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Pigeon and Friarbird Revisited

A Further Analysis of an Eastern Indonesian Mythico-Ornithological Contrast

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Abstract. – An earlier analysis of eastern Indonesian myths concerning the origin of death and the origin of temporal alternation (Forth 1992) has subsequently been informed and substantially augmented by more recent research into the folk ornithology of birds that figure as the myths' central characters. In this further exploration of the tradition, it is shown how contrasting qualities especially of bird vocalizations crucially influence a series of conceptual oppositions linked with the avian characters. Attention is also given to the part played by morphological and behavioural features of the ornithological species, and the extent to which these cohere with vocalic differences between the same bird kinds. The general objective is a demonstration of the importance of percepts in eastern Indonesian bird symbolism, and of how empirical features of natural kinds can influence their mythological value to an extent comparable to their formative role in shaping ethnozoological taxonomies. *[Eastern Indonesian mythology, origin of death myths, folk ornithology, symbolism of birds, empirical sources of animal symbols]*

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Some fifteen years ago I published a comparative essay on eastern Indonesian myths of origin which portray birds as opponents in an oratorical competition that determines the present order of the world (Forth 1992). Since then, ethnographic investigations by the present author as well as two articles by David Hicks (1997, 2006; see also Hicks 2004) have provided additional insight into the narrative tradition and the ornithological kinds which inform its central characters. Identification of the species involved has been greatly facilitated by the publication of an authoritative guide to the birds of Wallacea by Coates and Bishop (1997). At the same time, further investigation of the folk ornithology of the Nage of central Flores, including the occurrence of birds in various contexts of Nage oral culture (Forth 1996, 1999, 2004), has allowed a broader consideration of the use of birds in a variety of symbolic and mythological genres. In view of these developments, a comprehensive comparative review of the mythical tradition and the way it illuminates issues of eastern Indonesian symbolism and cosmology is warranted. In a more general vein, a major aim of this essay is a further demonstration of the empirical grounding of symbolic values in attested vocal and visual features of natural species (cf. Berlin 2006).

I first came to the present topic by way of a Nage story concerning the origin of the temporal alternation of night and day and the origin of death. Both origins are represented as the outcome of a contest between the Helmeted friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*; see Fig. 1) and the Green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea*; see Fig. 2). The friarbird, moreover, appears as one contestant in variants of the myth found in other parts of Flores, on Sumba, and also on Timor. The identity of the bird's avifaunal opponent is somewhat various, but is represented by some kind of pigeon on all three of these islands. In a way consistent with the bird's persistent early morning vocalizations heralding the start of a new

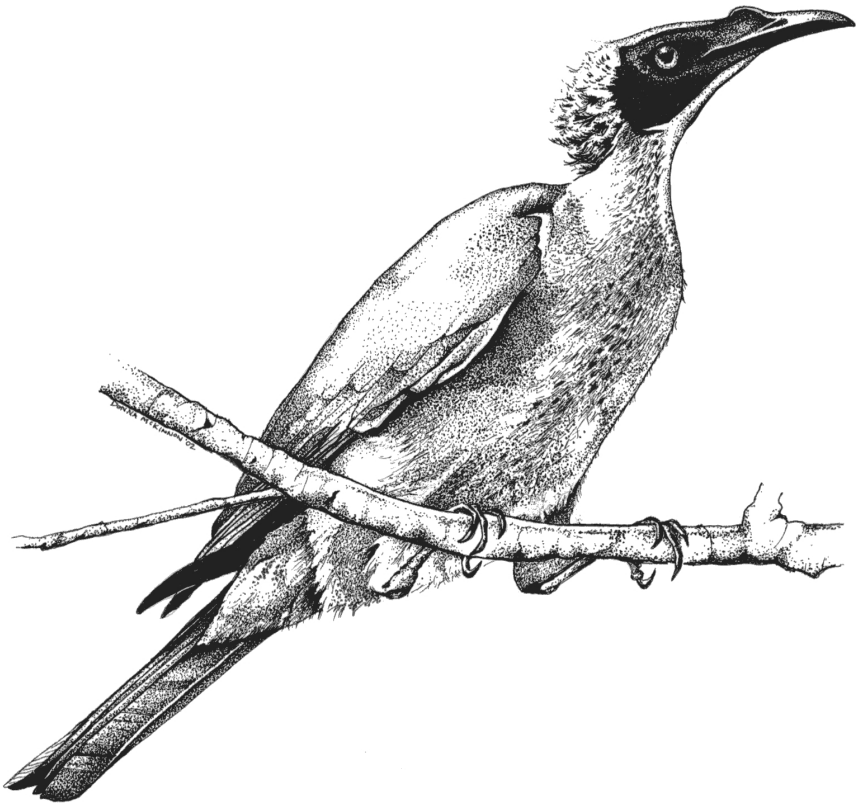

Fig. 1: Helmeted friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*) (drawing by Donna McKinnon).

day, in the Nage myth the friarbird wishes day and night to be of short duration and to alternate rapidly. The bird also argues that humans should die, but also reproduce and thus continually replace themselves with new generations. In contrast, the Imperial pigeon desires that the world remain in darkness, if not eternally, then for a very long time, so that day should succeed night only very slowly. The pigeon also deems it undesirable that humans should be prolific, arguing that seven men and seven women will be sufficient to populate the earth. The friarbird of course wins, so that life is as we know it today.

As the Nage myth links the entrance of death into a previously deathless world with the present alternation of day and night, it represents a variant of a worldwide mythological tradition concerning the "origin of death," most famously reflected in the Book of Genesis (see, e.g., Frazer 1918). Yet its immediate comparative context is of course eastern Indonesia, and a full understanding of the Nage story can only be gained within the framework of a particular regional culture. To this end, English translations of one of three versions the Nage story, as well as ten variants from other parts of Flores and from the neighbouring islands of Sumba and Timor, have been placed in the Appendix. Most of these have appeared previously (Forth 1992); hence in the present article, some are abbreviated (including the Sumbanese variant, on which my previous paper largely focused). New to this essay are a narrative from the Keo region of south central Flores and Timorese variants from Mambai and Viqueque published by Hicks (1997, 2004, 2006). Besides Nage and Keo, Flores versions of the myth come from Riung and Ende (two regions of central Flores bounding on Nage territory), from Sika in eastern Flores, and from Manggarai in the far western part of the island. Surprisingly, no version is found among Arndt's voluminous writings on the Ngadha, the immediate western neighbours of the Nage (see especially Arndt 1960), nor is any noted by Laubscher (1971). Even so, it is virtually certain that the story is known among this group as well.[1]

1 Citing an informant from So'a, immediately to the north of Ngadha and northwest of Nage, Arndt relates how, in the beginning, the divinity (Déva) created day and night by calling on the birds *burudzu* and *kuau*, the Imperial pigeon and the friarbird: The pigeon said: the night one year and the day one year. But the friarbird said: the night short and the day short. The divinity then did as the friarbird had spoken and provided a day of a short duration and a night of a short duration (Arndt 1937: 359). The same representation

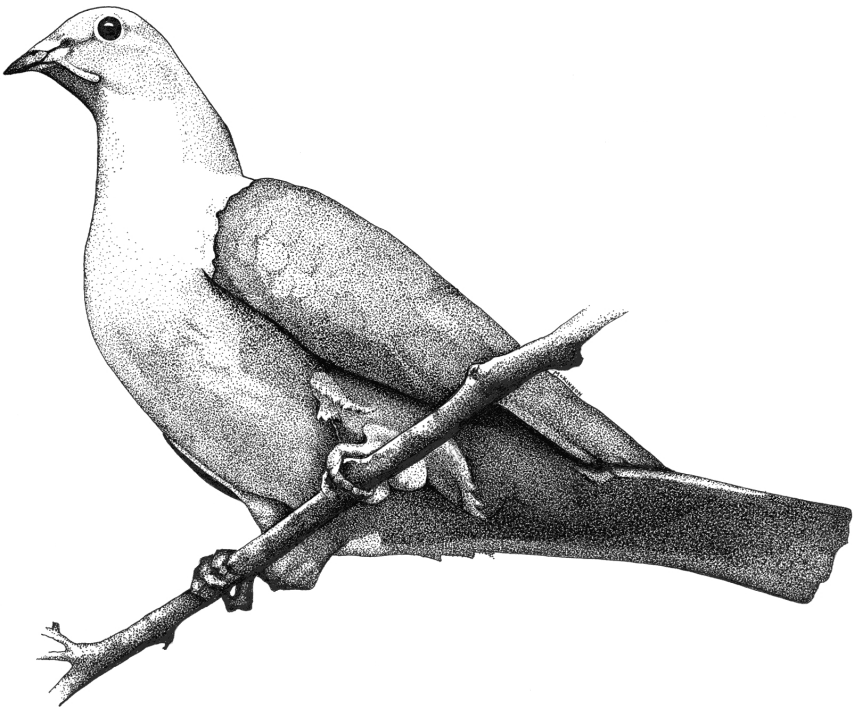

Fig. 2: Green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea*) (drawing by Donna McKinnon).

