rains" (Girard 1995:271). Luis López, an elder of Quetzaltepeque, confirms that the *hicaques*, or barbarians, "cut off the head, cut the body into pieces and buried it. Then plants and maize were born" (401). This event was described to Girard in more detail as follows (399):⁸

At the beginning of the world when the sun did not yet shine, the *hicaques* [barbarians] opposed him [warred against him], they killed him, cut off his head, cut him into pieces and buried him. The king of evil, the evil man killed him. Our Lord showed up inside the belly of his enemies. . . . When he poured out his blood at the foot of the tree of the cross, the miracle came down [rain and maize]. Before, it didn't rain; he gave them winter [rainy season]. They themselves [the evil men] buried him, after killing him, but the Lord with his power revived. From him was born the Child [god of Maize]. . . . When he revived, he brought forth a plantation [milpa], because he raised up the power [Spirit that animates the plants].

An understanding of the mythic narrative of these opposing "Giants" provides a clear explanation why turkey blood is traditionally poured into holes in the *milpa* ("cornfield") by Ch'orti' farmers before planting. The offering of blood and other parts of the sacrificial turkey into the holes at the four corners and the center of the *milpa* is to guarantee a good harvest (Fought 1972:468-69, 477-81; Hull and Carrasco 2004:137-38) by recreating this ancient episode of the first fertilization of the earth (Wisdom 1940:438). It is believed that if the blood of a turkey is offered into the *milpa*, "*water e chojb'esyaj tama e kosechob' porke' che'nob' ke' unawalir e rum ja'x mek'er umener ume'yn tuno'r pa'k'b'ajrya'r*" ("mercy will come to the harvest that they planted. Because they say that by the spirit of the Earth is embraced the ghost of all the cultivated plants") (Fought 1972:517, 519; Fought's translation). A bountiful harvest is assured through use of the turkey since its avatar is the God of Agriculture himself (Girard 1995:267). Thus, while chicken meat and blood can also be placed into holes in the *milpa*, the mythic symbolism associated with turkey meat and blood makes the turkey offering of greater worth and effectiveness. Since it was God's blood that first fecundated the earth, so too must the Ch'orti' re-enact this great sacrificial act by yearly spilling his blood anew (that is, that of his avatar, the turkey) into the ground to fertilize it while simultaneously providing a "payment" (*tojma'r*) to the God of Agriculture.

After the spilling of the blood of the White Giant that caused the ground to become productive, humans now only lacked seeds to plant. The appearance of the seeds of some of the

⁷While *Katata'* is primarily a reference to "Our Father," that is, God the Father, it is sometimes used to refer to Jesus Christ by the Ch'orti' today. Thus, at times the spilling of the blood of Christ is equated with the spilling of the blood of the Father as the first fertilizing agent of agriculture. According to one of Fought's consultants (1972:494, 498), "*porke' che'nob' ke tama uch'ich'er e jesukristo chekta tuno'r b'u'r, nar, ch'um, sik'ab', kene*" ("because they say that with the blood of Jesus Christ there appeared all the beans, corn, squash, sugar-cane, and bananas" [orthography altered]). Among other Maya groups corn is said to come from the body of Christ (Bassie-Sweet 2014:184).

⁸The original Ch'orti' text does not appear in Girard's work.

most important agricultural products for the Ch'orti'—corn, beans, sorghum, and others—was accomplished through the efforts of leaf-cutting ants (*t'isim*). According to one tradition, one day some people went to a leaf-cutting ant mound where they saw leaf-cutting ants coming and going. The people noticed that they were carrying seeds of all kinds: corn, beans, rice, and others. The people then reached down and began picking up kernels of corn and beans and planting them. Thus, the Ch'orti' believe that the seeds all of the important staple crops today came out of the *bodega* (“storehouse”) of the leaf-cutting ants. Having had sole access to these valuable seeds for so long, the leaf-cutting ants were and still are referred to as *rikob* (“the wealthy”). Today, due to the mythical connection between the coming forth of seeds by the leaf-cutting ants, their anthills found in cornfields as well as bean growing areas are always viewed as a positive sign that their crops will grow abundantly. Fought has also recorded a similar version of tale of the leaf-cutting ants that notes the usefulness of ant hills in the *milpa* (1972:184-85; Fought's translation):

I am going to tell this story—the story of the ant. They say that back when—there was not corn to plant, and corn was not known, they say that one day the ants discovered it. Because they say that there was a God called San Manuel—Monte de Oro. They say that God first discovered corn. And people did not know—how—about corn.

Then the ants, they say, when day broke—their anthill was right next door to the house. And (the people) went to stir up the anthill. They say that they found a little ant lying in it, and they took him and planted him. And when corn grew up, they kept it until it had multiplied. They say that that is how corn appeared. But they say that corn was within the earth. And it was the ant that made it appear above the earth.

And that is why people today, where they see an anthill, they are happy to see it, because they say that the anthill is great for growing corn. Because they say that it was the ants that brought forth corn.

One interesting variant in Fought's story is that the people actually picked up and planted the ants themselves. The Ch'orti' text is even more revealing than the English translation in its description of the ant found lying on the anthill: “*che ke' utajwyob' ingojr yer ut'isim ch'a'r tamar*” (“they say they found a tiny one of its ants lying down on it” [orthography altered]). The word *t'isim*, here “ant,” is somewhat unexpectedly modified by the numeral classifier *-gojr* in this case, which is usually reserved for round objects and never for ants. The ant, however, seems to have either been holding onto the kernel of corn (which would take the *-gojr* classifier due to its shape), or that the ant was curled up into a ball, like the shape of a corn kernel. I tend to see the former as the more likely. This minor detail, lost in the English translation, provides insight into the fashion in which the ant was found—in the shape of a kernel of corn.

