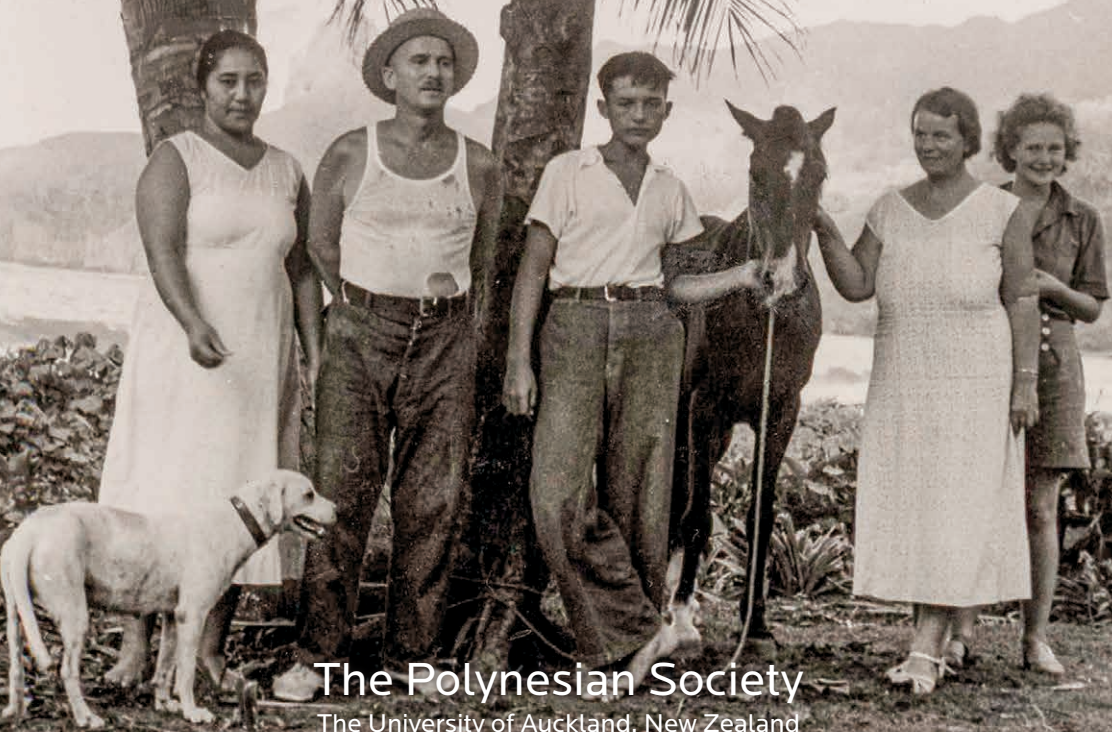
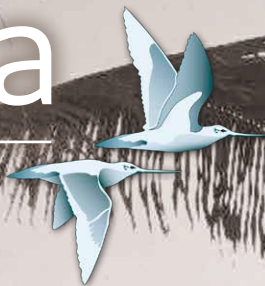


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MANU DUALITY: SEPARATION, COMPETITION AND DECEPTION IN POLYNESIAN BIRD STORIES

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ABSTRACT: In Polynesian societies, people developed a deep knowledge of all feathered creatures and devised a great many stories about them. This article offers a summary and a comparative analysis of 30 traditional Polynesian narratives. These stories feature two birds (or a bird and another animal) that either part company, compete with each other or deceive one another. Of these 30 narratives, 12 originate in East Polynesia, 6 in West Polynesia and the other 12 in Polynesian Outliers. These stories show that birds elicited much interest in people, that their habits and behaviour were intimately familiar to Polynesians and that they were perceived as much more than a food source. Their beautiful colours had to be accounted for, their origin thus explained in a story. The same went for a peculiar behavioural or physical characteristic, a call or cry, a feeding or nesting habit. These traditions describe birds as not having always looked, sounded or behaved the way they do now: in all these aetiological narratives a particular event triggered a change in appearance, voice or behaviour that became permanent.

Keywords: oral traditions, Polynesian birds, aetiological narratives, animal stories, Polynesian mythology, ethnozoology

In all Polynesian societies, birds engaged the human imagination with their songs, colours and power of flight, especially because of the absence of large land mammals in Polynesia. Manu (birds in most Polynesian languages) were also very powerful symbols. They appear in traditional Polynesian stories in a variety of roles.

In this article, traditional stories are defined as stories that were, and in some cases still are, handed down, transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation. Traditional Polynesian stories are not necessarily pre-European or from a very long time ago. They originated in Polynesian communities living in the thousand islands of East Polynesia, West Polynesia and the Polynesian Outliers.

Manu had already colonised Polynesia when *Homo sapiens* was barely leaving Africa. Fossil evidence suggests that most of the bird species present at first human contact in places such as Tonga, Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai‘i had been present for more than 100,000 years (Steadman 2006: 448). Most of the avifauna of tropical Polynesia (excluding Hawai‘i) originated

in New Guinea, having dispersed over the widest expanse of water on the planet and colonised very remote islands up to 10,000 kilometres away from New Guinea. The cases of Aotearoa New Zealand and Hawai‘i differ in that their avifaunas are highly endemic and have different origins and evolutionary histories from those of the rest of Polynesia. The former seems to be of Australian origin, while Hawai‘i has land birds of American origin (Mitchell 1990: 123–24).

For my PhD research I compiled a corpus of 300 traditional Polynesian narratives that feature birds as *dramatis personae*. I analysed and compared these in order to identify the recurrent themes and motifs that run through them and to find out how Polynesians incorporated birds into their stories (Richter-Gravier 2019). Little had been written on the topic of birds in Polynesian oral narratives. Birds have tended to be studied without consideration of the stories told about them, mostly in the case of ornithologists, and anthropologists have tended to study Polynesian oral traditions without taking much note of the birds present in them.