1 Mythological and Ornithological Commonalities

The present comparison refers to a total of thirteen texts. Of several prominent themes, the one encountered in all thirteen variants of the eastern Indonesian myth is that of a contest or dispute between birds.[2] In eleven texts, one contestant is the friarbird, in most languages called *koka* or something similar. In all but one text, the friarbird's opponent is a pigeon, probably in all cases an Imperial pigeon (genus *Ducula*), a bird that is rather more variously designated. The pigeon also appears in the Manggarai story, where the bird is supported by an owl; the pair are then opposed by all other birds, but especially by the *kiong*, the Bare-throated whistler (see Fig. 3). In the Belu (central Timor) variant, a crow takes the place of the pigeon. The crow then contests with a small bird called *berliku*,

Fig. 3: Bare-throated whistler (*Pachycephala nudigula*) (drawing by Donna McKinnon).

is encountered in Sara Sedu, a district in the extreme eastern part of the Ngadha region which combines features of Nage and Ngadha culture and social organization (A. K. Molnar, pers. comm. 1993).

2 Two birds also appear as contestants in a Buru myth (Barbara Grimes, pers. comm. 1993). One is a dove (*ermuken*, cf. Nage *muke*, Emerald ground-dove) and the other a Mallee fowl (a kind of Megapode). Apart from the element of contest, the story resembles the myth of the Imperial pigeon and the friarbird only insofar as one character, indeed the loser, is a Columbiforme. Otherwise, the narratives are quite different. In the Buru story, the birds fight over whether sago palms should be pulped or tapped (the dove's position); the outcome of their competition also explains present physical features of the two birds.

the identity of which remains uncertain.[3] In yet another Timorese variant, from Viqueque, a crow argues with the friarbird; but in contrast to all other variants the latter takes the side of the pigeon, thus effecting a reversal to which I return below. Verheijen (1950: 59, n. 3) briefly refers to a Manggarai variant of the story (which he does not record), in which the friarbird's antagonist is the moon. So far as I can discover, this is the only instance of the eastern Indonesian myth where the two main contestants are not both birds.

In the creation mythology of the Donggo of Sumbawa, the island located directly west of Flores, the continuous crowing of a cock gradually transforms an originally dark world into one in which day and night alternate. The idea is obviously predicated on the daily cock crows preceding the sunrise. Although this tradition does not involve a competition between birds, the primordial Donggo cock evidently takes the place of the friarbird elsewhere. By scratching the earth, moreover, the mythical cock participates in another creative act, by providing the first water for a thirsty humanity (Arndt 1952: 483 f.), an act which appears to be replicated in the Sumbanese version of the myth (see Appendix).

In two of the Nage variants and in eight of the stories from other Indonesian societies, the birds dispute over the length of night and day. In all instances, the Imperial pigeon (or the character that takes its place) wishes the world to remain dark or for darkness to prevail for a lengthy period of time. In contrast, the friarbird (or its replacement in the Manggarai and two Timorese variants) wants the daylight to appear quickly so that day and night will assume their present lengths and rapidly succeed one another. Among Nage, the mythological desire of the friarbird, that night and day should alternate rapidly, informs the Nage term *kobe koka*, "night of the friarbird." Employed in several ritual contexts, this denotes a procedure that can be invoked to speed up a lengthy undertaking, and more particularly to dispense with a day of inactivity which should otherwise intervene between component rites of a ceremonial sequence. In order to expedite this, participants pretend to sleep for a while; then someone imitates a cock's crow and everyone rises and continues as though a night had passed.

Variants of the myth from Sumba, Manggarai, and Sika explicitly describe how, at the beginning of the world, everything was in darkness. Accordingly, the dispute between the birds partly concerns how soon the first sunrise should occur. Including all three Nage variants, six or seven texts concern the origin of death, at least by implication. In these, the birds more specifically address the issue of whether human beings should live forever or whether they should die and then, in order to maintain or increase their number, regularly give birth. The only stories which expressly refer to the origin of both death and the alternation of night and day are two of the three Nage variants and a variant from the neighbouring region of Riung. The Keo story links in a peculiar way the contrast of life and death with the speed with which day and night follow one another. The suggestion is that, if night were one year in length, and everyone slept for this long, then it would be impossible to tell if people were dead or alive (and merely sleeping). Expressed another way, the contrast of life and death would then be unclear.

In a number of narratives, the question of whether humans should die entails another issue. The Imperial pigeon argues not only that people should live forever, but that their number should be extremely limited. In contrast, the friarbird not only wants humans to die but also to give birth continuously so that they will become numerous. All three of the Nage texts thus relate how, in the beginning, there were just seven men and seven women, and how the pigeon wished to keep things this way. In the story from the central Flores district of Ende, the same bird favours retaining just one man and one woman – a brother and a sister – alive on earth. Similarly, from the Riung tales one learns that, in the earliest time, people bore just a single offspring. The Belu story might be counted as another instance of a narrative concerned with both the origin of death and birth and the origin of night and day: although it mostly addresses the matter of day and night, it ends with the statement that, once these had assumed their present durations, "humanity multiplied vigorously and spread all over the earth."

The number seven, a preferred numeral not just in Nage but in several parts of Indonesia (Forth 1998, 2001, 2004: 221, n. 12), occurs again in one

3 Morris (1984: 13; cited in Hicks 1997) identifies the *berliku* as a "willy wagtail" (sic). But this cannot be correct if he means the Willie wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophyrys*), as the species does not occur on Timor. Hull's ornithologically uninformed gloss, "Timorese nightingale" (2001: 38, s. v. *bereliku*), possibly a translation of an older Portuguese source, also provides no clue to the bird's identity. Hicks describes the *berliku* as "a very small bird with a forked tail" (1997: 200). By either reckoning the bird is not a friarbird, as friarbirds are a medium-sized species, about 25 to 30 cm in length, and do not have forked tails. Nor, following Hicks's description, could it be a whistler (*Pachycephala* sp.; 1997: 200). Contrary to Hicks's assessment, however, I would suggest that the call of the *berliku*, as given in the Belu myth, does indeed resemble that of a friarbird.

of the Riung texts, where the pigeon desires both the night and the day to be seven times their present length – or as this is also stated, each "one week long." Here, the indigenous value attached to the number seven illuminates what might otherwise appear to be a foreign element, namely, the seven day week. Precisely the same position is argued in the Belu variant, where it is the crow who wants night and day to be seven times longer than they are at present. The numeral is mentioned again in the story from Ende, which gives seven as the number of days it took witches to chop down the vine that once connected the sky and the earth. Elsewhere, the pigeon proposes that night should last for a considerably longer period. In the Keo and Sikanese stories, as well as in one of the Nage variants, the bird proclaims that night and day should each last one year. In the Sumbanese tale, the pigeon wants the world to remain dark for one or two years, and in the Manggarai variant no fewer than seventeen years. The Mambai story is unusual insofar as it explicitly refers to a night and a day that are of unequal lengths: the pigeon wishes night to last for one year but the day to be of "normal" duration. This, then, realizes a combination which I mentioned merely as a logical possibility in my earlier analysis of the myth (Forth 1992: 433 n. 20; Hicks 1997: 198).

Despite these variations, in every case the bird that argues for a rapid alternation of day and night defeats his opponent, and is consequently given credit for the present durations of night and day or the present cycle of birth and death. By contrast to what is found in other traditions (including of course the Genesis story), where the introduction of death into the world is portrayed as a negative event, both developments are, with certain qualifications, represented in the eastern Indonesian myths as being of greater benefit to humanity than the arrangements proposed by the pigeon (or the crow in the Belu story). For this reason, the friarbird, by far the most common protagonist of the present order of things, is depicted as a kind of culture hero, and the pigeon as something of a villain. On the other hand, Nage identify neither bird with a creator deity nor any other sort of spiritual being; this seems also to apply in other societies from which the stories derive, even though Verheijen (1950: 62) describes the friarbird as the "totem" of a Manggarai clan.

In the Nage myth, the friarbird's victory eventuates in an act of aggression. Apparently angered by its defeat, the pigeon captures the friarbird and sells the bird into slavery in a place called Goa Jawa. Alluding to the export of slaves from Flores during the nineteenth century and earlier, the name generally designates lands overseas. "Goa" refers to the Makassarese centre in southwestern Sulawesi, and "Jawa" to the island of Java. Things happen the other way about in the Sumbanese tale, where the victorious friarbird kills the pigeon, whose flesh the ancestors of humanity then roast and eat. The same theme is implicit in the story from Manggarai, since after the pigeon and the owl make their position known, all the other birds (who are formally equivalent to the friarbird in the Sumbanese myth) want to kill the pair, while in the Mambai tale, the victorious friarbird kicks the pigeon, causing the bird to fall on some moss, which changes the colour of its plumage. Aggression is reciprocated in the Sikanese and Viqueque variants. In the first, the friarbird throws indigo dye over the pigeon, thus, in a way reminiscent of the Mambai story, darkening the bird's plumage. In retaliation, the pigeon then scalds the friarbird with millet porridge, an act that accounts for the sparse feathers and bare patches on the bird's head. Similarly, in the Viqueque story, the friarbird strikes the crow and rubs his body in ash, thus rendering the bird permanently black, while the crow hits the friarbird in the head, thereby causing the "baldness" characteristic of the species.