The origin of corn from a cave is part of a widely diffused tradition throughout the Maya area of the origin of corn (Navarrete 2000:64-70).⁹ The Aztecs also had a very similar version of the story, which is recorded in the Annals of Cuauhtitlan. “To provide food for the newly created people,” writes Bierhorst (1998:8-9), “Quetzalcoatl follows an ant into the interior of ‘Food

⁹For a large list of other sources of this myth, see Peñalosa (1996).

Mountain' and discovers a cache of corn kernels; the rain gods split open the mountain, gaining control over the corn and other crops as well." Similarly, throughout Mesoamerica in the vast majority of versions of this story it is ants that crawl into the small passages of a cave and bring out corn. However, in a version of this origin of corn story Hull (2002) recorded with an elderly Q'eqchi' man living in Pueblo Viejo, Belize, it was a number of small animals—the gopher (*aaqam*), the raccoon (*aj ow*), and the squirrel (*kuk*)—who crawled into a small hole in the rock (*pek*) to get access to the corn seeds.¹⁰ It was the gopher who first reached its hand in and touched the corn. There were 12 lightning/thunder (*kaaq*) gods who also wanted the corn, so they tried in vain to split the rock open. Unsuccessful, they turned to one lightning/thunder god among them who was very ill and who then tried his hand at it. He similarly failed to make a dent in the hard rock. Therefore, he enlisted the help of a woodpecker (*kolonte'*): "*Set chaq a pek a wa le', b'ar wank a hay yooq aatoch'om*," ("Go and break open that rock. Where the thin part is, you touch it"), to indicate the best place to direct the next lightning bolt.¹¹ The next strike succeeded, and the corn seeds were quickly gathered up. The best corn disappeared very quickly, leaving only black and yellow kernels that were scorched by the heat of the lightning bolt. This, therefore, is the reason there are different colors of corn in the world today, according to a larger Mesoamerican tradition.¹²

The Floods: Creations and Destructions

One of the more informative accounts of various stages and components of the creation and destruction of this world in Ch'orti' tradition is found in the story "What the World Used to be Like," recorded by Fought (1972:348-56). Due to its importance for this topic, I quote one section of the English translation of it at length:

People used to tell long ago that the world, long ago, would be destroyed again and again. They say that the sea rose over the earth and filled all the earth with water. And the earth became mud, until it finished—it turned to water all over the earth, and the people were completely killed off by the water. Because—they ended up floating, the people who were on the earth, ended up floating like rubbish on the water.

And no birds remained, nor foxes, nor deer, nor buzzards, nor hawks; nothing remained, because all at once, everything was destroyed on the earth, because they say that long ago, there were no mountains on the—world. Because they say that the world was once just stretched over the water; there were no mountains like today.

But when God saw that the humans in the world were destroyed, then one day, when it was filled with water all over the earth, and it had become pure mud, all over the—world. And

¹⁰ In the Annals of the Cakchiquels the animals responsible for discovering corn in Paxil are the coyote and the crow (Thompson 1990:353).

¹¹ The woodpecker is a common feature within this narrative among the Tzeltal, Yucatec, Mam, and other Maya groups (Thompson 1990:350-52). *Kolonte'* is a borrowing from the Mopan *kolonche'*.

¹² In some Q'eqchi' versions, however, the colors of the corn are associated with the solar positions as seen on the horizon (Braakhuis 2010:218).

when it began to dry, it went, and that water, where it began to gather, went away, and began to wash away the earth. Then was when everything appeared: streams, mountains, and stones. Everything there is.

It all became visible, because they say that that water, where it dried away, and where it began to gather together, washed away, and where it began to gather together, washed away the earth. And everything appeared, and the many rocks there are became visible.

It is clear from this story and from analyzing all the available accounts of creation among the Ch'orti' that the earth was destroyed more than once. In the above account, the first line states clearly that the earth was “destroyed again and again.” Fought rightly points out here that the adverb *iraj iraj* “definitely means ‘again and again,’” which suggests to him “that cyclical destruction of a world peopled as it is now is just what is meant” (1972:433 n.25.6). Indeed, in a story about the destruction of the world published by El Comité Nacional de Alfabetización (CONALFA) (López de Rosa and Mucia Patal 1997:113), the text explicitly notes that an event took place “*Tama inte' satpar xe' numuy tama e rum*” (“During one of the destructions that happened on the earth”). In another of Fought's accounts (1972:354) the narrator also specifies that the earth was flooded on numerous occasions: “Because the people used to tell long ago that the sea, from time to time, rose up, in its waves, and rose up standing like the clouds. And when it rose up standing, then it let itself come down, and covered everything on the earth.” Note again the seas are said to “rise up” “from time to time” and cover the earth in a flood, clearly indicating multiple floods of destruction.¹³