I found most of these stories in published sources (from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by ethnographers, anthropologists and linguists) and a few additional ones in manuscripts; I did not collect any of them firsthand. The first step was to locate bird-related narratives in Bacil Kirtley’s *A Motif-Index of Traditional Polynesian Narratives*, published in 1971. However, Kirtley did not survey all the existing literature, and many Polynesian stories were published after 1971. Therefore, although Kirtley’s motif-index was a highly valuable tool allowing me to locate many of the stories, numerous other publications had to be surveyed to find as many further narratives about birds as possible.

The corpus thus compiled shows that birds play a part in stories about the origin of the world and of humankind. They appear in many traditions as message-bearers sent by a deity to warn or advise humans, as guardians and protectors, or as cherished pets. They can also appear as giant man-eating birds.

Other narratives are purely “animal stories” without human characters. Of the 300 bird stories assembled in the corpus, 30 feature two birds (or a bird and another animal) in opposition to one another. They argue, compete or trick one another. In this article it will be argued that the primary function of these “animal stories” is not to inculcate moral values or merely to entertain. Rather than being didactic, they are aetiological—they account for and give meaning to the physical, vocal and behavioural characteristics of a given species. They demonstrate that Polynesian peoples developed their own sets of beliefs to explain a bird’s behaviour and appearance. These explanations are, in my view, what makes these stories particularly interesting, because they provide insights into Polynesian peoples’ ways of thinking. These narratives also show how birds can become “storytelling material”.

STORIES OF OPPOSITION

Arguments about the Best Place to Live or the Best Food

Two Māori “parting-of-ways” stories featuring birds present an opposition between land and sea. In these stories, two animals argue about the best place to live and part ways because they cannot agree. These “survival” stories are about finding the safest place to live in order not to be killed and eaten by people.

In the first story, the koreke (New Zealand quail, *Coturnix novaezelandiae*) and the pakake (New Zealand fur seal, *Arctocephalus forsteri*) were friends (Beattie 1920a: XXIII, 5). The pakake wanted the koreke to go out to sea with it, but the bird wished to stay on land.¹ The pakake insisted and tried to leave, but the koreke tried to restrain him. The pakake then began to tangi (cry) and sang a lament about having to leave to avoid being killed and eaten. The pakake eventually went out to sea, and its friend stayed on shore and headed inland.

In the story of the toroa (albatross) and the kākāpō (*Strigops habroptila*), a seabird plays the part of the fur seal (Beattie 1920a: XXIII, 2). In this narrative as well, the toroa wanted the kākāpō to go out to sea with him, but the latter replied that they were better off on land. The toroa argued that they would be found and eaten if they stayed on land, while the kākāpō believed that this would happen if they went out to sea. So, they parted company.

The Māori story of the kiore (Polynesian rat, *Rattus exulans*) and the pōwhaitere (parakeet, *Cyanoramphus* sp.) differs from the previous two narratives in that one of the protagonists, the kiore, knows that it will be killed and eaten by people anyway—there is no hope for the poor kiore (Taylor 1855: 137). In a conversation between the two animals, the pōwhaitere told the kiore that they should climb up the trees to eat the fruit of the miro (brown pine, *Prumnopitys ferruginea*) and the kahikatea (white pine, *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*). Parakeets are usually found high in the forest canopy, but they also often forage on the ground (Moon 1992: 183). The kiore replied that their numbers were declining because people twisted the necks of the pōwhaitere and snared the kiore. For Taylor, the “moral” of the story was that there is “no escape from man’s power” (1855: 137). In another version (Best 1977: 356, 405), the kiore replied that it belonged to the ground (“nō raro nei au”), where people strangled it. The opposition is not between land and sea in this narrative, but between the ground and the treetops.

From the Tuamotu Archipelago (‘Anā) comes a story in which the opposition is between two nesting habits (Torrente 2012: 71). The ngoio (brown noddy, *Anous stolidus*) asked the kīrarahu (white tern, *Gygis alba*) where she laid her eggs. The kīrarahu replied that she did not build a nest but rather laid eggs in the hollows in tree branches. The ngoio said that she made

a nest, so that when she laid eggs, the wind would not blow them away. The ngoio built her nest and laid her eggs, and the kīrarahu found a hollow in a tree branch and laid hers. This is what the two birds have done ever since.

Another Tuamotuan narrative tells of the argument between a bird and another animal, each predicting that the other will be killed and eaten by people (Henry 1928: 380–81). Unlike the previous narratives, they are not friends but siblings.² A moa (red junglefowl, *Gallus gallus*) and a tifaï (turtle) had an argument: the tifaï said that it will have more prestige because it will be sacred to the gods, whereas the moa will be eaten by women and children. The moa scornfully replied that it was the tifaï that would be eaten; the bird would dive into the depths of the ocean and escape humans. At that moment, a man picked up the tifaï and took it to the gods. The moa then tried to dive into the sea but was caught by a passing party of women and children, who took him home. This is how the moa became a domestic animal and a food source for women and children and the tifaï a delicacy for the aristocracy. While the Māori stories explain why the pakake and the toroa parted company with their respective friends, the koreke and the kākāpō, this tradition describes how the moa became a domestic animal.

A different version of this Tuamotuan narrative is reminiscent of the Māori stories in that it too raises the question of whether the sea or the land is the best place to live. According to this second version (Seurat 1906: 125–26), a turtle swimming in the ocean urged a moa standing on the shore to come into the water, but the moa replied that the turtle should come ashore. The turtle refused because it did not want to have to eat tūtae (excrement), and the moa declined because he was reluctant to eat only rimu (seaweed). The turtle then told the moa that he is disreputable (“‘aore ōu ro‘o”) whereas the turtle is esteemed (“‘e ro‘o tō‘u”), being a tapu (sacred) animal. Thus, this story is about not just ro‘o (renown) but also food. The moa thought that the best food could only be found on land, but for the turtle the best food was in the sea.