Once death and birth are introduced into the world, and night and day assume their present lengths, several other major changes follow. The Nage and Riung myths speak of the origin of labour, depletion, and of a need for constant renewal. In regard to labour as a concomitant of the innovation of death, the eastern Indonesian tradition obviously recalls the biblical story of the fall of man, his expulsion from an earthly paradise, and the appearance of toil, exhaustion, and deterioration as constants of human experience (see Genesis 3: 19). In the Nage texts, this new demand on humanity is partly expressed with reference to the spinning and winding of thread, a theme that may connect with the idea found in one of the Riung stories, that in the beginning people did not wear clothes. Other innovations include the proliferation of grains (or seeds) and thus of food, the need continually to cook, to fetch wood and water, and to eat much. The story from Ende also mentions the proliferation of seeds (and thus of food), while both the Keo and Sikanese variants relate how, in the earliest time, a single grain of rice, when cooked, would fill a whole pot.

The idea that one grain was once sufficient to produce a pot of cooked rice is also found in a Rotinese myth, which describes how, contrary to her mother's instruction, a disobedient girl once cooked a rice grain together with a grain of millet.

In consequence, the pot overflows, filling the whole house and yard, and ruining the meal (Jonker 1911, cited in de Vries 1928). The girl is then beaten by her mother and transforms into a monkey, thus instancing another theme of widespread occurrence in eastern Indonesia (Forth 1988). The notion of originally profusive grains further occurs in aboriginal Formosa, where according to a common story, at one time a pot of cooked rice or millet could be produced by boiling one half a grain (Mabuchi 1974: 88). Mabuchi remarks that the theme occurs in "Malaysia," a term he employs also to designate Indonesia and the Philippines (102), but the only instance he cites is a myth from Sumba concerning "rice which increases by itself" (129).

In the Indonesian stories, there is an obvious logical connection between these various developments and the origin of death and birth and the consequent multiplication of humanity. Although not mentioned explicitly, these departures further implicate the origin of sex, or the "discovery of biological reproduction" (Anell 1964: 26) – a theme expressly developed in some Oceanic myths (16–18, 26). On the other hand, the segmentation of bamboo, which the friarbird advocates in all versions of the Nage myth, is more suggestive of the alternation of day and night. According to the pigeon, lengths of bamboo should consist only of a single unarticulated segment or internode, with nodes appearing only at the top and bottom. The friarbird, by contrast, contends that bamboo should have many nodes and internodes (segments). Mentioned also in one of the tales from Riung, this seemingly trivial detail is intelligible as an instance of eastern Indonesian representations whereby the passage of time is imagined as "a series of spatial segments divided and articulated by a number of points of transition" (Forth 1982: 234; cf. Barnes 1974: 141 f.). Thus, Nage *buku*, denoting inter alia nodes (joints) of bamboo, also refers to temporal points, while *alu* (internode) can denote a period of time.

Two of the Nage tales allude to a primordial condition, favoured by the Imperial pigeon, in which there were just two colours, black and red. These Nage explain as a reference to colours of cotton thread, and remark that since the friarbird got its way, thread and other things have come in many colours. The fact that the two original colours were relatively dark colours obviously accords with the theme of a primeval darkness which the pigeon wished to preserve by having the night last a long time. Thus, by introducing daylight and a much shorter night, the friarbird simultaneously introduced lighter colours into the world.

Although occurring in a minority of variants, two further innovations are nonetheless worthy of mention. Only the Sikanese, Mambai, and Viqueque texts link the birds' contest with the origin of physical characters of one or both avian kinds (the colour of the pigeon's or crow's plumage and the friarbird's bare head). The Sumbanese story describes the emergence of a spring, thereafter known as Mata Wai la Rawa ("water source at the place of the pigeon"), at the spot where the pigeon is killed and consumed after being defeated by the friarbird. Mata Wai la Rawa is a phrase employed in formal speech for the mountainous interior of eastern Sumba, where the major rivers have their sources. Therefore, in this variant of the myth one encounters a contiguity of the origin of water courses with the origin of temporal successions that define the present order of the world. While this may appear as a purely local elaboration of the tradition bearing on a specific geographical feature, it is logically continuous with a detail of one of the Riung stories, in which deathless humans need to fetch water only once in a lifetime.

2 Empirical Differences and Symbolic Contrasts

In the Nage stories, the origin of night and day is less prominent a theme than the origin of birth and death. By contrast, the myths from Manggarai, Sumba, and Timor (Belu, Mambai, Viqueque) mention only the first theme. Yet what is striking about the narratives, considered as a single corpus, is how the two themes converge. Even where one origin does not receive explicit mention, obscure passages illuminated by variants recorded in neighbouring eastern Indonesian societies suggest a possibility of combination that is not always realized. Actually, a conjunction of the two themes seems uncommon more generally in the universal genre usually known as "origin of death myths." A story from Greenland tells how the first man and woman debated "as to whether or not the night and day should always be, and whether or not man should always be" (Obayashi 1966: 11). They finally decided that "night and day should always return, but man should die," so that there would be room on earth for future generations. This combination of themes from what is almost exactly the opposite side of the world from eastern Indonesia thus replicates what the Nage myths, especially, make explicit.

Regardless of the prominence of one theme or the other, or the extent of their convergence in

particular texts, two linked questions have yet to be addressed. The first is why all the eastern Indonesian stories feature two birds and why, in most cases, should these be the friarbird and the Imperial pigeon? With regard not only to Nage but to all societies where variants of the myth are found, the friarbird is more specifically the Helmeted friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*). The only other member of the genus to occur within the range of the narratives is *Philemon inornatus*, the Timor friarbird. Even so, *P. buceroides* is as ubiquitous on Timor as it is elsewhere in the region; and its louder calls are arguably more in accord with what is described in some detail in the Mambai myth than are the softer and less nasal vocalizations of the Timorese endemic (Coates and Bishop 1997: 475). It is equally certain that the pigeon is mostly the Green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea polia*), the member of the genus most commonly encountered in the lowlands and foothills of Flores and Sumba (Coates and Bishop 1997: 325). The one obvious exception concerns the "grey pigeon" in the Timorese version known to the Mambai, since *D. aenea* does not occur on Timor. In this instance, a more likely candidate is either the Timor imperial pigeon (*D. cineracea*) or Pink-headed imperial pigeon (*D. rosacea*). The first species is the greyer of the pair, but only the second shows green on the upper parts, a feature that would seem to accord with the "colour of moss" mentioned in the Mambai narrative. As described by Coates and Bishop (1997: 327 f.), the deep, muted calls of both birds resemble the "u'uuu, u'uuu" sound mentioned in the myth. Rather than the Green imperial pigeon, the reference to "black" plumage in the story from Sika might similarly suggest another Flores species, the Dark-backed imperial pigeon (*D. lacernulata*). On the other hand, the call of this bird seems inconsistent with vocalizations described in the texts, including the Sikanese variant, where these are reproduced as "bem bem."

The fact that friarbirds and Imperial pigeons do not appear together in the mythology of other Indonesian or Austronesian peoples is readily explained by their distribution. The friarbirds (genus *Philemon*), large members of the Meliphagidae (honeyeaters), are centred in Australia and New Guinea, and in Indonesia occur only in the eastern Lesser Sunda Islands and the Moluccas (Cameron and Harrison 1978: 232). Although the bird's black plumage certainly suits it as the advocate for a night of exceptionally long duration, the crow's replacement of the pigeon in the Belu myth from central Timor is less easily explained. For even though the Green imperial pigeon is absent on Timor, two other species of *Ducula* are present, and one indeed is a likely candidate for the "grey pigeon" of the Mambai tale. Nevertheless, given the vocal similarities among all three *Ducula* species, the probable identification of the Mambai bird tends to confirm that it is particularly Imperial pigeons – large, robust birds with deep, resonant voices – and not Columbiformes in general, that are suited to the mythological role of conservative opponents to what, at one time, was a new world order.

The foregoing references to vocalizations provide a more general point of departure. Befitting their symbolic functions in this mythological context, the pigeon and the friarbird are primarily characterized by the nature of their calls. By virtue of their calls, moreover, both are associated and distinguished from one another phenomenally and, in the mythological process, symbolically. The importance of bird vocalizations is underlined by mention of the distinctive cry of the friarbird in several of the stories. Similarly, the call of the pigeon prefaces the statement of this bird's position in the variants from Sika, Manggarai, and Sumba. By the same token, in the Belu and Viqueque myths it is the cawing of the crow that is foregrounded, as is the hooting of the owl (the pigeon's ally) and call of the Bare-throated whistler (the friarbird's replacement) in the Manggarai tale.

Particularly in regard to their mythical association with the alternation of night and day, the daily times at which friarbirds and Imperial pigeons call is obviously relevant. In the Lesser Sundas, the call of the friarbird is first heard about half an hour to an hour before daybreak. Nage thus describe the friarbird as a "sign of daylight" (*ola pea da*) or "sign of the morning" (*ola pea poa*). In eastern Sumba as well, the friarbird's cries predict the rising of the sun; thus the call of the first friarbird (*pini hakaheungu na koka*, "a single friarbird calls") marks the earliest stage in the daily process that culminates in the appearance of the globe of the sun on the eastern horizon. Yet, despite these cultural specifications, the friarbird is by no means vocal only in the early morning. The bird is also heard occasionally in the middle of the day and, indeed, resumes its loud and clamorous calling towards the end of the afternoon, falling silent just before sunset. At this time, Nage say, the "friarbird orders, or reserves, the sun" (*koka na'u leza*), that is, arranges with the sun so that they will meet again the following morning.