We learn that in some cases the reason for the destruction of the world was due to human disobedience. For instance, in one version where the world was destroyed by a flood recorded by Hull in 2002, God first attempts to destroy humans because they were all misbehaving (*malcriado*). God therefore sends a massive flood to annihilate the human race, but a “small group” (*yar e grupito*) quickly makes boats and they were able to survive the flood. They wait out the deluge until they see dry land. Soon God realizes that some have managed to survive. Curious to know how they did it, especially since all other land animals were killed, he sends a bird to fly down and ask the humans. In one version it is a hummingbird (*tz'unun*); in another a vulture (*usij*).¹⁴ The bird descends to earth to find the humans “eating their horses” (*war uk'uxyo'b' uchij*) in one version. Before the bird inquires of the humans, it notices scores of dying fish flopping around in the small pools left after the flood. The bird (in this case, the vulture) found the prospect of feasting on this bounty too much of a temptation and began eating its fill. In fact, the vulture gorges itself on so many fish that it is too heavy to fly afterwards. What is more, since it spends all its time eating, it never bothers to ask the people how they

¹³ The notion of a great flood may have been influenced in some aspects by Christian traditions. However, the idea of a massive, destructive flood is pre-Columbian. On page 74 of the Dresden Codex, one of the four surviving Maya codices, the goddess Chahk Chak Chel is shown emptying a jug of water, while water simultaneously spills from the mouth of a large caiman, both of which symbolize a great flood that destroyed the world, as Thompson (1993:214-16) first pointed out and other scholars have affirmed (see Schele and Grube 1997:198-99; Taube 1993:71; García 2006:5-6).

¹⁴ I have recorded versions with both the hummingbird and/or the vulture. The ALMG has published a version of this story also with a vulture (ALMG 1999:8).

survived the flood. After some time and effort, the vulture is able to fly back to the presence of God. Upon arriving, God immediately asks what it was able to find out from the humans. Ashamed, the vulture reports: “*Matuk'a cho'b*” (“They didn't say”). God berates the vulture for eating the rotting fish rather than doing what he had asked. Thus, the Ch'orti' say that the vulture was cursed by God from that time forth to eat only rotting flesh.

In another version of this story, it was a hummingbird that was sent. In this case the hummingbird follows the orders of God and asked the people directly, “*No'x, kocha korpo'x?*” (“How did you all save yourselves?”). The people proudly responded, “*Aa, no'n korpo'n ti kapoder*” (“Well, we saved ourselves by our power”). When the hummingbird returned to God to report, it related how the humans took credit for saving themselves through their own power and wit. Angry at the insolence of the people for not recognizing God as the one who saved them, God retorted, “Well then, we have to destroy them right away.” In this case, however, the “destruction” (*satpa'r*) God intended was more of a destruction through transformation; he changed all humans into monkeys. In this version of the story, this is how the last surviving humans from the first creation were finally destroyed. Furthermore, we also learn from this episode where and when monkeys came into the world according to the Ch'orti'.

Yet another version of the story by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG 1999:8) contains both the vulture and the hummingbird. After the vulture's failure, it was forever cursed to eat only “*tuj tuj xe'ayan*” (“all there is that stinks”). It is then that God sends the hummingbird to see if it can find out how the humans managed to survive. The humans similarly responded to the hummingbird: “*No'n korpo'n tama kak'ek'wa'r*” (“We survived through our own strength”). When the hummingbird returned and told God what they had said, he first praised the hummingbird for fulfilling his mission. The hummingbird was rewarded by being allowed to eat “*imb'utz tuno'r awya'r*” (“all good food”), such as “*uje'yr o'uchi'r e nichir twa'anumse tuno'r ab'ixirar*” (“the nectar or juice of flowers on which to live all your life”).¹⁵ God in his anger then visits the surviving humans and turns them into monkeys as punishment for their prideful ways.

I now present two longer versions of the creation and destruction of the human race recorded by Hull (2002) with different Ch'orti' men. The first was an elderly man in his 90s. His narrative is highly interesting in that it contains numerous details not found elsewhere. The story is somewhat rough at times, however, as he tended to switch trains of thought during recitation quite often. He also mixes certain Christian elements into the narrative at times and code-switches often with Spanish:¹⁶

1. *Entonces después kocha tama aquel tiempo b'an ani turo'b'kocha turo'n tara'.*

Then after, as in that time, we were living as we do here.

¹⁵ The hummingbird is always viewed in a positive light by the Ch'orti'. In other oral traditions it too is said to have been rewarded for its actions by being allowed to drink the sweet nectar of flowers all of its days, such as in the Story of the Kumix Angel (Hull 2009:131-40).

¹⁶ When code-switching is apparent, Spanish spellings are retained. When the Spanish forms are more clearly a case of lexical borrowing, the Ch'orti' spellings of Spanish words will be used.

2. *Después ke' cuando hicieron el cielo, entonces subieron ixob' tichan tu'no'rob'b'an pue.*
After when they made the sky, then they went up, they all went above, in fact.
3. *Entonces kocha e Padre Celestial 2000 año ch'a'r atz'i makwe'e ja' che.*
Thus, 2,000 years ago as Heavenly Father was indeed lying within the water, they say.
4. *Entonces kocha ma'ni tuk'a e rum verdad, ya el hijo uche formar el mundo ira.*
Then as there was no real land, there the son made this earth.
5. *Kocha no'n ayan e maxtak ub'an.*
Just as we have children also.
6. *De aquí k'ani [ka'y] apatno'b'.*
For here they began to work.
7. *War inwa'ryo'b' 'patne'nik'b'anixto ayi e Padre Eterno, kocha maku'ja'ani ch'a'r ya.*
I was saying to them, 'Work!' just like Heavenly Father, since he was inside water there.
8. *Ya ch'a'r ayi.*
There he was.
9. *Entonces yaja' che ke' i por eso pues ke' después ke' ya está al cielo.*
Thus there they say and for this reason that afterwards the sky was now there.
10. *Entonces separaron ta cielo e angelob' yaja'b'an pues.*
Then those angels separated in the sky in fact.
11. *I e angelob' ub'an kocha formado umen e Katata', ub'an el hijo de Dios, ayan.*
And the angels, as they were also created by God, also the Son of God.
12. *Verdad ke'—verdad e Kumix era el último hijo pero kone'r mixto ja'x tara turo'b'.*
Truly, truly Kumix was the last child, but they do not live here anymore.
13. *Talvez verdad ke' pero los que fueron obediente aquel tiempo e angelob' cuando che atz'i el hijo de Dios konde uche formar e mundo.*
Perhaps it's true—but those who were obedient in those days, the angels, when they say that the Son of God—when he created the world.
14. *Entonces uyari uyok e ja'ixin.*
Then the water took root and went.
15. *I de ahí mamajchi'twa' atz'ayma cha'yi, mamajchi'twa' atz'ayma.*
And from there there was no one to irrigate they say; no one to irrigate.

