



## Nukeria Creation Story

Albert Davletshin

**Abstract.** – Little is known about the Polynesians of the Nukuria atoll in Papua New Guinea and the language they speak. This article presents a Nukeria creation story, that is to say, a narrative of how the world began and how people first came to inhabit it. The text was recorded during an expedition in 2013. It is supplied with linguistic and textual analysis, compared with similar stories attested in the other Polynesian traditions, and situated in the ecological and cultural contexts. The article should be of interest for those who are concerned with languages, mythology, techniques of storytelling, and historical ethnography of Polynesia. [*Papua New Guinea, creation myths, folklore motifs, Polynesian languages and rhetoric, Polynesian Outliers of Papua New Guinea*]

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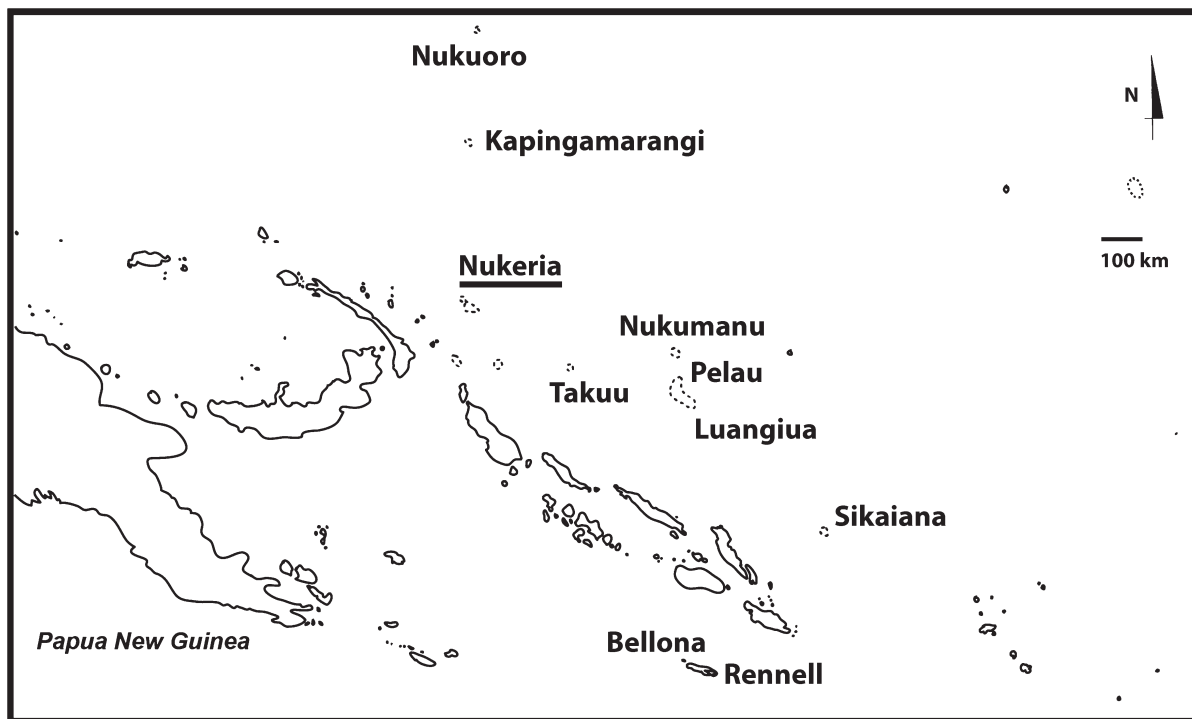
Not all human cultures worldwide possess creation stories, i.e., narratives of how the world began and how people first came to inhabit it. Those oral traditions that possess such stories regard their creation myths as true and for them these stories are crucial for the valuation of the world, for the orientation of humans in the universe, and for the explanation of the basic patterns found in life and culture. During my fieldwork in 2013, dedicated to the documentation of the Nukeria language, I collected a few traditional narratives; one of them is a creation story.

The aim of this article is to present the recorded text, supply it with linguistic and textual analysis, and finally situate it in the ecological and cultural contexts, which is necessary for its symbolic interpretation.