As Nage equally recognize, the Green imperial pigeon, too, is vocally active both early in the morning and in the late afternoon, "when the birds perch on exposed upper branches and fly between feeding and roosting places" (Coates and Bishop 1997: 326;

Schmutz 1977: 32f.). Indeed, referring to the bird's early morning calls, Nage describe the Imperial pigeon, like the friarbird, as a "sign of daylight" (*ola pea da*). This is made clear in two Nage songs thus describing the two birds in identical terms (Forth 2004: 183, s. v. texts 8 and 9). Arguably, it is this fundamental equivalence that facilitates the mythological portrayal of the two birds as competitors. On the other hand, the pigeon, as Nage point out, always calls later than the friarbird, or as they also say, the friarbird is always faster than the pigeon, as he likes everything to be done quickly and without difficulty. The morning cries of the friarbird begin when it is still dark, indicating that people should be rising from sleep (*koka sedho ta bugu to*). By contrast, the calls of the Imperial pigeon are heard about the time when one should be leaving the house to work in the fields. In the same way, the friarbird becomes vocal again in the late afternoon. Then, sometime later, Imperial pigeons can be seen alighting in trees (*zawa ko'a*) to roost for the night, whereupon they begin to call. This indicates that night is fast approaching and that people outside the village should prepare to return home. Accordingly, the two Nage phrases given just above, as well as the previously mentioned expression *koka na'u leza* ("friarbird reserves the sun"), serve as standard ways of referring to particular stages of the day.

Consistent with these observations, and particularly the perceived "slowness" of the Imperial pigeon relative to the friarbird, is the Nage depiction of the pigeon as wishing night to last a whole year. Sumbanese and Manggarai variants of the story are even more categorical in linking the Imperial pigeon with the night. Thus, in the Sumbanese text the bird is specified as a "sign of the night" and is even described as calling after dark – a notion which most evidence (including the testimony of the Nage) suggests is ornithologically inaccurate. This, then, corrects my earlier statement, based on Sumbanese claims, that Imperial pigeons sometimes vocalize nocturnally (Forth 1992: 433, n. 19); at the same time, the notion is somewhat in accord with the Nage report that, in the late afternoon, the pigeons always call after friarbirds.

As also discussed in my earlier paper, explaining the Imperial pigeon's association with darkness, and the friarbird's identification with daylight, is a process of mythological transformation which finds its fullest development in the Sumbanese variant of the myth. The contrast of a closer and more distant sunrise becomes equated with advocacy of rapid versus slow alternation of day and night, as for example in the Nage and other Flores narratives. But in the Sumbanese variant, this is further transformed into an opposition of alternation and an absence of alternation – identified as endless night – and thus an association of the two birds with daylight and night respectively. In contrast to what Lévi-Strauss (1967) deemed typical of myth, then, the story does not progressively reduce oppositions (or "contradictions"), but on the contrary expands them, in this way magnifying the phenomenal differences between the two birds. Yet a question remains as to why the friarbird should be identified with rapid alternation (or, in the myths, the rapid appearance of daylight) and the Imperial pigeon with slow alternation (or with an extremely distant sunrise, which on Sumba, especially, has become associated with an extremely long night).

The answer is to be found not so much in the times of the birds' calling (as was largely suggested in my earlier analysis), but in the quality of the calls themselves. The voice of the Helmeted friarbird (*Philemon buceroides*) comprises "variable, loud, coarsely musical, nasal three-note phrases … often repeated at short intervals" (Coates and Bishop 1997: 476). With regard to friarbirds in general – but with no less accuracy in respect of the Helmeted species – other accounts have similarly referred to the birds' "noisy, clanking calls" (Cameron and Harrison 1978: 232). The characteristic vocalization of the Green imperial pigeon (*Ducula aenea*) could scarcely be more different. Nage reproduce the pigeon's deep, mellow, and sonorous call as *guuumm guuuumm*. The Sumbanese and Manggarai equivalents are respectively *muku muku muu* and *regummmm*, while the Riung name for the Imperial pigeon, *girgemk*, appears to reproduce the same vocalization. Almost identically, Schmutz (1977: 32f.) imitates the sound heard on Flores with "rengUUU!," "renggUUU, renggUUU," "hMMMMMM," and "hmmm!", and compares the last component to the way humans often react vocally to a pleasant taste. From my own experience in eastern Indonesia, I can also verify the description given by King et al.: "a lovely deep coo … somewhat like a cow mooing in the distance" (1975: 171).

Not just relative to the vocalization of the Imperial pigeon, but absolutely as well, the higher-pitched calls of the friarbird are lively, energetic, noisy, and rough. They are also notably variable, to the extent that Nage are able to ascribe to them all sorts of linguistic messages. Indeed, the friarbird's vocalizations are distinguished from other bird calls that possess augural value, insofar as particular calls – the "speech" of the friarbird as Nage say – can be interpreted as conveying specific pieces of information, and are therefore ac-

corded significance in contexts of ritual divination (Forth 2004: 99, 181, s. v. text 4). It goes without saying that this special vocal ability not only renders the bird an appropriate contestant in a mythical oratorical competition, but is indeed consistent with its role as the victor. In marked contrast, the Imperial pigeon produces a murmurous sound that is smooth, soothing, and low-pitched. It is also monotonous, with a distant, mysterious quality that differs sharply from the immediate clatter and clamour of the friarbird. Without placing too much reliance on English metaphor, the cry of the Imperial pigeon might even be described as "sleepy," "dreamy," or "lazy" – adjectives that immediately suggest darkness and night – whereas the friarbird, especially as it calls very early in the morning, could, without too much exaggeration, be compared to a slightly musical alarm clock.

The foregoing answers in the affirmative a question posed in my 1992 essay, concerning whether "… the pigeon's soft deep coo links it in any natural or obvious way with the night …" (429). What is more, much of this interpretation is explicit in the Mambai variant of the myth, where the friarbird is described as crying out in "the jerky fashion of someone who is always in a hurry and who never has enough time." In contrast, the pigeon's call is characterized as "drawn-out" and "lethargic … repeated only now and then … with the sluggishness of someone who has plenty of time." The Mambai narrator moreover describes the pigeon as "well-fed and sleepy" (Hicks 1997: 199). One can thus readily appreciate how the contrast of rapid and slow alternation of major temporal periods, and related mythological oppositions (such as the presence or absence of labour, change, variety, birth, multiplication, and multiplicity) are all ultimately grounded in natural vocal features of the two birds.

Reflecting the same percepts are standard expressions reproducing the friarbird's call. In Nage, the phrase is *iko ako*. As the narratives reveal, the Riung, Sikanese, Sumbanese, and Mambai variants of this onomatopoeia include *ciko cako*, *aku koa*, *ku kau ku kau*, and *ko'a ko'a ko'a* (see also *kiu kau kiu kau*, the cry attributed to the *berliku* bird in the Belu story).[4] In all cases, I would argue, binary vocalic contrasts comprised in local representations of the friarbird's call reproduce the perceptual motivation connecting the bird with the regular and rapid alternation of day and night which it advocates in the myth.[5] In addition, names for the friarbird (see Nage, Keo, Endenese and Sumbanese *koka*, Manggarai *kokak*, Sikanese *oä*, Riung *koa kezok*) identically reveal this binary variation. Indeed, in the Tetum language of Timor, *kakoak*, *kae-koa'ak*, and *koa-kau* refer equally to the cries of the friarbird and to the bird itself, while in view of the previously mentioned association of the bird with rapidity, it is similarly noteworthy that a relationship has been suggested between these several ornithological names and Tetum *kako'a*, meaning "to be quick," "quickly," or "to hasten," "to be in a hurry" (Hicks 1997: 199; 2004: 65, citing Hull 2001). In this connection it should be emphasized that both Nage and Sumbanese regard the friarbird's name, *koka*, as an onomatopoeic designation. The same character could plausibly be attributed to names in other languages which, while distinct from representations of the calls, are nevertheless similarly constructed.

The importance of vocalic contrasts between the two bird species in empirically informing their respective associations with a rapid or slow alternation of temporal periods is confirmed by a Timorese variant of the myth which initially appears to contradict these associations (Hicks 2006). Collected in the Viqueque subdistrict of East Timor, the story has the friarbird arguing with another bird, identified by Hicks as the Large-billed crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), over the length of day and night. In contrast to all other versions, the friarbird favours a seven-day long period of darkness alternating with a seven-day period of light, whereas his adversary advocates a single day alternating with a single night. (According to the crow, the arrangement proposed by the friarbird would cause them to "suffer" and "be hungry.") However, as Hicks shows, in this particular ornithological contrast it is actually the friarbird that possesses the relatively "unhurried" and "more languid" cry, contrasting to the "more rapid" guttural call of the crow (Hicks 2006: 572). Thus, in this case as well, it is the bird with the harsher and more rapid vocalization which advocates a more rapid alternation of day and night – and which proves the victor. Rather than contradicting the general pattern of eastern Indonesian origin myths, then, the Viqueque variant confirms it in a particularly telling way. It does so, moreover, even

4 Arndt (who misidentifies the species as a kind of pheasant) gives the Riung name for the bird as *ciko cako*. Apparently, another designation is *koa kezok*, which he places in brackets after *ciko cako* (the initial /c/ reflects a peculiarity of Arndt's transcription; see Arndt 1961). In the closely related group of dialects Verheijen (1977) labels as "Rembong," the Helmeted friarbird is called *iko ako*, *kokak*, and *kokaq okak*.