16. *Entonces a'rena umen e Padre Eterno ke'haga otros espíritu che.*
So it was said by Heavenly Father, 'Make other spirits' he said.
17. *Entonce uwajpi e rum.*
Then they took some dirt.
18. *Uyujta koche'ra.*
He blew it like this.
19. *Wa'r el hijo de Dios uyujta.*
The Son of God stood blowing it.
20. *Entonces chekta ixin solo taka uwich'ob'uyangelob'.*
Then they went appearing, just with the wings of his angels.
21. *Entonce ka'y ajk'uno'b', ka'y patno'b'e rum ka'y tz'aymo'b'.*
Then they began to be given; they began to work the land; and they began to irrigate.
22. *Ja'x ani twa'uchob'celar e mundo, entonces ka'y patno'b'.*
This was in order to make the world jealous, so they began to work.
23. *I de ayi che'nob'ayi imb'a ke' 'No'n kache mandar e rum'che'nob'ayi,*
And from there they say they indeed said, 'We ordered the earth,' they say they said.
24. *'No'n kache mandar'cha'yi.*
'We ordered it,' they say they said.
25. *I entonces el hijo de Dios uche quejar taka utata.*
And so the Son of God complained to his father.
26. *Cha'yi ke', 'Ne't maja'x ayi ne't ache mandar e rum'cha'yi uya're utata, el hijo de Dios.*
They say he said, 'It is not you' they say. 'You ordered the earth,' they say he said to his father, the Son of God.
27. *'Haga otros tierra'che ayi.*
'Make other worlds,' they say he said.
28. *Uche otronte'e rum el hijo de Dios.*
The Son of God made another world.
29. *Entonce eb'tana tari e san espíritu cuando che'na formar*
So the Holy Spirit was sent when it was created,

30. *yixto era che tar e Padre Eterno.*

just so, they say, it was with Heavenly Father.

31. *Koche'ra wa'r taka uk'ab' el hijo de Dios.*

In this way he stands with the hand of the Son of God.

The first point of interest is that the text states that God and his son “went up” to some unspecified locale after creating the sky. The story then notes that 2,000 years ago God was “lying within the water,” a mysterious reference that does not appear in any other published version. Later, the text reiterates that “Heavenly Father” was still “inside water there.” Some implicit connection is made between the creation of the sky and the presence of God in the water since it states that God’s being in the water is the “reason that afterwards the sky was now there.” Furthermore, the angels are said to have “separated in the sky” at this point, an opaque reference, though it could signify that this was the moment when God assigned four angels their respective corner-posts at the corners of the sky.

The earth is then created by God’s son. No information is provided about the activities of the humans except that they were commanded to work. The text then abruptly introduces the first flood of the earth by simply saying “*uyari uyok e ja' ixin*” (“the water took root and went” or “the water went and took root”). Once the humans were all killed, there was no one left to irrigate the land, so God commanded his son to “Make other spirits”—the second creation of humans. God’s son did so by taking a handful of dirt and blowing it, causing humans to appear. This act of repopulating the earth is unique in Ch’orti’ lore as far as I know.

The people wasted no time in beginning to irrigate the land. In another unclear statement, the text says that humans starting irrigating “in order to make the world jealous,” a phrase for which I have no explanation. However, the people seemingly became prideful and began to boast that they had “ordered the world.” God’s son complained to him about this, telling God that the people think they made and ordered the earth, but that it was really God. This caused God to command his son to start again and make another world.¹⁷ Thus, in this short text we have three separate creations of humans, two of the earth, and one great flood.

The second story of the creation and destruction of the world recorded by Hull contains numerous new details about the early moments of Creation, the conditions under which the first humans lived, multiple floods, and how and why God created mountains during this time (2002):

1. *K'ani ink'ajti unumer xe' ak'aj nato ani oni'x i ne'n k'a'r nimener.*

I want to relate a story that was still told long ago and that I still remember.

2. *Uk'ajtyo'b' ani ninoy i nitata tya'war apatno'b' o tya'turo'b' ajiryo'b' aturan ani uk'ajtyo'b' e k'ajpesyaj ira.*

¹⁷ While the text uses the plural *otros* (“others”), the noun is given in the singular as *tierra* (“land/world”). The following line also clarifies that it was indeed a single new earth: *Uche otronte'e rum*, “He made another [sg.] world.” The non-agreement of gender and number with adjectives and nouns is common when the speaker uses Spanish terms while speaking Ch’orti’.

My grandfathers would tell it, and my father when they were working or when they were seated resting they told this story.