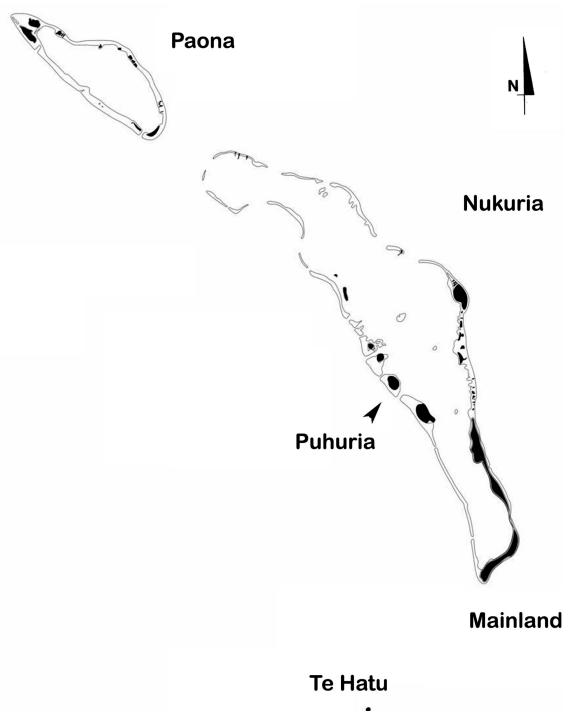
I should note that I use the term “Nukeria” to designate the language and the people, since my consultants insist that it is the correct name. According to them, “Nukuria” is a word from a local “trade language” which Polynesians of Papua New Guinea – Nukeria, Nukumanu, and Takuu – use when they gather together. I still use Nukuria as the name of the atoll.

### Environmental and Sociocultural Settings

Nukuria (also known as Nuguria, Nugarba, Fead Islands, or Abgarris Islands) is the westernmost of the Polynesian atolls in Papua New Guinea, lying at Lat 30° 20' S, Long 154° 45' E (Fig. 1). In fact there are two atolls, a southeastern one (Nukuria), some 32 km long and 8 km wide, and a northwestern one (Paona) 5 km away, some 8 km in length (Fig. 2). Nugarba and Malum are the largest of the 50 islets in the two atolls, respectively. The actual land area of the two atolls is just 10 km<sup>2</sup> (Bayard 1976: 14 f.). Sable Islet (Te Hatu), about 2.4 m high and surrounded by a reef, lies 16 km southsouthwest of the main island; people gather bird eggs and catch turtle there. The Feni Islands of New Ireland are the closest land, some 130 km south of Nukuria. Politically, Nukuria forms part of the Bougainville Autonomous Region in Papua New Guinea. Leaving the atoll one goes some 225 km south on a ba-



**Fig. 1:** Partial map of Near Oceania indicating locations of the Polynesian Outliers mentioned in the text (drawing by the author after a satellite map from <<https://earth.google.com/>>).



**Fig. 2:** Map of the atolls Nukuria and Paona (drawing of the author after a satellite map from <<https://earth.google.com/>>).

nana boat to the temporary capital of the province on Buka and commonly makes a call at Nissan.

Nukuria’s population was devastated by post-contact diseases in the late 1800s and reduced to 15 persons; the population in 1940 was 80 (Parkinson 1907; Bayard 1976: 14). Today some 200 persons reside in a village on the small island Puhuria where they were relocated from the main island in the 1890s, some 200 more live in a recently built new settlement on the main island, and a hundred somewhere else in Papua New Guinea, mostly on Buka. Some Nukeria speak English or Tok Pisin as second language, but the Nukeria language is very much alive. On Puhuria, houses are arranged in two rows parallel to the lagoon side (Fig. 3). Behind these buildings are the primary school, the teachers’ houses, the house of worship, and the football field. Land stretching north towards the reef constitutes the morning defecation area for men, that for women is located on the foreshores at the southern tip. The rumble of the breakers on the reef can be heard all the time.

Nukuria’s climate is tropical and experiences seasonal variation. The southeast trade winds blow from around June to October, and both the period and the wind are known as *te anaake*. From December to May, the prevailing wind is *te laki*, the northwest trade wind, which brings *pantai* “drift-



**Fig. 3:** The only street of the Puhuria village on the island of the same name (photo of the author).

wood”, including food, timber, and important materials such as rope and floats. It is the time of rainfall shortage and rainwater harvesting is the principal source of freshwater. The Nukeria society is a vivid example of the cultural adaptation to the atoll environment with its sandy and infertile soil, a paucity of rainfall, and the absence of freshwater sources. It is a culture of coconut palm, swamp taro (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*), sea turtle, and giant clam (*Tridacna gigas*). Nukeria hunt and also farm giant clams whose shells were once the only source material available for manufacturing adzes, and whose meat is harvested for food. Once group fishing of shark, tuna, and oil-fish was important. Nowadays this is not practiced because there is no demand for shark teeth, previously used for making tools and weapons, as these ocean species are considered to be inferior to reef fishes. Nukeria proudly say “our staple food is turtle” because the turtle is abundant on the two atolls even though they consume more fish than turtle meat. They also gather clams, lobsters, crabs, bird eggs, and nestlings. Bats and rats are the only mammals, the former were extensively hunted in the precontact times. Domestic animals are unknown.