Another story about a bird not impressed by the food eaten by another animal comes from Mungiki/Bellona Island (Solomon Islands) (Kuschel 1975: 114–16). The taba (brown goshawk, *Accipiter fasciatus*), the mangibae (eastern osprey, *Pandion cristatus*) and the ngupe (Pacific imperial pigeon, *Ducula pacifica*) were brothers. The mangibae was the oldest, and for some informants the ngupe was in the middle and the taba the youngest, but for others the ngupe was the youngest. They came from the underworld, Tengaangonga. The taba went out for his food first, and came back with a string of snakes. The mangibae, not impressed by this choice, told his younger brother that the forest was full of ngupe, a much better food. He thus convinced the taba to eat his own brothers. The taba came back with a

string of ngupe, which he ate raw. He also ate the snakes. Then the mangibae went out for his food and came back with a string of parrotfish, which he ate raw. Since then, the brothers have been rivals, and mangibae have eaten fish, and taba, ngupe and snakes.

In a version collected in Mugaba/Rennell Island (Solomon Islands), the taba and the magibae are not brothers but friends, and there is no ngupe (Kirtley and Elbert 1973: 248–49). The two friends made their nest together. One day, they went separately to get their food. The taba went to the bush to catch birds, and the magibae went to the sea to catch fish. The magibae was first to return to the nest, with some fish, and waited for his friend. But when the taba came back with his catch of snakes and rats, the magibae found them so disgusting that he stamped on their nest and his fish and flew away. The two separated forever. According to the collectors of the story, the people of Mugaba had “a horror of rats and snakes”. In this version the motif of the taba eating his own brother is absent; it focuses instead on the disgust triggered by the food brought back by the taba as an explanation for the separation.

A Mungiki narrative about the taghoa (Australian white ibis, *Threskiornis molucca*) explains the feeding habits of this bird: taghoa leave their perching tree in the morning and only come back in the evening (Kuschel 1975: 116–17). A female taghoa waited all day long in her tree for the male to return home. When she angrily reproached him for coming back so late, he retorted that he had been to the far end of the island. Since then, taghoa have been going out early in the morning and flying off a long way in search of food, only returning in the evening.

Races and Games of Hide-and-Seek

A variant of the story of the kākāpō and the toroa introduces a game of hide-and-seek: the two birds hold a contest to decide who will be the master of the land (Beattie 1920b: 72). This notion of competition is absent from the other version. In this version the birds agreed to take turns at hiding on a piece of open land with very little cover. The toroa hid first, but the kākāpō soon found him because of his very conspicuous white plumage. The toroa hid a second time, but again, before long, the kākāpō found him. Then the kākāpō hid; he covered his head with a piupiu (fern) and lay down on a bare patch of land. The toroa looked everywhere but could not find the kākāpō, until the latter laughed out loud, thus revealing his hiding place. The kākāpō hid a second time; he used the piupiu again so as not to be found. The toroa flew back and forth over the land but failed to discover him. Because of his failure, the toroa was banished to the ocean by the other birds, who considered him unfit to dwell on land. In this version, the toroa is clearly defeated, whereas in the other version he goes to sea of his own accord.

In another version of that story, the game of hide-and-seek played is not a contest to decide who will be the master of the land but a way to ascertain whose plumage provides better camouflage; it is again about being safe from people (Drummond 1910). The kākāpō and the mollymawk³ became friends at a gathering of all the birds. The mollymawk suggested that they exchange places of residence, but the kākāpō, who did not like the idea very much, replied that the white and grey plumage of his friend would make him too conspicuous on land: unlike the kākāpō with his green plumage easily camouflaged in the foliage, the mollymawk would not be able to hide from his enemies. The mollymawk then suggested that they put it to the test by taking turns hiding. The mollymawk tried to hide, but the kākāpō could still see him. When the kākāpō hid, however, his friend looked for him for a long time, but in vain. The mollymawk then went out to sea, while the kākāpō remained on land.

In 'Uvea/Wallis Island, Niue and Mugaba, it is not two birds who play a game of hide-and-seek but a plover and a crab. They also race. In 'Uvea, one version of the story explains why there are many hermit crabs on the islet of Nukuhifala (off the east coast of the island), while another explains why the islet of Nukutapu (off the northeastern coast) belongs to the people of Alele. The first version (Burrows 1937: 165–67) has it that the kiu (Pacific golden plover, *Pluvialis fulva*, or ruddy turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*) accused the hermit crab ('uga) of being slow of foot, so the two fought. When the 'uga pinched the leg of the kiu, the latter cried in agony, and the 'uga declared itself the winner. The kiu then raced the polili (wandering tattler, *Tringa incana*). The 'uga wanted to race the kiu but told him that they should sleep first. While the bird was sleeping, the 'uga crawled out of its shell and began the race, and when the bird awakened, he saw the shell and, not suspecting that the 'uga was gone, went back to sleep. The 'uga thus won the race and told the assembly of kiu that they could not live at Nukuhifala, for it was the ruler there now. So, the kiu flew away to Nukuhione and Nukuteatea. To this day there are many 'uga at Nukuhifala.

According to the second version (Mayer 1970–71: 130), the islet of Nukutapu was contested by the villages of Vaitupu and Alele. To settle the matter, it was decided to organise a race. The former village chose the kiu to race on their behalf, and the latter, the 'uga. Vaitupu was to be the starting point and Nukutapu the finish. The two animals agreed to start the race at sunrise, but during the night the 'uga crawled out of its shell and began to run. In the middle of the night the bird awakened, but he assumed that the 'uga was still sleeping. At sunrise, the bird started racing, but it was too late. As he was about to reach the islet, the 'uga, which was already there, told the bird to leave because Nukutapu now belonged to the people of Alele. Ashamed, the kiu flew away to Nukuteatea. For Mayer (1976: 159), this

story reflects the opposition between the villages of Vaitupu and Alele. It also explains why some motu (islets) have more kiu and others have more 'uga.