3. *Uk'ajtyo'b' ani ke' oni'x e b'ajxan pak'ab'ob' ub'an xe' turanob' ke' konde wartokto ani ak'a'pa uche e rum e katata' i uturb'a e k'in.*

They used to tell that long ago the first people also who lived, when God had just finished making the earth and God placed the sun.

4. *B'ajxan ma'ya'ni tuk'a e k'in ma'ya'ni tuk'a ub'an e ek'ajataka ani u't e k'in, e rum i e jaja'r i e Katata' uche ayi koche'ra.*

First they say there was no sun, nor were there stars, only the sky, the earth, and the rain, and God made them in this way, they say.

5. *I uturb'a upak'ab'ob' to'r e rum i uyarak'ob'.*

And he placed his people on the earth and his animals.

6. *Inton che ke'e b'ajxan pak'ab'ob' ira apatno'b' ayi apatno'b' me'yra tama e rum.*

Then they say that these first people worked, they say, worked a lot on the land.

7. *Ma'ya'ni tuk'a e machit tak'in.*

They did not have steel machetes.

8. *Tama e pajb'irte' e'yni apatnob'.*

With whittled wood sticks they would work, they say.

9. *Upajryo'b' e te' i tar upajnyo'b' e rum i uyak'nyo'b' u't e jinaj.*

They whittled wood, and with them they would dig the ground and remove the weeds from the cornfield.

10. *Koche ma'ya'ni tuk'a ub'an e k'in xe'ujanch'akres u't e rum, ik'sib'an taka e'yni anumuy.*

Since there was no sun either to illuminate the earth, they just lived day to day in darkness, they say.

11. *Ma'chi una'tob' jay ayan e akb'ar i ma'chi una'tob' jay ayan ajk'in.*

They did not know if there was darkness, nor did they know if there was sun.

12. *Ajtaka uwiro'b' e akb'ar ik'sib'aner.*

They only saw the night in darkness.

13. *Inton che ja'xirob'tya'war e'yni aptano'b' uk'echo'b' ayi kororte'a'xin b'antaka ke'ayan ani i me'yra t'iw.*

Then they say where they were working, they say, they were carrying, they say, wooden carrying racks because there were many eagles.

14. *E t'iw che uk'uxi ayi e pak'ab'tya'war apatno'b'.*

The eagles, they say, would eat the people while they were working, they say.

15. *E t'iw ira ekmay watar ja'xir tu't e k'in uch'uyi a'xin e pak'ab'twa'uk'uxi.*

These eagles descended from the sky and carried away the people to eat them.

16. *Inton che e pak'ab'ira uche'yni inte'unukir korortyo'b'twa'ukotb'a tu'jorob'twa'ukorpesob'ub'o'b'.*

So, they say, these people would made large wooden carrying racks to put on their heads to protect themselves.

17. *I tya'watar e t'iw tu't e k'in ja'xtaka e kororte'uch'uyi a'xin.*

And when the eagles came from the sky, they took away the wooden carrying racks.

18. *E pak'ab'aketpa, i wa'kchetaka ukotb'a otronte'kororte'tu'jor twa'ma'chi asutpa ak'ujxa umen e t'iw.*

But the people remained, and they'd quickly put another wooden carrying rack on their heads so they would not be eaten by the eagles again.

19. *B'anixto koche'ra turanob'ub'an.*

In this way they also lived.

20. *I koche kana'ta ke'ja'xirob'ja'x e b'ajxan pak'ab'ob', inton che ma'ya'ni tuk'a e witzir ub'an.*

And since we know that they were the first people, so they say that there were no mountains either.

21. *Inyajrer turu e'yni e rum.*

They say there was just land.

22. *I b'antaka kawira e rum ani tech'er.*

And we just see the earth was flat.

23. *Matuk'a ani e witzir.*

There were no mountains.

24. *Inton che konda ak'axi e jaja'r me'yra, asib'i e noj ja'uwech'e ub'a watar tama e rum tya'turo'b'e pak'ab'ob'.*

So they say that when the rain would fall heavily, the sea would grow in size, spreading out over the land where the people lived.

25. *I b'an koche'ra che ataki e'yni a'xin e ja'ira i tya'anumuy e jaja'r ataki e ja'a'xin.*

And thus in this way they say that this water dries up, they say, where the rain occurs the water dries up.

26. *Aketpa e syan chay ta takinar.*

There remain a lot of fish on the dry parts.

27. *Ak'a'uk'uxo'b'e chay che i upojpyo'b'e syan chay i ja'xirob'twa'taka ke'ja'xirob'ma'chi ani achamo'b'umen e wi'na'r.*

They eat up the fish, they say, and they roast many fish, and they—so that they would not die of hunger.

28. *Una'tob'ix ani ke'achi'i'e ja'che.*

They had known that the water would rise up.

29. *Ja'xirob'ayan ani inte'upajrb'irtyo'b'.*

They had a boat.

30. *Uyose ub'o'b'aturanob'i umaki ub'o'b'.*

They got in, sat down, and hid themselves.

31. *I konde achi'i'e ja'achu'jya a'xin tichan.*

And when the water increases, they are carried away above it.

32. *Ma'chi achamo'b'ja'xirob'akorpo'b'.*

They do not die, but they save themselves.

33. *I konde anumuy e ja'e'kmay watar yer upajb'irtyo'b'tya'turo'b'tar.*

And when the water passes, they get off their little boats in which they were seated.