5 Cf. Forth (1992: 429), where the point is made in a somewhat different way, by suggesting that the friarbird's call "parallels and so may be seen to imitate the regular and rapid alternation of day and night."

though one might expect the dark plumage of the crow (the origin of which this story also describes) to be connected with a longer period of darkness, as is the case in the Belu (central Timorese) variant, where the crow loses the contest. On the other hand, the locally recognized association of the crow, as a scavenger, with death and decay (Hicks 2006: 572) is perfectly consistent with a rapid alternation of day and night coinciding with the "origin of death," a coincidence fully articulated in variants of the myth from Flores. Finally, it is noteworthy how, in the Viqueque story, slow alternation of night and day is (implicitly at least) linked with hunger and deprivation, an association which, in a way comparable to the friarbird's taking the part of the pigeon elsewhere, appears to reverse what is found in Flores variants, where it is the introduction of a rapidly alternating day and night that brings exhaustion, a need to toil, and to produce and eat much food (and in some instances, also, to reproduce).[6]

As noted, the Timorese tale further describes the origin of physical features of the two birds. Although not accounted for in the same way in other versions of the myth, palpably informing symbolic contrasts grounded in their very different calls are morphological differences between the scrawny friarbird and the round, plump pigeon. Indeed, Nage link the friarbird's emaciated appearance explicitly to its vociferousness and excessive expenditure of vocal energy (Forth 2004: 148, 202; see also texts in 2004: 181–183). There is also a contrast of plumage. Whereas the friarbird is among the dullest of eastern Indonesian aviformes, the Imperial pigeon is a handsome bird, displaying metallic green upper parts and a pale pinkish-grey head, neck, and under parts (Coates and Bishop 1997: 108). Behavioural dissimilarity is yet another factor contributing to the opposition between the avian pair. Like other honeyeaters (Meliphagidae), the friarbird is pugnacious and aggressive; the Imperial pigeon is not. The friarbird is mostly a nectar feeder, a trait which, according to the Mambai narrative, requires it to "keep moving about … without stopping." The pigeon, on the other hand, feeds on berries, figs, and other large fruits – a diet which, as the Mambai story also specifies, is relatively easily procured and keeps the bird well fed.

Although bearing on attitudes towards the birds rather than the birds themselves, another sort of dietary contrast is reflected in the Nage assessment of the friarbird as the least edible of birds, being all skin and bones. In regard to the bird's mythical role in the origin of death, one might also speculatively compare its appearance to that of a corpse. In sharp contrast, the flesh of the Imperial pigeon, like that of Columbiformes in general, is among the most preferred of wild bird meats.

Nevertheless, in the context of myth all these differences are quite clearly of lesser significance than the contrasting vocal habits of the two species. In this respect, the mythological opposition of pigeon and friarbird accords with a general pattern of Nage bird symbolism, whereby the visual is on the whole subordinated to the auditory sense, and birds generally figure as symbols or signs on the basis of their vocalizations rather than their appearance (Forth 2004). The point is further exemplified below in a myth involving birds of prey. Bound up with the essential verbal nature of the contest between the friarbird and the Imperial pigeon (or their occasional substitutes in some variants), the emphasis on vocal characteristics, of course, further accords with the fact that, in this eastern Indonesian tradition, the disputants are birds. For, as vocalizing creatures, birds are obviously better suited to this sort of competition than are other kinds of animals – the characters in origin of death myths told in some other parts of the world. Since all groups possessing variants of the story of the pigeon and the friarbird are Austronesian speakers, it may be significant as well that, sometimes, two birds occur as contestants in Oceanic myths concerning the origin of death (Anell 1964: 24ff.).

The importance of vocalization is further attested by the replacement of the friarbird in the Manggarai variant of the myth by the Bare-throated whistler (*Pachycephala nudigula*). Particularly relevant are the loudness and variety of the whistler's calls (Coates and Bishop 1997: 462). Described by Ver-

6 In a previous discussion of the Viqueque tale, Hicks (2004: 64f.) cites evidence suggesting that the friarbird's opponent may not be a crow, but another black bird, and that it might even be, or may resemble, a "small swallow." I am inclined to suggest that the bird is the Wallacean drongo (*Dicrurus densus*), a noisy, aggressive species with a "distinctive, unpleasant, moderately loud, harsh" call (Coates and Bishop 1997: 409) and glossy black feathers not dissimilar to a crow, and with a prominent forked tail that might recall a swallow. (Perhaps significantly, the small *berliku* bird, which opposes a crow in the Belu variant of the myth, is also said to have a forked tail.) On the other hand, while considerably smaller than the Large-billed crow, drongos are medium-sized birds and could hardly be called "small." Yet, even if the Viqueque bird were a drongo, this would not obviously affect the analysis Hicks advances, particularly with regard to vocal differences. Possibly relevant to the bird's ornithological identity, and perhaps also to Hicks's interpretation of the symbolic contrasts in which it participates, is the curious fact that the Viqueque (Tetum) name of the bird, "*kaoá*," is remarkably similar to that of the friarbird, called "*kakoak*" and variants in the same language. At the same time, crows in Tetum are further designated as *manu-metan* (literally "black bird"; Hull 2001) or *ko'a metan* (Morris 1984).

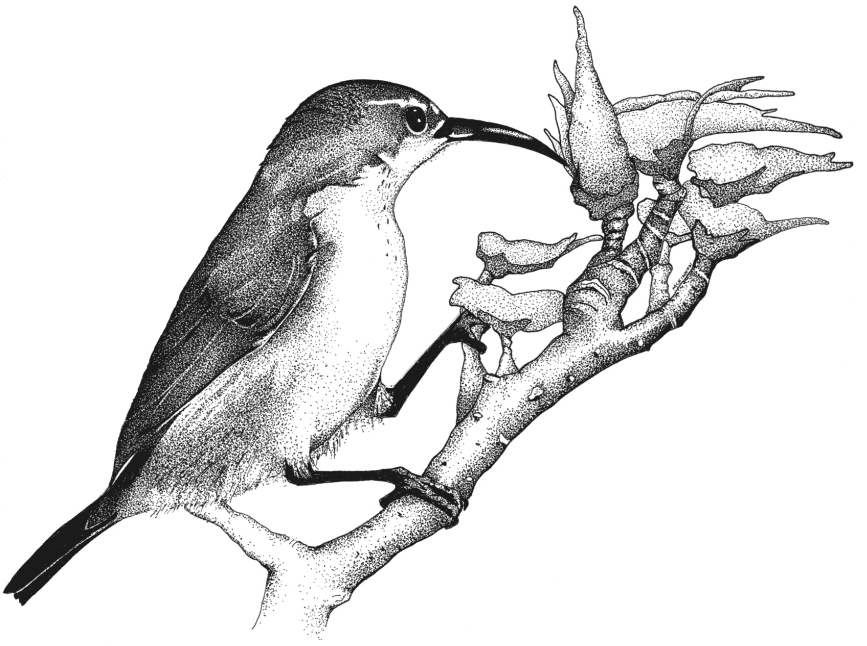

Fig. 4: Olive-backed sunbird (*Nectarinia jugularis*) (drawing by Donna McKinnon).

heijen (1963: 697) as the "finest songster of Flores," the bird is also an accomplished mimic. In fact, in these several respects, the Bare-throated whistler, a species the Nage call *kete dhéngi* (Forth 2004; see Fig. 3), might appear to be an even better choice than the friarbird as the pigeon's antagonist. Explaining the bird's sole appearance in a variant of the myth from Flores, however, is the fact that the species is endemic to that island and to Sumbawa, and thus absent from both Sumba and Timor. Even on Flores, moreover, it does not play a prominent part in the dawn chorus, and in fact occurs only at higher elevations and thus, unlike the ubiquitous friarbird, often at some distance from human habitations. The bird's sole appearance in the Manggarai story, on the other hand, is consistent with *Pachycephala nudigula* being significantly more common and vocal in this more densely forested western region than in other, more easterly parts of Flores (Verhoeye and Holmes 1999: 41).

In regard to the bird's favouring a very lengthy night, the selection of the owl as the pigeon's ally in the Manggarai story of course requires no comment. Nor, for the same reason, does the replacement of the pigeon by the moon in another Manggarai variant. The occurrence of the crow in place of the Imperial pigeon in the Belu story might be explained by its dark feathers. But as noted, in another Timorese myth the crow takes the place of the friarbird as the advocate of a short day and night, thus again suggesting the subordination of the visual to the vocal. In addition, the Manggarai owl is described as prefacing an appeal for an enduring night with the cry *po*, *po*, *po*, thereby associating the bird's mythical function with its characteristic nocturnal vocalization (one Nage consider a principal manifestation of witches [Forth 2004: 68–74], who also favour the night) as much as with the bird's simple occurrence after dark.