In the Niuean version of that narrative, the hermit crab (ugamea) plays exactly the same trick on the poor kiu,⁴ but the object of the race is different. They race not to a motu to claim its ownership (Niue has no motu) but to the ocean to ascertain who will own the water (Loeb 1926: 200–201). Because the ugamea wins the race, the sea becomes its home, and the defeated kiu has to rest on rocks. This version is thus reminiscent of the Māori “parting-of-ways” stories of the koreke/pakake and kākāpō/toroa in their opposition between land and sea, which does not appear in the Uvean versions. The difference, though, between the Niuean tradition and the Māori ones is that only the latter are about finding safety from humans.

In Mugaba, just as in the first Uvean version mentioned above, the race between the plover and the hermit crab is triggered by the bird's remark that the crab walks like a weakling while the bird can fly strongly and to distant places (Kirtley and Elbert 1973: 252–53). The sibiū (greater sand plover, *Charadrius leschenaultii*) challenged the hermit crab ('unga) to a race. The latter agreed but asked him to wait for it to get ready. The 'unga went and asked its congeners for help. When it returned, they started the race. The sibiū flew off and the 'unga stayed behind. He asked the 'unga where it was, and it replied, “Here I am”. He continued to fly, repeated the question, got the same reply, and so on until he exhausted himself, fell down and died. The 'unga then said, “You have died, you who challenged; I alone am living”, before eating the bird's stomach. As Kirtley and Elbert explained, the 'unga is a scavenger that “may be seen piled up in heaps on Rennellese beaches”, and it won the race “against a swift opponent by stationing its relatives, indistinguishable from itself in appearance, along the course to be run”. The outcome of the race is the death of the bird, again tricked by the 'unga but in a different fashion from the Uvean and Niuean stories. This narrative is also less aetiological than the others as it does not explain why 'unga live in a particular place and sibiū do not.

Another tradition, from Niue, again features a kiu and a crab playing a game of hide-and-seek, but in this instance, it is the bird that is the victor (Loeb 1926: 195). The uga (which is not the hermit crab but the coconut crab) hid first; before long the kiu spotted its claws and went to peck at it. Then the bird hid; the uga could hear his voice above but could not find him. Thus the reason why people cannot find these birds' nests⁵ is that the uga failed to find the kiu in the story. This story is thus clearly aetiological.

Two Māori narratives deal with a race between two species of bird. The first tradition accounts for the presence of one species and not the other on a particular group of islands; the second explains how a bird flew into the heavens, never to return. In Rakiura/Stewart Island, the kōkako (South

Island kōkako, *Callaeas cinereus*) and the tīeke (South Island saddleback, *Philesturnus carunculatus*) agreed to have a race to find out which bird flew faster (Beattie 1920a: XXIII, 3). The kōkako thought that he was leading but could hear his rival's whistle sounding ahead in the bush. Every time the tīeke heard the kōkako coming behind him, he flew ahead and whistled. The tīeke won the race and was recognised as the better flyer. Thus, he flew to the Tītī (Muttonbird) Islands, where he settled, while the kōkako remained in Rakiura. Unlike the kiu of 'Uvea, Niue and Mugaba, the kōkako is not tricked by his opponent—he is defeated because he is the slower flyer.

The second story is about a race between the hōkioi or hākuwai (possibly a snipe)⁶ and the kāhu (swamp harrier, *Circus approximans*) (Grey 1872). The hōkioi was described as a bird resting on the mountain tops with black feathers tinged with yellow and green and some red ones on the top of his head. The hōkioi and the kāhu both claimed to be able to reach the heavens. As they were flying towards the heavens, they were assailed by the wind and clouds, so much so that the kāhu could not fly any higher, and so he called out “kei!” and flew back down. The hōkioi, however, continued his ascent, disappearing into the heavens. In another version (Best 1982: 564), the kāhu claimed that Hōkioi could not fly higher than the fernbird. Incensed, Hōkioi challenged the kāhu to a race to find out who could fly higher. When the kāhu saw a fern plain on fire, he flew down to prey on the animals escaping from the fire, but Hōkioi continued to fly to the heavens, and never returned to earth again.

These two Māori stories seem to be the only published Polynesian traditions about two birds racing one another. They may be all that remains of a multitude of Polynesian stories about bird races that were lost because they were never recorded and ceased to be transmitted orally through the generations.

STORIES OF TRICKERY

Elements of deception (on the part of the hermit crab) are apparent in some of the preceding stories. In many more traditional Polynesian narratives about birds trickery is the central motif.

Theft

Throughout Polynesia red was considered a sacred colour. According to a Māori tradition, the kākā (New Zealand kākā, *Nestor meridionalis*) was the only bird with red feathers (Beattie 1920a: XXIII, 3). The kākāriki (parakeet, *Cyanoramphus* sp.), longing for the kura (red feathers) of the kākā, offered to pick his kutu (lice). The kākā agreed, but after a time, when he was not looking, the kākāriki plucked all the red feathers from his head and flew away. The kākā called out “Whakahokia mai ōku raukura!” (give me back my red feathers!) and pursued the little thief, but could not catch

him. This is why the kākārīki has red feathers on his crown and the only red feathers the kākā can still boast are under his wings.

In another version the thief is the kākā and the victim is the kākārīki (Best 1982: 565). The kākā stole from the kākārīki his bright red plumage, procured in Motu-tapu, the sacred island of Tinirau, when he saw the admiration elicited by those red feathers. The kākā jeered at him to confuse him, plucked the coveted feathers, left the kākārīki his own feathers and fled.