34. *I alok'o'b'tar i aka'y uk'uxo'b'e chay xe'aketpa a'xin.*

And they leave (the boats) and begin eating the fish that remain.

35. *B'anto ani koche'ra uchob'.*

This they continually did.

36. *K'ijna e Katata'che.*

God became angry, they say.

37. *I uyeb'ta tari inte'nox'i'jaja'r xe'ma'chi'x anumuy inyajrer.*

And he sent a great rainstorm that had nowhere to run off.

38. *I b'ut'tz'a yaja'tuno'r e rum tya'turo'b'.*

And it filled up there all of the earth where they were.

39. *I mixtuk'a twa'utajwyo'b'tuk'a uk'uxo'b'.*

And now they didn't have anything to eat.

40. *I majko 'b' inyajrer umen e ja', ub'ukyo 'b' e ja' i jak'bo 'b' chamo 'b'.*

And they were covered over immediately by the water, swallowed the water, choked, and they died.

41. *B'anixto koche 'ra sajto 'b' umen e Katata'.*

Thus in this way they were destroyed by God.

42. *Inton cha 'yi e Katata' 'Kone 'r k'ani 'xto inturb 'a nipak 'ab 'ob 'ya 'intya 'chi 'x.*

Then they say that God said, "Now I want to put my people this time in a different form.

43. *Insati 'x e mojr ira i kone 'r k'ani inche koche 'ra.*

I've already destroyed this group, and now I will make them in this way.

44. *K'ani inturb 'a a'xin imb 'ijk e rum najtnajt twa' asutpa witzirob 'i twa' e witzir ira ja 'x inte' makte' twa' ma 'chi 'x anumuy e noj ja' i twa' ti 'n a'xin aturanob 'nakpat xe' k'ani inturb 'ob'.*

I will go about putting bits of dirt all around so that mountains return and so that these mountains will be a fence so that a great flood will not happen again (for) those who will be living afterward whom I will place.

45. *Ma 'chi 'x a'xin ak 'otoy e noj ja' twa' amajko 'b' koche inche taka e mojr ira.*

The flood will no longer reach, so that they will be shut in as I did with the other group."

46. *I b'an koche 'ra kana 'ta b'anixto ayi chekta a'xin e witzir.*

And thus in this way we know that mountains began to appear.

47. *I b'an koche 'ra che kay ayi xana e Katata' uturb 'a e witzir.*

And thus in this way they say God went about setting mountains.

48. *Intaka ayi kay xana uturb 'a e rum najtnajt.*

They say he just went about putting dirt far and wide.

49. *I konde ja 'xir ch 'ayi upejka ayi e rum ch 'y'enik wa 'kchetaka cha 'yi, inton wa 'kchetaka ka 'y sib 'i a'xin e witzir.*

And when they say he spoke to the land, "Grow quickly!" they say he said, then right away the mountains began to grow in size.

50. *I ketpa e nukir witzir.*

And the big mountains remained.

51. *I b'an koche 'ra kawira e nukir witzir ko 'rako 'ra.*

And thus in this way we see big mountains everywhere.

52. *I e witzir ira ja 'x inte' makte' twa' ma 'chi anumuy e ja' uchamsyo 'n.*

And these mountains are a fence so that the water doesn't pass and kill us.

The text states that the sky and earth were created before the sun and the stars. Indeed, the first people (*e b'ajxan pak'ab'ob'*) are said to have lived in utter darkness. They would work the fields with their wooden machetes but without the benefit of any light. At some point God “placed” (*uturb'a*) the sun in the world, though the timing of this event is not stated precisely.

The narrative then introduces one of the great dangers the first people faced—giant marauding eagles that would swoop down, grab humans in their claws, and carry them off to be eaten.¹⁸ This myth is well known throughout Mesoamerica, such as among the K'iche' (Ajpacajá Túm, Chox Tum et al. 2001:141), the Ch'ol (Arcos 1998:25-30; Josserand 2003; Meneses López 1986:62-63), the Q'eqchi' (Hull and Fergus 2009:108-18), and among the Huautla of Sierra Mazateca (Boege 1992:61-81; Neiburg 1988). In most versions of this story the humans protect themselves by placing large wooden cages or carrying racks on their backs or heads. When the eagles try to grab them, they only make off with the wooden structure. The fear of large eagles that can carry away humans is still found among many Maya groups today (Hull and Fergus 2009:108-18).

The above narrative also affirms that there were no mountains on the earth in the beginning. The land is simply described as being *tech'er* (“flat”).¹⁹ This is corroborated in one of Fought's texts, which states that “everything was destroyed on the earth, because they say that long ago, there were no mountains on the—world;” furthermore, “Because they say that the world was once just stretched over the water; there were no mountains like today” (1972:353). Therefore, as I previously noted, the land was constantly in danger from the water rising.

This narrative also suggests that rather than there being just a single great flood, the earth was repeatedly inundated by the seas. The form of the verb “fall” (*k'ax-*) that appears here, referring to the heavy rains, is in the incompletive aspect (*ak'axi*), perhaps indicating that this was not a one-time event. However, the narrative then changes to the completive, making this assertion somewhat less certain.

Soon the waters begin to recede and dry land becomes visible. The people find that fish are to be had on these dry spots and begin cooking and eating them. A crucial line of the text states that the people knew ahead of time (*una'tob'ix ani*) of the impending flood and therefore were able to prepare boats (given as plural, *upajb'irtyo'b'*) in advance and survive the great flood. After disembarking their boats, they subsisted off the dying fish for some time. For some unstated reason, however, this angered God, so he sent a storm so large that the earth was not able to contain the amount of water.²⁰ The land quickly flooded, and the people summarily drowned.