Another bird requiring attention is the sunbird (*tiwe*, including the Olive-backed sunbird, *Nectarinia jugularis*; see Fig. 4), which appears as the redeemer of the friarbird in two variants of the Nage myth. As discussed elsewhere (Forth 2004: 126–127), it is the boldness that Nage ascribe to the sunbird – an attribution grounded in ornithological fact – that explains why, in one variant, both the pigeon and the friarbird are described as being afraid of the sunbird, and why the *tiwe* is able to ransom the friarbird, even though the tiny bird is too small to carry the banyan fruits (or figs) which the Imperial pigeon, in keeping with the dietary habits of the species, evidently requires. This aspect of the sunbird's nature does not of course explain why this bird should take the side of the friarbird. But an answer may be found in perceptual similarities reflecting phylogenetic linkage between the two avian kinds. As noted, friarbirds are large members of the Meliphagidae (honeyeaters), whereas sunbirds belong to the Nectarinidae. While ornithologists disagree as to how closely related the two families might be (Cameron and Harrison 1978: 232; cf. Coates and Bishop 1997: 480), small honeyeaters, especially, closely resemble sunbirds in form and behaviour; and, accordingly, Nage include small honeyeaters (genus *Lichmera*), together

with sunbirds, under the rubric of *tiwe*. Both friarbirds and sunbirds are mostly nectar feeders and, despite the difference in their sizes, moreover resemble one another in a tendency to aggressiveness and pugnacity. Sunbirds are also rather vocal birds (Coates and Bishop 1997: 473, 482). In Nage bird symbolism, therefore, the sunbird assumes a position comparable to the feisty and equally diminutive wren, as the "king of birds" in European tradition (Forth 2004: 127).

Nage represent both the sunbird and the friarbird as minor palm juice thieves (Forth 2004: 14). In the case of the sunbird, the reputation informs both the bird's appearance in a myth concerning the origin of palm wine production and in ritual phrases relating to palm tapping (150, 193–194). Similarly, in Manggarai mythology it is the friarbird who first instructed people how to tap palms (Verheijen 1950: 62).

3 Birds, Origins, and Temporal Values

In my earlier article (1992), I discussed how the story of the pigeon and the friarbird articulates with other components of eastern Indonesian origin mythology concerning the origin of temporal processes (including the separation of sun and moon and of sky and earth, and the origin of witches). Another interest of that essay was a comparison of the Indonesian myth with origin of death myths in other parts of the world, as analyzed by Frazer (1918) and others (e.g., Dundes 1984). Defining a distinct genre of origin stories, the fundamental theme of the Indonesian texts is the alternation of day and night, while the contrast of life and death appears as a secondary and derivative development. Equally, one can say that the principal concern of the eastern Indonesian myth is temporal alternation in general, with death and birth then being understood as but one manifestation of a temporal flux that is represented identically to the more immediate and palpable alternation of periods of darkness and light. It may be partly for this reason that the innovation of death is not depicted as a punishment, as for example in the biblical tradition, but as a necessary entailment of a condition of constant change and growth, particularly of the human population. All this is possible only by virtue of a worldview in which life (or birth) and death succeed one another in a cyclical relation, in the same way as do day and night, and in which death is valorized as a precondition of birth, and thus of life – a position which the Imperial pigeon implicitly does not understand.

Of the two bird characters, the primary value of alternation is clearly identified with the friarbird. From the beginning, the friarbird is associated with both day and night, or at any rate is so associated to a greater extent than the Imperial pigeon, which throughout the entire eastern Indonesian corpus tends to be more exclusively identified with the night. Bound up with the friarbird's dual nature, and the dual character of the bird's "gift" of both death and a rapidly recurring daylight, is a general structural feature of the eastern Indonesian myths. As demonstrated previously (Forth 1992), the subordination of the Imperial pigeon to the victorious friarbird coexists with, and arguably parallels, a relation of encompassment or subsumption. That is to say, the value of the friarbird, as the proponent of rapid alternation of night and day, subsumes the value of the pigeon, who even if not associated solely or categorically with the night, nevertheless favours a very long night or considerably longer cycles of day and night. Equally noteworthy is the fact that the mythical commutation of day/night into life/death produces an absolute identification of the Imperial pigeon with the first term of the second pair; for particularly in Nage and other Flores variants of the myth, the pigeon advocates a world without death or birth. Understood as an endless (as well as birthless) life, the value associated with the pigeon is thus similarly subsumed as part of the alternative championed by the friarbird. Expressed another way, the pigeon favours a life which, owing to the absence of birth (or new or renewed life) and of several other processes of change and instances of diversity, is arguably more like death. In either case, the Imperial pigeon is identified with just one term of the contrast, or with a condition where the contrast itself scarcely exists.

It should also be recalled that, in regard to both its morning and evening vocalizations, the "faster" friarbird always precedes the Imperial pigeon. Resulting from a conflict between the two birds in which the former is victorious, this asymmetric order of precedence established by the friarbird's victory becomes, in effect, the correct order of the world. In regard to central Flores ethnography in general, then, what we encounter in the myth of the two birds is another context in which "precedence" simultaneously entails "encompassment," a relationship I have extensively documented with reference to Keo social organization (Forth 2001). For the bird that has (or acquires) precedence is also the one which, as shown just above, represents the superordinate value, or the conceptual whole that subsumes its opposite.

4 Comparison and Conclusions

To conclude this discussion, it is useful to compare the mythological status of the Imperial pigeon and the friarbird among Nage with that of quite different sorts of birds in other mythical contexts. The case I select is birds of prey, central characters in the Nage story of Tupa Lélu (Forth 2004: 154–171; Forth 2007). The myth tells how a selfish father murders his own daughter, who is then brought back to life and raised to maturity by several kinds of raptorial birds; later, the family is able to recover the woman, but only at the cost of making domestic fowls forever after the prey of such birds. In addition to the fact that both the friarbird and pigeon and the raptors in the Tupa Lélu story anthropomorphously intervene in human affairs – and both do so to the benefit of humanity or a particular human being – an equally significant resemblance lies in the value attached in both cases to bird vocalizations. Considered as instances of the symbolic category *po*, a class largely defined vocally and most closely associated with owls, all raptors are symbolically distinguished by putative vocal features, even though visual traits of both diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey contribute to their association with witches and malevolent spirits (Forth ibid.). Similarly, the friarbird and Imperial pigeon are suited to their mythological functions mainly by the quality and timing of their calls, even while visible features (for example, the friarbird's scrawny form) lend support to these functions.

Yet there is an equally obvious difference. In what might generally be called religious or cosmological contexts (which would include both ritual and myth), Nage speak of raptorial birds as manifestations or embodiments of spiritual beings. By contrast, in no sense do they identify the Imperial pigeon or the friarbird in this way. Partly in this respect, the two sets of birds appear to exemplify standard analytical distinctions of "symbol" and "sign," and "metaphor" and "metonymy." The metonymic aspect of the friarbird and pigeon also consists in the participation of both birds in temporal processes with which they are generally associated: the daily cycle and the alternation of day and night. That is, the two birds both form natural parts of the dawn chorus and its evening counterpart, and to that extent (like the crowing cock featured in the Donggo myth mentioned earlier) may be called natural signs.

An indication that Nage themselves are aware of this difference between the two sets of birds is found in the lyrics of a song, which contrasts the vocalizations of the friarbird and the Imperial pigeon, as useful signs, with the cry of the Brahminy kite (the sole raptor in variants of the Tupa Lélu story), which possesses no such value (see Forth 2004: 183, s. v. text 9). However, in other respects, the friarbird and the Imperial pigeon can be understood as much as symbols as can the birds in the myth of Tupa Lélu. Regardless of how far the birds' association with the alternation of night and day can be ascribed to a natural perception, their further (and arguably, secondary) connection with contrasting positions regarding life (or birth) and death is fully "metaphorical," and in that sense, more strictly "symbolic." Furthermore, while the cries of the friarbird have, as it were, been selected as a symbol of the rapid and regular alternation of day and night, as well as of the culturally postulated cycle of life and death, the voice of the Imperial pigeon symbolizes the opposite values not simply because of inherent qualities, but by virtue of the way the bird's call contrasts to the voice of the friarbird. The importance of contrast is of course underlined by those variants of the myth, such as ones from Manggarai and Timor, where quite different birds take the place of the pigeon or friarbird. Largely with respect to its association with a culturally valued order of things, moreover, the friarbird might be called the most "human" of Nage birds. Not only does it serve as a simile for a human type – a loquacious but also a "lucky" person of the sort Nage admire (as evidenced by a planting song, Forth 2004: 181–182, s. v. text 5) – but in the myth the bird appears as a kind of champion of humanity and humanity's present, positively valued condition. In addition, facilitating the friarbird's previously mentioned oracular function is the species' variable vocal repertoire, which Nage perceive as resembling human speech. The Imperial pigeon, by contrast, is represented as an enemy of mankind – a point elaborated in the Sumbanese variant of the myth, where the earliest human ancestors consume the flesh of the pigeon after it is killed by the friarbird.