In Rimatara (Austral Islands), the thief is another psittacine, the ‘ura (Kuhl’s lorikeet, *Vini kuhlii*). He steals not just the red feathers of the poor moho (spotless crane, *Porzana tabuensis*) but all his colourful feathers (Utia 2010). The moho was the most beautiful bird on the island with his multicoloured plumage. The ‘ura, however, was grey and dull, and he became jealous of the moho, who was admired by all. He waited for the moho to take a nap, then stealthily moved towards the sleeping bird. He started by stealing the green feathers from his wings, then the yellow ones from his back, then the red from his chest and the blue from his head. However, as he was in the middle of taking the orange colour of his legs and about to take the red colour of his eyes, the moho felt the beak of the ‘ura on his eyelid and was startled awake. Ashamed of having lost all his colours, the moho ran off to the marsh to hide. To this day the ‘ura flies around showing off his beauty, whereas the moho only comes out at night. Thus, the story not only accounts for the colours of each bird but also explains why the moho is a secretive crepuscular bird,⁷ quite unlike the ‘ura.

In a Māori narrative, the thieving behaviour of a bird backfires on him to the point that he, and not the victim of the theft, goes into hiding (Best 1977: 323; 1982: 565–66). The kōkako (North Island kōkako, *Callaeas wilsoni*) wished he were as beautiful as the much-admired huia (*Heteralocha acutirostris*). Thus, he stole the bill and the plumage of a dead huia. But, instead of admiring him, the other birds all laughed and jeered at him, saying that although he tried to look like a huia, he was still a kōkako. This story may explain why the kōkako is “skulking in habit” (Moon 1992: 242).

A tradition from Kapingamarangi and Nukuoro (Federated States of Micronesia) accounts for a bird’s entirely black plumage. Its colour does not result from theft but from his friend’s refusal to paint him with other colours. In the Kapingamarangi version, the moeho (Micronesian starling, *Aplonis opaca*) suggested to the dala (spectacled tern, *Onychoprion lunatus*) that they beautify themselves (Elbert 1948: 127–28). The moeho painted his friend’s feathers white using a mixture made of softened coral stones, and his head black using charcoal mixed with water. The dala was now hūmarie (pretty). Subsequently, the moeho asked the dala to paint him, so the dala painted him all black with the charcoal mixture. The dala then went away, refusing to add white spots to his friend’s feathers despite his insistence,

saying that it was enough and would do. The moeho, however, found himself huaaitu (ugly), and complained that his children would be black just like him (for Elbert, this story shows the “dislike of being black”). In the Nukuoro version, the same bird (called moso) closed his eyes (Carroll 1980: 93). His friend (whose species is not mentioned) picked up the container of black paint and poured it over the entire body of the moso before flying away. When the moso opened his eyes and saw his body, he was not happy at all. He said that if his friend landed on the ground he would beat him up; the friend replied that if the moso flew up into the air he would beat him up. This story explains why the moeho/moso is black, but it may also account for the fact that this bird eats seabird eggs. For the Kapingamarangi and the Nukuoro the antagonism between the two species may originate in this episode. According to Reichel and Glass (1990), Micronesian starlings do eat seabird eggs. Whether the Kapingamarangi and the Nukuoro had observed this or not is unknown, but if they had, the story may explain the behaviour of the starling eating seabird eggs in retaliation for the tern’s trickery.

In all the above narratives, a bird is tricked by another bird. From Mungiki comes a tradition in which the thief is an insect (Kuschel 1975: 111–13). The tuu (bronze ground dove, *Alopecoenas beccarii*) prised bark off trees every day, which he beat to make a loincloth. The noise greatly annoyed the tukutuku (bagworm moth). The tukutuku decided one day to find the source of this racket. When it arrived at the abode of the tuu, it saw the loincloth, put it on and stole it away. The tuu then chased the tukutuku to get his loincloth back, up and down a tree, but the tukutuku was faster because of its spinning thread, and the exhausted bird gave up. Since then, the tuu has been mourning the loss of his loincloth, weeping every day.⁸ This narrative thus accounts for the plaintive call of this bird.

Finally, a bird tricks a fish in a tradition from Mugaba (Kirtley and Elbert 1973: 251). The baapenu (moustached treeswift, *Hemiprocne mystacea*) asked the hu’aaika (trevally) to give him its tail, in exchange for some of his feathers. The fish obliged him, but the bird took the tail and flew away without giving any feathers in return, and the fish went out to sea. The story explains why the baapenu has a forked tail like that of the hu’aaika. But in Pukapuka, it is the fish that steals the tail of a bird (Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1936: 31–32). The tavake mokomoko (white-tailed tropicbird, *Phaethon lepturus*) was perched on a coral rock in the lagoon. All the fish in the lagoon tried one after the other to pull out the bird’s long tail feathers, even changing their colours to blend in with the colour of the sea, but each time the wary bird saw the fish approaching and flew off. The wūmoemoe (stareye parrotfish, *Calotomus carolinus*), changing its colour three times to match the various colours of coral formations in its environment, sneaked up to the bird unnoticed and managed to close its teeth around his tail

feathers. The tavake mokomoko managed to fly off, but not without its tail feathers still in the jaws of the wūmoemoe. This is why to this day the tavake mokomoko has a short tail compared with the tavake toto (red-tailed tropicbird, *Phaethon rubricauda*). The other fish grabbed the feathers from the wūmoemoe and inserted them in their fins and tails. This is why some species of fish have long fins or a long tail.

All these stories, which account for the colours of birds' plumages, their distinctive calls or tail shapes, result in anger, shame or sadness. Other narratives about trickery have more dramatic endings.

Harm and Death

One of the most widespread traditional Polynesian narratives about manu, versions of which have been collected in a few Polynesian Outliers and most areas of West Polynesia (but not in East Polynesia),⁹ is that of the buff-banded rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*) and the Australasian swamphen (*Porphyrio melanotus*). The storyline differs slightly in each version, but some elements appear in most of them. One of the birds (usually the buff-banded rail) is tricked by the other into eating excrement. He takes revenge by convincing the other bird to lower his leg into a giant clam, which closes on him, trapping him. When the tide comes in, the poor bird either is saved just in time or drowns.