There appears to be little seasonality in agriculture, and people plant and harvest their swamp taro as needed throughout the year. Gardens are wet, lying in excavated areas and located mostly on the main island. Yams, taro, banana, and sugarcane do not yield well in poor soil and are of minor significance in comparison with swamp taro and coconut.

The coconut palm is the source of coconut water, milk, oil, sprout, and leaves used for mats and baskets. In the precontact times, it was also the source of fiber for making ropes and cords and shells for fabricating water containers. Traditionally, an alcoholic beverage, *kareve*, was made of sap taken from inflorescence of coconut palm, but the consumption of alcohol was banned by the elders in the 20th century. In general, gardening is secondary to food foraging, but seaweed is not consumed. Imported foods such as rice, sugar, coffee, tea, and tobacco play an important role but locally produced foods constitute the bulk of the diet.

### Sociopolitical Organization According to the Nukeria Oral Tradition

The following reconstruction is based on the data gathered in 2013 (see more in Davletshin 2016). I do not attempt to compare these data with the two descriptions made more than a century ago (Parkinson 1897, 1907; Thilenius 1902) and which bear little information on the sociopolitical organization. It should be mentioned that Polynesian Outliers that developed in a similar ecological environment are quite different from sociopolitical or linguistic points of view (see, e.g., Feinberg and Scaglione 2012; Sahlins 1958).

The residents of the atoll form four clans (*mataapaa*), each headed by a so-called paramount chief (*hoto-ariki*, also *hato-ariki*): Avela, Hauma, Te Pe-

rurani, and Tahaa. All the islands of the atoll and the land of the main island are divided between these four clans. The atoll Paona belongs to the people of Te Perurani clan alone. The term *mataapaa* refers to a group of people as well as to the land on the main island, the islets in the vicinity, and the fishing grounds belonging to this group. The title “paramount chief” automatically is passed to the oldest of the capable men from the noble lineages of the clan. Potential chiefs, i.e., men who belong to such lineages, are called *atariki*. In the past, the term *ariki* was used and although my consultants were uncertain about the exact translation, they believe *ariki* to be people who stand behind the chief. Commoners, people without chiefly rank, are called *puaka*. Each of the four clans possessed its own village on the main island, its own war canoe, used when the clans were at war with each other but also for communal turtle-hunting and tuna-fishing, its own open place where rituals were performed and the skulls of the dead chiefs were kept, its own god-house, and its own young men’s house where bachelors and strangers spent the night and where men gathered for drinking toddy, exchanging stories, and teaching youth. Each of the four clans still possesses its own garden of swamp taro and its own forbidden island where sea birds lay eggs, fire is forbidden to be kindled and people are not allowed without a permission given by the chief. Formerly, a certain species of fish was forbidden for consumption to each clan. The villages consisted of households including a house where people sleep and a cookhouse. Each household, and an extended family associated with it, was headed by an elder, one who had the right to speak in communal gatherings.

In the past, a person caught stealing food was to be punished to death. The thief took flight and sought salvation from one of the four chiefs. If a chief raised his hand, the thief was safe from danger, but then he and his descendants became slaves of that chief. Although islanders translate *hoto-ariki* as “paramount chief,” the four chiefs enjoy the same status being leaders of *mataapaa* which are stratified social groups associated with certain territories. According to local oral history, “The Great Soa” tried to place the four clans under his command but was killed by Europeans.

Three observations are necessary to complete this short sketch of the Nukeria culture. These have to do with interpersonal relationships and psychological orientation of the people. Firstly, the Nukeria are timid and even shy to the extreme that the word expressing gratitude and excuse *kaupae roo*, “sorry! thank you!” literally means “(I) have inadvertently touched (you).” Secondly, the society is

characterized by avoidance between people in specific kinship relationships, most commonly brother-sister and in-laws. The concept is manifested visibly in a reluctance to be in close proximity, and extends to verbal contact. Thirdly, personal knowledge is an object of particular respect and its lack generates the utmost shame. According to the islanders, one can inherit knowledge of words, names for nights of the Moon, fish names, stories, and songs from one’s father only, and nobody would share secret knowledge outside of his family.

## Nukeria Language

The Nukeria language significantly differs from that of the other Outliers both concerning grammatical and lexical points of view. It shows in the basic lexicon more similarities with Takuu than any other Polynesian language, but still 15 positions of the Swadesh 100-word list are occupied with different etymons (Davletshin 2015). The data on the language published by the German South-Sea Expedition are different from the data recorded in 2013 and contain characteristic Luangiua isoglosses, phonetic, grammatical, and lexical. I suspect that these data were collected from a Luangiua immigrant who settled on Nukeria and had a good command of English.