As this last point might suggest, the symbolic qualities of the two birds are also apparent from a disparity between their relationship in the myth and their significance in the present day. By virtue of the contrary positions they assume in the narratives, or their contradictory messages, the pigeon and the friarbird are represented as opponents. In contrast, with regard to their actual calls, the two birds are nowadays recognized by Nage as successive chronological signs, and thus in a sense as complementary indicators of common temporal processes in which the friarbird, by calling first, takes precedence. At the same time, this limited, and empirically better grounded, distinction is ob-

viously the base on which the mythological enmity of the two birds is symbolically constructed. As already pointed out, the myth exaggerates or elaborates empirical differences between the birds. Yet, ultimately, the series of strong oppositions which form the Nage narratives' point of departure, are reduced by the defeat of the pigeon and the bird's final subordination to the friarbird, which for Nage have determined present-day reality.

It would appear, therefore, that the mythological difference between raptorial birds and the two avian chronometers has less to do with a contrast of symbol and sign, than with the exclusive identification of the raptors with spiritual beings. For Nage, birds of prey are unequivocally the most "spiritual" of all birds. What is more, it is precisely because of their spiritual nature that these birds are, so to speak, symbolic outside of myth as well as within – which is to say, as manifestations of malevolent spiritual beings. As detailed elsewhere, it is only against the background of this general symbolism that the story of Tupa Lélu can be properly understood as turning on a major inversion, whereby flesh-eating birds, and manifestations of death-dealing spirits, bring a victim murdered by human kin back to life (Forth 2004: 160–163).

In mundane contexts, however, thus outside of the special context of myth, raptorial or carnivorous birds manifest spirits mostly in an audial mode, through vocalizations (the *po* sounds) which, in the case of diurnal birds of prey, appear to be ornithologically misattributed. Being of incidental and irregular occurrence – and subject to a variable interpretation – the sounds additionally represent disorder, an invasion, or potential invasion, by maleficent external spirits, of the human domain.[7] On the other hand, possessing calls which in everyday experience require no special interpretation, largely because they are attributed to nothing other than the birds themselves, the friarbird and the Imperial pigeon derive symbolic significance from a single mythical framework. Being completely regular, moreover, in contrast to the vocal associations of raptorial birds, they signify order, indeed the proper temporal order of the entire world. Quite a different sort of significance appears to attach to the call of the friarbird when interpreted as an oracle (that is, in divinatory ritual). Yet in this case, too, the bird's cry contrasts with vocalizations of the spiritual raptors; for unlike these, it is construed as conveying a particular, linguistic message, and one which, revealing specific information about the cause of violent death, assists in restoring order to a situation deemed to be disorderly or a reflection of spiritual disorder (see Forth 1998: 58–59, regarding witches and violent deaths).

I shall end on a quasi-aetiological note. Both the myth of the pigeon and friarbird and the Nage story of Tupa Lélu appear to explain features of the world and, in varying degrees, of the human condition. Structurally, however, they do so in quite different ways. In Tupa Lélu, a series of inversions is ultimately resolved by raptorial birds assuming their present habits, and particularly habits that impinge on mundane human existence, as predators of domestic fowls. In the story of the pigeon and the friarbird, on the other hand, the focus is on a series of oppositions connected with contrasting vocal and morphological characteristics of the two birds; these are then resolved by the defeat of one bird which, in terms of vocal significance, becomes a subordinated surrogate of the victor. Yet the outcomes of the two mythological processes are not so dissimilar as might at first appear. One result of the friarbird's defeat of the pigeon is the origin of death, whereas all the story of Tupa Lélu appears to account for is the chicken-stealing proclivity of birds of prey. But insofar as Nage symbolically identify humans (or human souls) with domestic fowls, and more specifically as "God's chickens" (Forth 1998: 210, 2004: 89–90, 190 s. v. text 27), and since they simultaneously identify raptorial birds with death-dealing malevolent spirits, the Tupa Lélu myth can in fact be understood identically to the myth of the pigeon and the friarbird. Indeed, it is in this, rather than in those aspects that approximate a "just so" story regarding behavioural features of raptorial birds, that one finds a comprehensive relevance for the tale of Tupa Lélu. Thus, it would not be going too far to suggest that this story is another eastern Indonesian myth concerning the origin of death.

Recently, Brent Berlin (2006) has explored a universal sound symbolism affecting the naming of zoological kinds. In this perspective, phonological differences among taxonomic names articulate symbolically with contrasting morphological and behavioural features of the categories designated. Only in part do eastern Indonesian names of the friarbird (e.g., *koka*) and the Imperial pigeon (e.g., *rawa* or *zawa*) conform to the universal pattern Berlin proposes. Yet this hardly affects the foregoing analysis. Berlin's concern is the way *linguis-*

7 In regard to the contrast of "symbol" and "sign," it may be worth noting that the property linking diurnal and nocturnal raptors, the ability to produce *po* sounds, is itself symbolic, not least because the sounds are attributed as much to unseen spiritual beings as to empirical birds (which Nage, moreover, sometimes deny as the source the sounds).

tic sounds reflect visual and other perceptual properties of natural kinds. By contrast, this paper has focused on the way features of avian form and behaviour, as well as equally empirical vocal qualities of birds, inform not ethno-ornithological nomenclature but the symbolic value of birds. The main product of this comparative analysis has been a demonstration of the formative role empirical properties play in the attribution of symbolic value to contrasting natural kinds. Both vocal and visual percepts can in fact be seen to affect symbolic values to an extent comparable to their influence, extensively documented by Berlin and his followers, in the ethnotaxonomic ordering of zoological categories. Once again, then, while ethnotaxonomy and symbolic classification – as this latter term is most profitably employed (Forth 2004: 63) – represent contrasting ways of conceptualizing natural continuities and discontinuities, the empirical basis of both explains not only their common coincidence in single cultures, but similarities, often quite remarkable, in animal symbolism encountered the world over.

Appendix: Eastern Indonesian Variants of the Myth of the Pigeon and the Friarbird

All texts are translated by the author except where indicated.

Nage

(Central Flores; told to the author by M. Méze Pawe, 1991; two other Nage variants are recorded in Forth 1992.)

Formerly the sky was close to the earth. The Imperial pigeon (*zawa*) said seven men and seven women would be enough (to populate the earth). But the friarbird (*koka*) said many should be born and many should hatch out. People should die continually and be born continually. "Let people give birth again; the dead shall proceed below" (said the friarbird). As regards bamboo, the pigeon said that at the top there should be just one node, and at the bottom just one node. The friarbird then responded, saying there should be numerous nodes.

The pigeon said night should last one year and daylight should last one year. But the friarbird stated that night should pass quickly and the day should also pass quickly. As for rice, the pigeon said "one piece for one potful, one grain for a whole earthen vessel." The friarbird responded, "cook a great deal, eat a lot." Regarding the spinning of thread, the friarbird said "simply spin and just press." The pigeon then said "only red and only black (thread)." The friarbird again spoke, saying "just become tired, just become exhausted, simply tie and simply bind."

Then the pigeon, with a hateful heart, seized the friarbird and went to sell him in Goa Jawa. The sunbird (*tiwe*) had pity on the friarbird. The sunbird did not listen to voices (heed the opinion of others). He went and ransomed the friarbird, bringing fruits from all trees that the pigeon liked to eat. But the sunbird was unable to carry the fruit of the banyan tree. He said "goodness, I cannot carry these banyan fruits as they are as big as my own body." The sunbird then told the two birds, "you two must search for your own food, until soil bears fruit and rocks begin to blossom" (that is, until the end of time). "But you, Friarbird, you must affirm your proposal, since you are the one who will provide the sign of daylight." Thus it is that, when the friarbird calls, people know that the time of daylight has arrived.

Keo

(Central Flores; told to the author by P. Suta Ndike, in the village of Bo'a Ora, western Keo, 1992.)

The Imperial pigeon (*rawa*) said that if one cooked just one grain, it would be sufficient to fill a whole pot. He said "night one year, daylight one year." For this reason, the friarbird (*koka*) challenged him to the utmost. He said "night pass quickly, day pass quickly." The friarbird said that if we put many (rice grains in the pot), then we shall also eat a lot. If we put in only a little, then we shall certainly get little. "Night pass quickly, daylight pass quickly," the friarbird said, "it is sufficient that nighttime last only one night." Now it is twelve hours; daylight too is only twelve hours. If we wanted to sleep, how long should we sleep; we should have great difficulty. We would not know if someone were dead or alive because (the night) would be too long.

Riung

(Central Flores; from German translations of texts recorded by P. Arndt 1935: 345 f.)

a) The bird Ciko Cako (Koa Kezok) contested with the bird Girgemk. In the earliest times, when Ndival and Lobak [two early ancestors] lived, the two birds fought over the longevity of mankind. According to the Girgemk all humans should live forever, should wear no clothing, and each day should eat just one kernel of maize and thereby be sated. However, Ciko Cako said that this must not be. Humans should bear children and then die. They should labour and should thereby become hungry and then satiate themselves.

After they had argued back and forth for a long time, the Girgemk was defeated. Humans must be born and the mothers must therefore die. Humans must also work

hard, up to the present day. The elders thus speak the proverb: The bamboo has internodes and joints; the human being lives and dies.

b) If the bird Girgemk had had his way, the night would be seven times longer than it is; and the day also would be seven times its present length. Day and night would have been one week long. But the *kuau* [Malay name given by Arndt for the friarbird] did not want this; he said: "The day one moment and the night one moment!" Thus it happened and so it has remained to the present. The Girgemk also wished that water and firewood should be fetched only once in a lifetime, and that people should till fields only once, eat only once, and bear just a single child. Also, no one should die. The *kuau*, however, opposed this; he said: "Continually fetch water, continually collect wood, forever work fields, eat again and again, continually bear children and then die!" And thus it happened and so it has remained.