An East Futunan version, for instance, says that the veka (buff-banded rail) and the kalae (Australasian swamphen) went fishing on the reef (Moyse-Faurie 2010a). The kalae stepped further away to defecate and caught a fowl, whose feathers he used to "adorn" his excrement to make it look like a fowl. He then told the veka to stop fishing and go catch a fowl. The veka ran and found what he thought was a fowl, but in his struggle with it he got his eyes and body all covered with excrement. Wild with anger, he went and washed himself in the shoal. The kalae asked him to stop crying and forgive him, but when they went back to fish, the veka noticed a big vasua (clam shell). He persuaded the kalae to put his toe in it so they could take it away. The bird's leg got stuck as the clam shell closed. The veka ran back to the shore and urged the tide to come in because he had been humiliated by the kalae. The kalae implored the veka to throw down stones to protect him from the incoming tide and, crying, told him that he would surrender many of his own possessions to him. But the veka refused and again urged the tide to come in. When the water level reached his beak, the kalae again begged the veka, but to no avail. The tide came in, and the kalae drowned. The same bird (called manuāli'i) also dies in a Samoan version of the story which does not include the excrement-eating episode (Sierich 1904: 110). If the ve'a does not help his friend, it is not out of revenge but because he accuses him of being a fe'ai (savage) taro plantation raider.

In Niuean versions, the scatological element (eating faeces unintentionally) is present in a different form. The kulē (Australasian swampphen) decided one day that only he should eat sugarcane, bananas and taro, and the veka only excrement (Loeb 1926: 190–92; Morris 1919; Smith 1902: 101). Very angry with the kulē, the veka cast a charm causing the legs of the kulē to get stuck in the clam shell. It eventually opened again, but by then the legs of the kulē had become red and quite elongated from all his efforts to free himself, which explains the long red legs of the kulē to this day. The kulē then chased and caught the veka, whom he repeatedly struck on the head with a tree branch, splitting it open in several places. The marks are still visible today—the buff-banded rail’s “crown, nape and eye stripe are chestnut-brown contrasting strongly with the greyish white eyebrow” (Watling 1982: 75).

A version collected in West ‘Uvea (Loyalty Islands) is again about excrement, but it does not feature the revenge episode with the giant clam (Moyse-Faurie 2010b). The veka and the kalae lived together, roasting and eating tubers every day. One day, the veka left his friend for a moment, and when he returned he found that the kalae had eaten all the tubers. There was no food left for the poor veka. Thus, he had to go to the bush where the kalae had defecated after eating all the tubers and eat the excrement. Since then, kalae have been eating tubers, as well as sugarcane and bananas, which they steal from people’s fields, whereas veka go to find their food where people defecate.

In Mungiki, the trickster is not a swampphen but another long-legged bird, the kangau (Pacific reef heron, *Egretta sacra*).¹⁰ The victim of the scatological joke is the swampphen; buff-banded rails are indeed absent from the island. The beka (young Australasian swampphen) and the kangau were friends and would eat their food together (Kuschel 1975: 123–28). One day, when the beka was not looking, the kangau broke open his friend’s ‘uhi (yam) that was being roasted, removed the mash and defecated into the ‘uhi. Then he put the two parts of the ‘uhi back together and ate the mash. When the beka returned, he noticed that the ‘uhi was split, but the kangau told him that it probably split because it was overcooked. The beka then ate his ‘uhi, and complained about the rotten and putrid taste; but the kangau said that his own ‘uhi tasted the same. When the beka had eaten the whole ‘uhi, the kangau told him that he had just tricked him into eating his faeces. The beka, very angry, chased the kangau, but he could not catch him, and so looked for a way to take revenge on him. After reconciling, they went to the sea together. The beka dived, found a haasua (giant clam) and removed its entrails with his nao (prodding stick). The kangau wanted some for himself and begged the beka to teach him how to do it. So, the beka told him that he just needed to lower his leg into the clam, twist it and pull up the entrails. When the kangau dived and found a clam, he put his leg inside, but the clam closed

up. He begged the beka for help, but the beka reminded him of his past trickery and flew away. Fish came along and swam around the clam, but it did not open. Eventually a turtle came and hit the clam, whose shell broke into pieces, freeing the leg of the kangau. In West Futuna (Vanuatu), the trickster is also a Pacific reef heron (*matuku*), but his victim is a veka, as in the Futunan, Niuean and West Uvean versions (Capell 1958: 152–57).

Some versions of this very widespread narrative are more aetiological than others. Some account for each bird's eating habits—buff-banded rails are omnivorous scavengers, and Australasian swampheens are infamous in West Polynesia and the Polynesian Outliers for raiding plantations.¹¹ Some account for their physical characteristics, such as the marks on the rail's head or the swampheens' long red legs. One may wonder whether the story sprang from people having actually observed birds with their legs stuck in a giant clam. Some versions are more humorous than others: the scatological element rendered the story very funny for its audience. In Mungiki, for instance, Kuschel (1975: 48) noted that “the audience is often eagerly waiting to hear famous, funny incidents like the reef heron tricking the young swamp hen into eating its feces”.

There do not appear to be any similar narratives in East Polynesia. In Hawai'i, for example, the only trickster story featuring birds that has been published is that of the rat, the trickster, and the pueo (short-eared owl, *Asio flammeus*), the victim who gets revenge (Pukui and Green 1995: 51–53, 123–24). The kupua (supernatural being, culture hero) 'Iole (Polynesian rat, *Rattus exulans*) and Pueo lived in Kohala, on the island of Hawai'i. Pueo was a farmer who worked hard at night; 'Iole was lazy and kept stealing Pueo's 'uala (sweet potatoes). 'Iole dug a tunnel to reach Pueo's garden without being seen. When Pueo realised that most of his 'uala were gone, he was very angry with 'Iole, so he pecked a hole in the gourd that the human keeper had filled with water for 'Iole, but the man, seeing this, struck him with a stick and broke one of his legs. Pueo then called out to 'Io (Hawaiian hawk, *Buteo solitarius*) and told him what had happened. 'Io blamed Pueo for pecking the gourd, but Pueo cried and said that he was hungry because his 'uala had all been stolen. 'Io looked at the man and could not help Pueo because the man was stronger than him. When Pueo's leg was well again, he sought out an expert in rat shooting, and heard about the kupua Pikoi-a-ka-'alala from O'ahu. He went to O'ahu, befriended Pikoi, and told him about 'Iole's misdeeds. They sailed to Hilo, where, from the top of a hill, Pikoi shot an arrow that instantly killed the sleeping 'Iole in Kohala. This story may explain why owls hunt rats.