The destruction of the “first people” now gave God the chance to try again. So he created humans again, this time *intya'chi'x* (“in a different form” or “in a different way”). God then

¹⁸ Kerry Hull and Rob Fergus (2009:83-134) have previously published this portion of this eagle myth in Ch'orti'.

¹⁹ The Tzotzil of Larrainzar similarly note that at the first creation the earth was “completely flat” (Thompson 1990:346).

²⁰ Another possibility is that God was angry that they had survived, though the text is unclear on this point.

began to sprinkle dirt all around the earth in an effort to cause mountains (*witzir*) to appear, which they did upon his verbal command.²¹ These mountains would now form a “barrier” (*makte*) between the sea and the land so that the earth would never again be flooded.

The Transformation of Humans into Animals

A number of the early humans created by God were either destroyed or transformed into animals in Ch’orti’ tradition. For example, in one story, all the people who were destroyed by a flood when the world was also destroyed turned into fish: “So they used to tell long ago, that the fish were people” (Fought 1972:378). In addition, vultures are also said to have first been human, but were changed into their present form due to disobedience. Similarly, raccoons are said to have first been humans. Fought provides one account of how this happened (151-53). In this version, the narrator states that “the Raccoon used to be like a person.” A few men discovered a secret for hunting by changing themselves into raccoons. This way they were able to easily catch the chickens and turkeys of their neighbors. All they had to do was to pass under the legs of their wives to be transformed. Evidently, so many men took advantage of this that there began to be very few men left, something that caused the women to fear. Therefore, they stopped allowing men to pass under their skirts. Unfortunately, those who had already changed into raccoons could not figure out how to turn into men again and therefore went to the mountains to hide. The narrator notes that they remained raccoons, evidence of which is that raccoons have hands and feet much like humans (*b’an kocha uyok e jente uk’ab’*) (Fought 1972:152; [orthography altered]).

In another version of this tradition recorded by Hull in 2005, raccoons are also said to have first been humans. The reason why God changed them into raccoons, however, differs from the version just cited from Fought above:

1. *E ejmach ja’x ani inkojt pak’ab’ob’ub’an xe’turanob’b’ajxan to’r e rum.*

Raccoons used to be people also who lived first on the earth.

2. *Ma’chi kana’ta jay ja’x turanob’b’ajxan ke’Ch’ortyo’b’.*

We don’t know if it was they who lived before the Ch’orti’.

3. *Inton che ke’ yer e animalob’, koche kawa’re, e’ra yer uyarak’ob’ e Katata’ i ma’chi o’b’yanob’che.*

So, they say, that the little animals, as we call them, these were little animals of God, they wouldn’t obey.

4. *Turanob’to’r e rum ani koche no’n.*

They used to live on the earth as we do.

²¹ This method of creating land/mountains is similar to an account recorded by Fought I mentioned earlier (1972:378). Importantly, another of Fought’s texts informs us that it was only after the ground began to dry that “everything appeared: streams, mountains, and stones. Everything there is” (353).

5. *A'reno'b'twa'upak'yo'b'e nar, e b'u'r, e ch'um ja'xirob'che.*

They are told to plant corn, beans, and squash, they say.

6. *B'ajxan ke'ak'otoy e jaja'r o ayo'pa e jaja'r uk'uxo'b'u't ujinajob'.*

Before the rain arrives, or the rain comes they eat the seeds of the field.

7. *I b'anto ya'kay che ucho'b'inteto jab'.*

And thus always, they say, they were doing every year.

8. *Watar ja'xob'uk'uxo'b'u't e jinajob'.*

They come to eat the seeds of the field.

9. *Uketyo'b'i uk'uxyo'b'.*

They keep them back and eat them.

10. *I ak'otoy e ajk'in matuk'a twa'upak'yo'b'.*

And the day arrives when there was nothing to plant.

11. *Inton che e Katata'k'oyran.*

Then, they say, God grew tired of them.

12. *I maja'xtaka e'ra ucho'b', ucho'b'me'yra mab'anb'anir.*

And it wasn't just this they did, for they had done lots of bad things.

Thus, due to their disobedience, God appeared to them in the shape of an animal. He grabbed one of the humans and ripped out its intestines. He then stuck the innards up its rear end, causing all of them to be turned into raccoons, with the eviscerated intestines transforming into their long tails. They then began to live in the forests and make their homes there.

The ALMG (1999:25) has also published a version of this story of how humans became raccoons:

Che ak'ajna, Ejmach pak'ab'ani, b'an koche'no'n aktab'ir ani umen e katata'twa'apatna to'r e rum ira, yi che ak'ajna, Ejmach ira, injab'injab'ukete ani e jinaj, pak'i, yi tya'ak'otoy e jab'twa'apak'ma, b'ajxan ak'a'pa uk'uxi, mixto tuk'a u't ujinaj twa'upak'i ya', injab', injab', b'antaka uche, ye'katata'k'oyran uwiran tuk'a war uche e Ejmach. Tari ja'xir uwajpi tu'nuk'e Ejmach, utz'oki lok'oy uxor, uturb'a tu'tusuy e Ejmach, tya'ch'u'r ani uxor lok'oy unej. B'an koche'ra k'otoy usatpa'rir e b'ajxan pak'ab'ira umen e mab'amb'anir xe'ayan ani tamarob'.