Endenese

(Central Flores; excerpt from a Dutch translation by B. C. C. M. M. van Suchtelen [1921: 158f.] of a text recorded in North Tana Rea, in the western part of the Ende region. The full text, in English translation, is published in Forth 1992.)

Two children, the sole survivors of a primeval flood, heard a pigeon (*rawa*) cooing, and it said: "One seed is sufficient; one piece of wood is enough to cook with. The sister expects strange things; there you will be just two." By this was meant that the two of them were a sufficient number of inhabitants for the world, and that they need not wish for any others. But the friarbird (*koka*), a wise creature, heard this perverse counsel and said to them: 'There below the sea speaks wisely, there above the mountains speak the same; the wood says many can also cook; a large pan of rice fills up the pot; (if) the mango dies (it must) be rejuvenated." In short, the friarbird wished to say: "multiply yourselves so that the race will not die out." And the children followed the advice of the friarbird, and they became many, at least seventeen generations to the present day.

Manggarai

(Western Flores; from a Dutch translation published by J. A. J. Verheijen, 1950: 58f. The original, undated text, in the western Manggarai dialect of Kempo, was recorded by A. Burger.)

In former times the world was continuously dark; there was absolutely no light. The moon, sun, and stars did not exist. Yet in this darkness there lived many birds. The pigeon, *renggae* (or *regem* in central Manggarai) was the most powerful. Every day he called; and his call was "regummmm, light will appear after seventeen years, and only then will there be sun, moon, and stars in the sky." The owl, *po*, cried continually in the night; and his cry was "po, po, po, let it be night, let it be night."

When the other birds heard them calling thus, they become angry. They were unanimous in their desire to kill the pigeon and the owl who had called so badly. If they had cried "it will become light," then the other creatures would not have been infuriated.

Thereupon the pigeon summoned all the other creatures. Once they had assembled at his house, he instructed all of them to sit on the ground. After that, the pigeon invited some of the creatures to let their cries be heard. He first called upon the *kiong* (the Bare-throated whistler), who was the singer among the birds. And the *kiong* sang thus: "day, night, day, night." When the other birds heard this "day and night" they were all delighted. The pigeon then asked them what they wanted, whether they wished it always to be dark night or whether they wanted night and day. "Night *and* day, that is what we all want" (all the other birds replied). At that the pigeon went to visit God, and he said "Lord, all creatures will be very happy if you give to us, your slaves, night and day." "So be it," God answered. And beginning on that day, light alternated with darkness, up to the present time. Moon, sun, and stars first shone on that day.

Sika

(Eastern Flores; from P. Arndt's German text of the Sikanese myth, 1932: 24, 70.)

Once the earth was pitch-dark; two birds were there, the Oä and the Rawa. The Oä and Rawa disputed, and they quarreled with one another. The Oä said "aku ko'a, day and night shall rapidly follow one upon another." But the Rawa said "bem bem, one year night and one year day." Thus the Oä and the Rawa became angry with one another. Oä took indigo solution and threw it over the Rawa, so his body became black. Rawa however took hot millet porridge and scolded the neck of Oä, so that his neck became bare of feathers (p. 24).

In the beginning, night lasted a whole year and the day also a year. Since then, however, the wild pigeon [sic; see Forth 1992] instructed the people of the horizon to scrape the bottom of the large water container and to eat the scrapings, and to scrub the lid of the container and to drink this, so day and night have come to follow quickly upon one another. If the night had lasted a year, a single grain of rice, when cooked, would have filled a whole pot.

So it was that the people of the horizon came and issued the command that the night should end quickly, that it should quickly become day and night and the daylight should be close by. Also, that from a basket of rice people could cook only a potful (p. 70).

Eastern Sumbanese

(Rindi district; an abbreviated version of a text narrated by Kalambaru Mahangu and recorded by the author in Rindi, eastern Sumba, 1976. The longer version appeared in Forth 1992.)

The earth was dry and the waters of the primeval flood had subsided, but daylight did not yet exist and it was continually dark. The Creator therefore created the sun, but it was not very hot and not bright for very long. Everything was dark. He then created all the birds. He made the friarbird (*koka*), and when it was nighttime he made the Imperial pigeon (*rawa*, or more specifically *rawa muku mu*). "You Pigeon, you shall be the sign of the daylight," said the Creator, "and you Friarbird, you shall be the sign of the dawn."

When it was night, and there was absolutely no light, the pigeon called "muku muku mu, in one year daylight will appear," he said. "Oh no" replied the Sumbanese ancestors, "what are you doing, Pigeon? You have said 'daylight in one year'; we will not be able to see our way." But the pigeon did not answer them. He just called out again. "Muku muku muu," he said, "daylight will appear in two years!"

The ancestors then turned to the friarbird, asking him to announce the appearance of daylight. But the friarbird said he was scared of the pigeon. The friarbird then ascended to the place of the Creator, who told the bird what to do. Later, the ancestors called the two birds together and instructed them to go and sit at the "Head of the Earth" [the interior of eastern Sumba, where major rivers have their source]. Arriving at this place, the pigeon again called out "muku muku muu, in one year daylight appear!" It was then the friarbird's turn. Encouraged by the ancestors, he took flight, alighted in a tree, and cried out "ku kau ku kau, daylight appear!" And the daylight appeared, and it was dawn.

The friarbird then seized the pigeon and he killed him, declaring that the pigeon had not spoken correctly. The friarbird ascended to the Creator to announce what had happened, and how he had made the daylight appear. "Very well," said the Creator, "now you shall be known as *koka* [friarbird], the sign of the dawn, the means by which the sun may rise, the means by which the earth is lighted ..." Thus it is that, to the present, when the friarbird calls, daylight will follow, but when the Imperial pigeon calls it will be the middle of the night. The friarbird is the sign of the daylight, the herald of the dawn, and the pigeon the sign of night.

After the friarbird killed the Imperial pigeon, the ancestors roasted and ate the bird at the Head of the Earth. They then became thirsty. As they had nothing to drink, the ancestor named Umbu Walu Mandoku pricked his index finger and caused a spring to appear. The place where the spring arose has since that time been called Mata Wai la Rawa [Spring at the place of the Imperial pigeon].

Belu

(Central Timor; from a German translation of a myth recorded in Waiwiku, Belu, by B. A. G. Vroklage, 1953/II: 141.)

The animals and humans together considered whether it would be better always to have light or one day of light and one day of darkness. The crow said "ka, ka, ka, night seven seven, light seven seven." But the little *berliku* bird made the following proposal: "kiu kau, kiu kau, night one light one." "After the day one night, after the day one night" cried the little bird continually. In the end, all agreed with this proposal. Humanity multiplied vigorously and spread all over the earth.

Mambai

(Eastern Timor; translated by David Hicks, 1997: 199, from a Portuguese text published in Pascoal, 1967: 212.)

Friarbird and grey Pigeon, each in his own distinctive manner, expressed his preference as to how time should be divided. Repeating, successively, *ko'a*, *ko'a*, *ko'a* in the jerky fashion of someone who is always in a hurry and who never has enough time, Friarbird said "I desire one day and one night." He wanted the day to quickly follow the night, and vice versa, as it is today. In his drawn-out, lethargic utterance, *u'uuu*, *u'uuu*, repeated only now and then, but with the sluggishness of someone who has plenty of time, grey Pigeon, well-fed and sleepy replied, "I want a night of one year's duration followed by a normal day."

Ko'a, *ko'a*, *ko'a* Friarbird kept insisting, explaining his position to Pigeon, "Since you live at the top of the *canárias* tree, never failing to eat long-lasting almonds [or almond-like nuts], you never fail to eat. I feed on the nectar of flowers and from the juice of fruits which are of little duration. In order to procure them I must continually keep moving about in a perpetual circuit, without stopping."

This said, he went up to Pigeon and kicked him. Pigeon fell onto some moss. He remained the colour of the moss, he who before had been of another colour. If we continue to have day and night of equal intervals, it is because Friarbird won.

Viqueque

(Eastern Timor; free translation made by David Hicks 2006: 573; see also Hicks 2004: 64 f.)

A long time ago there were two wild birds. One was called Crow. The other was called Friarbird. They were clearing rotten weeds from their garden when midday came and they returned home to eat. They roasted bananas and ate them, after which they poured out some

wine. The two of them drank. They drank until they became drunk. They began talking. Friarbird said to Crow: "I prefer this world to have seven days of light followed by seven days of darkness." Then Crow said: "The arrangement should be one night alternating with one day. A day lasting seven days followed by a night lasting seven nights we definitely can't have because we would suffer too much. Therefore, I prefer one day alternating with one night." But Friarbird did not want this arrangement, saying "I prefer a day lasting seven days followed by a night lasting seven nights." Crow continued to disagree. "It's like this. We shall be hungry. We must not suffer. Therefore the best arrangement is to have one night alternating with one day." Friarbird hit Crow. Crow hit Friarbird with a gourd. Friarbird's entire head became covered in blood. Friarbird grabbed some banana ash and rubbed Crow's entire body with it until his body was black all over. Friarbird's head remained bald and Crow's body remained black for he could never wash himself clean.

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