Finally, the following narrative from Aniwa (Vanuatu) may account for the antagonism between fowls (the trickster in the story) and crocodiles. It primarily explains why the latter are not found in Aniwa (Gardissat 2004:

255–56). This appears to be the only Polynesian tradition featuring both species.¹² In Aniwa, a little red hen was bored and wished to go to Tanna. She tricked all the crocodiles into forming a line between one island and the other, under the pretence of wanting to count how many crocodiles there were in Aniwa. She jumped along their backs all the way to Tanna, counting the crocodiles. As she got there, she started laughing and told them that they had been duped as her only intention had ever been to go to Tanna. However, she spoke too soon: the last crocodile on whose back she was still standing opened its mouth and pulled out all her tail feathers. Ashamed and looking ridiculous, the little hen ran to hide in the bush, crying. As for the crocodiles, angry at having been deceived, they all left the island to go and live further north.

CONCLUSION

The Polynesian Outliers account for 12 of the 30 stories in this article. Countless animal stories were collected in the Outliers, for instance in Kapingamarangi (Emory 1949: 231) and in Mungiki, from where no fewer than 110 animal stories were published by Kuschel (1975). Kirtley (1976: 218–19) argued that the Outliers were much richer in animal stories than other parts of Polynesia because they had been influenced by Micronesian and Melanesian traditions, which are rich in animal stories.¹³ In Hawai‘i for instance, Beckwith (in Green and Beckwith 1926: 66–69) only knew one example of an animal trickster story (that of ‘Iole and Pueo). However, this may also be because the Outliers have received much ethnographic attention relative to their “modest” size, as Feinberg (1998: 3) pointed out, or because the collectors of the stories in some areas were not interested in animal stories as much as in other types of traditions (Kuschel 1975: XII, 1). The fact that the “general eastward trend through Melanesia, West Polynesia, and East Polynesia is one of reduced floral and faunal diversity at all taxonomic levels” (Steadman 2006: 41) may also explain the prevalence of animal stories, and bird stories in particular, in the Polynesian Outliers, since the fauna is more diverse there than in other parts of Polynesia.

What function did these stories serve in the Polynesian societies that kept them alive by word of mouth through the centuries? For Firth (1961: 6), in Tikopia traditional narratives form a “body of precedents for future action”, for they inculcate moral values, albeit indirectly, since “the incidents as narrated may imply that certain forms of action are right or wrong even as techniques”. According to Best (1924: 178), many Māori stories have a moral, and are didactic in that they convey to the young “various lessons”, such as “the undesirable effects of recklessness, boasting, self conceit, indolence, etc., and the necessity for cultivating such virtues as industry, respect for *tapu* etc.” (Best 1982: 560). Similarly, Elbert (1948: 61) argued

that in Kapingamarangi most of the traditions collected by the Bishop Museum party were “distinctly moral”, the most frequent theme in them being the “importance of literally following instructions”. Moyle (1981: 45–47) noted that in Sāmoa, fāgogo (stories interspersed with songs) depict “behavioural principles” and portray “immoral acts and themes” so as to “demonstrate what may be categorized as being moral”.

However, the stories in this article are more aetiological than moral. They explain the origin of the physical characteristics of bird species and their behavioural traits (particularly their diet) or their habitat, as well as the cause of enmity between two given species. Polynesian bird traditions are thus explanatory or aetiological stories dealing with the establishment of the special characteristics of the bird protagonists rather than moral stories in the Aesopian tradition.

This article does not lay any claim to having gathered all available Polynesian bird stories about opposition and deception, but it does contain most of the published ones. More could be gathered. Feathered creatures have always inspired the human imagination—thus the place of the bird in the human mind is, in Polynesia as elsewhere, an almost inexhaustible subject of study.

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NOTES

1. In this article, the personal pronouns “he” and “she”, the possessive adjectives “his” and “her” and the relative pronoun “who” are used to refer to birds, which may appear to be a departure from traditional English usage. The decision to use gendered pronouns and determiners seemed appropriate given that in many of these narratives birds actually exhibit human-like behaviour. It was also based on my desire to acknowledge the fact that birds are sentient beings. However,

the words “it” and “its” are used to refer to non-bird animal species (i.e., crabs, rats, fish, turtles and insects). The reason for this choice is to enable the reader to distinguish more easily between birds and non-bird animals in the stories. Since birds are the focus of this article, this seemed the best way to proceed. The classification and English names in this article are those adopted by Gill and Donsker (2017).