They say it is said that raccoons used to be humans, just as we were left by God to work this earth. And they say it is said that year after year these raccoons would hold back the seeds they plant, but when the year would come to plant, first they stopped eating; they no longer had any seeds to plant there. Year after year they would do things like this. And God grew tired of seeing what the raccoons were doing. He came and grabbed onto the neck of raccoon and ripped off its head and

put it in the butt of the raccoon. Where its head used to be its tail came out. Thus in this way the destruction came to be of these first people because of the evil that was in them.

In this case, humans are turned into raccoons as punishment for hoarding the corn seeds meant for planting. Their fate was the same as in the previous narrative, though this time it is their heads that are ripped off and put into their rear ends.²² Additionally, it is of interest that the narrator makes the point that this was “*usatpa’rir e b’ajxan pak’ab’ira*,” (“the destruction of the first people” [emphasis mine]), in obvious contrast to later human creations.

Afterwards in the same version recited to Hull (2002, cited above), the narrator also noted that humans were turned into monkeys for the same reason as the raccoon—for eating all the seeds instead of planting them as they were obligated to do by God. Here too God takes out the intestines of the monkeys and inserts them in their rear ends, thereby creating their tails. In this telling of the story, the narrator ends by saying: “*I b’an koche’ra k’otoy sajto’b’ e b’ajxanob’ t’oxma’r era xe’ uche e Katata*” (“And in this way they came to be destroyed, these first creations that God made”). Once again, the narrator stresses that monkeys were created from “these first creations.”

In another version, some humans were said to have survived the great flood by floating on top of wooden cages (*kororte’*) (López de Rosa and Patal 1997:113).²³ When God asked them how they survived, they responded: “*No’n korpon kab’ajner*,” (“We saved ourselves by ourselves”), to which God disbelievingly replied, “*Ib’ajner korpo’xka?*,” (“You saved yourselves by yourselves?”). The arrogant humans affirmed, “*Kab’ajner*” (“Yes, by ourselves”). God again expresses his displeasure with them for not giving credit to him for their survival and changes them into monkeys. In this version, however, it is not the entrails that are removed and put up their rear ends as in the version of Hull cited above. Here the text states that God “*uk’ok’chi uxor e ma’x utakb’u*²⁴ *tama usuy*” (“cracked the head of the monkey [read ‘human’] open and attached it to its rear end”). This is precisely what happened to the raccoons in the previous story mentioned above (ALMG 1999:25).

Another tale published by the ALMG (1999:8) also contains a similar account of how men became monkeys. When God learns of the haughty response of the humans that they saved themselves from the flood by their own power, the text states God “*utz’oki uxor e pak’ab’ob’ yaja’, uwajpi ayi utz’iri tu’yebarirob’ e pak’ab’ob’ yaja’, ja’xto kone’r Ma’x*” (“he ripped off those people’s heads, grabbed them, they say, and inserted them up the rear ends of the people.

²² In a Ch’ol version of the Creation, when God sent jaguars to kill of the human race, one man barricaded himself in his house. When God discovered him still alive “he tore off the man’s head and stuck it on his anus, and the man was changed into a spider monkey” (Thompson 1990:345-46).

²³ The story never explicitly states they were “humans” who turned to monkeys, but it is obviously implied by logic and context: “*chekta ub’ixirar e arak*,” “their life as wild animals began” (lit. “appeared”) (López de Rosa and Patal 1997:113). A similar tradition exists among the Tzotzil of some escaping the flood after the first creation by floating in a box (Thompson 1990:347).

²⁴ The verb *utakb’u* should be *utak’b’u* instead, which means “stick two things together.”

Thus today they are monkeys”).²⁵ Now, according to the text, “*Tu’yeb’aririob’ ayi turu ub’ijnusyajob*” (“They say their thoughts resided in their butts”). Because of their pride, many of the early humans on the earth were transformed into monkeys, a belief that is still pervasive in the Ch’orti’ area today.

Conclusion

While a complete version of the creation story does not exist among the Ch’orti’, the various key components of the narrative are still known. In this study I have attempted to bring as many of these details together for the first time into one source in order to better appreciate these core mythic beliefs that have long been part of Ch’orti’ oral tradition. I have shown that creation as such was not a singular event, but rather complex series of trials and errors, until God felt satisfied with the behavior of humans. Numerous floods of massive proportions are said to have occurred on the earth in the distant past, some for vengeance, some for punishment, and others out of petulance.

The story of the development of human beings and animals is notable mainly for the way that their histories intertwine. As we have seen, the Ch’orti’ believe various animals were first humans that for one reason or another were transformed, at times voluntarily and at times not.

The influence of the central beliefs of the creations and destructions of the world in other areas of Ch’orti’ mythology and their understanding of the physical and spiritual world can hardly be overstated. They literally pervade nearly every area of traditional Ch’orti’ thought and worldview. Indeed, the concepts of how the world was created and how it is constituted alone have profound interconnections to all healing practices and conceptions of illness for the Ch’orti’. Furthermore, much of traditional Ch’orti’ ritual is patterned in accordance with their conception of their physical world, as described above, in terms of the four corners, the center, and the physical layout of both heaven and earth. Thus, in order to better comprehend many aspects of Ch’orti’ daily life, ceremonialism, oral tradition, ritual drama, and overall worldview, the foundational myths of Creation and the destruction of the world are a necessary prerequisite.

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²⁵ The verb *tz’oki* can be quite a violent action of “ripping off,” “break,” or “break off” in Ch’orti’. And, in this version the verb *tz’iri* is used, which means “to insert” something somewhat gently.

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