2. The fowl and the turtle were born in Havaiki-te-a-raro of the same parents, according to a tradition from ‘Anā (Emory 1947: 62).
3. In Aotearoa New Zealand, *mollymawk* is the usual term for some smaller species of albatross.
4. Whereas in ‘Uvea *kiu* can designate both the Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) and the ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), in Niue *kiu* only designates the former; ruddy turnstones are named *fulimaka* in Niuean.
5. Pacific golden plovers are migratory birds that breed in the Arctic tundra. A Fijian proverb says that something may be as hard to find as the egg of that bird (Watling 1982: 150).
6. Tennyson and Martinson (2006: 92) noted that the tutukiwi (South Island snipe, *Coenocorypha iredalei*) became extinct in 1964: “The species flew rarely in daytime, though would do so if sufficiently alarmed. A capable flier, its eerie, nocturnal, aerial display is thought to have been the basis of the mythical celestial bird Hakawai ... Some of the South Island snipe’s surviving relatives fly high into the air, give a brief whistling call, then descend at speed, making their tail feathers vibrate which produces a roaring noise like a jet.”
7. In Tahitian, as a noun *meho* is the spotless crane, and as a verb it means “to be hiding, or seeking a refuge among the bushes, as fugitives in war time” (Davies 1851: 142).
8. The call of the *tuu* is a “long monotonous series of deep flat *hoop-hoop*- notes” (Dutson 2011: 311).
9. This may be because no species of *Porphyrio* seems to have lived prehistorically in tropical East Polynesia, apart from *Porphyrio paepae*, an extinct species of swamphen whose bones were discovered by David W. Steadman in archaeological sites in the Marquesas Islands (Hiva Oa and Tahuata) in 1986–87 (Steadman 2006: 105–6).
10. A variant from Mugaba has a much smaller bird, a maghighape (Rennell fantail, *Rhipidura rennelliana*), playing the part of the kangau (Kirtley and Elbert 1973: 242–43).
11. Many an ethnographer and anthropologist has noted the Polynesians’ dislike of swamphens because these birds feed on bananas, yam and taro and can wreak havoc on their plantations, for instance Davenport (1968: 143) in Taumako (Duff Islands) and Elbert and Monberg (1965: 134) in Mugaba.
12. In the Polynesian culture area, saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*) are only found on some Outliers.
13. For instance, Nemi traditions (Grande Terre, New Caledonia) include many animal stories. In an example featuring birds, the bwaaolee (whistling kite, *Haliastur sphenurus*) and the bwek (flying fox) decided one day to build a house, but the bird kept flying about and did no work at all. The bwek did not make a door,

because the entrance was on the roof. At night, when the rain and the wind came, the bird got very cold. He begged the bwēk to let him in, but it replied that he should just keep flying about. He cried behind the house; his friend made a fire and went to sleep. The bwāalee died of cold (Ozanne-Rivierre 1979a: 160–67). In another Nemi story, another raptor falls victim to a smaller bird: the khiny (white-breasted woodswallow, *Artamus leucorhynchus*) played tricks on the deny (swamp harrier, *Circus approximans*), so much so that the deny died (Ozanne-Rivierre 1979b: 53–65).

GLOSSARY

baapenu	moustached treeswift (Rennellese)
beka	young Australasian swampen (Rennellese)
bwāalee	whistling kite (Nemi)
bwēk	flying fox (Nemi)
dala	spectacled tern (Kapingamarangi)
deny	swamp harrier (Nemi)
fāgogo	stories interspersed with songs (Samoan)
fe'ai	savage (Samoan)
fulimaka	ruddy turnstone (Niuean)
haasua	giant clam (<i>Tridacna</i>) (Rennellese)
hākuwai	a snipe? (Māori)
hōkioi	a snipe? (Māori)
hu'aaika	trevally (Rennellese)
huaitu	ugly (Kapingamarangi)
hūmarie	pretty (Kapingamarangi)
'io	Hawaiian hawk (Hawaiian)
'iole	Polynesian rat (Hawaiian)
kahikatea	white pine (Māori)
kāhu	swamp harrier (Māori)
kākā	New Zealand kākā (Māori)
kākāriki	parakeet (Māori)
kalae	Australasian swampen (East Futunan, West Uvean)
kangau	Pacific reef heron (Rennellese)
khiny	white-breasted woodswallow (Nemi)
kiore	Polynesian rat (Māori)
kīrarahu	white tern (Tuamotuan)
kiu	Pacific golden plover or ruddy turnstone (East Uvean); Pacific golden plover (Niuean)
kōkako	South Island kōkako or North Island kōkako (Māori)
koreke	New Zealand quail (Māori)
kulē	Australasian swampen (Niuean)

kupua	supernatural being, culture hero (Hawaiian)
kura	red feathers (Māori)
kutu	lice (Māori)
maghighape	Rennell fantail (Rennellese)
mangibae/magibae	eastern osprey (Rennellese)
manu	bird (most Polynesian languages)
manuāali'i	Australasian swamphen (Samoan)
matuku	Pacific reef heron (West Futunan)
meho	spotless crane (Tahitian)
miro	brown pine (Māori)
moa	red junglefowl (Tuamotuan)
mocho	Micronesian starling (Kapingamarangi)
moho	spotless crane (Austral)
moso	Micronesian starling (Nukuoro)
motu	islet (East Uvean)
nao	prodding stick (Rennellese)
ngoio	brown noddy (Tuamotuan)
ngupe	Pacific imperial pigeon (Rennellese)
pakake	New Zealand fur seal (Māori)
piupiu	fern (Māori)
polili	wandering tattler (East Uvean)
pōwhaitere	parakeet (Māori)
pueo	short-eared owl (Hawaiian)
rimu	seaweed (Tuamotuan)
ro'ō	renown (Tuamotuan)
sibiu	greater sand plover (Rennellese)
taba	brown goshawk (Rennellese)
taghoa	Australian white ibis (Rennellese)
tangi	to cry (Māori)
tapu	sacred (Tuamotuan)
tavake mokomoko	white-tailed tropicbird (Pukapukan)
tavake toto	red-tailed tropicbird (Pukapukan)
tīeke	South Island saddleback (Māori)
tifai	turtle (Tuamotuan)
toroa	albatross (Māori)
tukutuku	bagworm moth (Rennellese)
tūtae	excrement (Tuamotuan)
tutukiwi	South Island snipe (Māori)
tuu	bronze ground dove (Rennellese)
‘uala	sweet potato (Hawaiian)

‘uga	hermit crab (East Uvean)
uga	coconut crab (Niuean)
ugamea	hermit crab (Niuean)
‘uhi	yam (Rennellese)
‘unga	hermit crab (Rennellese)
‘ura	Kuhl’s lorikeet (Austral)
vasua	clam shell (East Futunan)
ve‘a	buff-banded rail (Samoan)
veka	buff-banded rail (East Futunan, Niuean, West Uvean, West Futunan)
wūmoemoe	stareye parrotfish (Pukapukan)

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