**Table 1:** Nukeria Phonological System (Using the International Phonetic Alphabet).

Consonants					
p	t	k	pp	tt	kk
m	n		mm	nn	
h	(s)		hh	ss	
v			vv		
	r(l)			rr	
Vowels					
i	u		ii	uu	
e	o		ee	oo	
	a			aa	

The velar *k* is sometimes realized as a dorso-uvular [q] in the context of the non-front vowels *a*, *o* and *u*. In isolation the final monomoraic middle vowels *e* and *o* are raised and realized close to the corresponding high vowels [i] and [u], e.g., *koe* [‘koi], “2nd person, sg.,” *namo* [‘namu], “lagoon,” etc.

The lateral approximant *l* and the dental sibilant *s* are believed to be borrowed from Takuu and Nukumanu though the last language lacks sibilants. The sibilant is not attested in an earlier wordlist published by Parkinson (1897: 147–150). Both the vibrant *r* and the lateral *l* are common in this wordlist. However, today the lateral *l*, as an alternative pronunciation of the vibrant *r*, is restricted to similar environments in Nukeria and Takuu (Davletshin 2014). The palatal affricate *tʃ* is attested in one context only, when the article *te* is followed by a noun beginning with *h*. In such a situation four forms are accepted: [tee 'hare ~ 'thare ~ 'tʃhare ~ 'tʃare], “the house,” [te ha'rau ~ tha'rau ~ tʃha'rau ~ tʃa'rau], “the cat,” etc.

Stress is not phonemic and falls on the penultimate mora with some regular exceptions: [i'loa], “(v.) know,” [ha'hine], “woman,” [ha'kkii ~ haka'kii], “throat,” *haraoa* [ha'rawa], “bread, flour,” *paona* [paona], “place-name,” *maea* [maya], “rope,” *haeko* [haeko], “(v.) hate.” When followed by stressed vowels the high vowels *i* and *u* are realized as glides: *uila* [wila], “lightning,” etc.

Geminate consonants are frequent, but attested in predictable contexts. First, geminate consonants arise when a word with initial *t* follows the definite article *tee* [tee 'tama ~ 'ttama], “the person.” Second, the *haka-*, “causative, simulative” suffix is optionally shortened to *hak-* before stems which begin with *k*: [ha'kkati ~ haka'kati], “(v. t.) to kindle, light a fire (s. obj.)” Third, *tonu*, “directly, very,” gives [i loto'tonu ~ i lo'ttonu], “in the centre (of),” if combined with [loto], “inside.” Fourth, intransitive verbs agree in number with plural subjects by doubling of the consonant in the penultimate syllable: [ee 'hae], “(i. v.) escape (sg.),” and [ee 'hhae], “(i. v.) escape (pl.),” [maka'riri], “(adj.) cold (sg.),” and [maka'rriri], “(adj.) cold (pl.)” Transitive verbs agree in number with plural objects: [ee 'keri], “(t. v.) dig (sg. obj.),” and [ee 'kkeri], “(t. v.) dig (pl. obj.)” The marking of plural in verbs by geminate consonants is relatively consistent in comparison with other Polynesian languages, in particular in the case of plural subjects for intransitive verbs. However, some verbs do not distinguish between singular and plural forms and some verbs are plural inherently and/or semantically. These plural forms correspond to reduplicated forms in other Polynesian languages. Degeminated forms with no vowels elided are attested in poetic language and in those cases when people try to remember a forgotten word. These predictable contexts imply that geminate consonants do not have phonemic status in Nukeria though a bulk of apparent minimal pairs is attested (cf. Davletshin 2014).

## Case-Marking

Subject, agent, and direct object are zero-marked. However, an indirect object is marked with the preposition *i* and the so-called middle verbs/verbs of perception take an indirect object: *a ia te kite i te laa*, “he does not see the sail.” Following the preposition *i* common nouns are obligatory marked with the specific article, either singular *te* or plural *na*. Singular personal pronouns also receive the specific article in such cases: *a nau e rono i te koe*, “I hear you (sg.)” The agentive marker *a* is used only on agents. Its use is restricted to singular personal pronouns, singular independent demonstrative pronouns, and personal names. Even in these cases it is not obligatory, with the exception of the passive construction, so it is a differential object marking where only high-individuation noun phrases and discourse-salient participants receive overt case-marking when functioning as agents (for a similar situation in Vaeakau-Taumako see Næss and Hovdhaugen 2011: 165 and in Rapanui see Kieviet 2016: 371–373). A possessive relation commonly is indicated by simple apposition of two noun phrases.

## Nukeria Creation Story

The text was recorded at the end of my stay on Puhuria during an informal meeting organized by a group of elders who gathered to perform different texts for me. It was their choice which texts and in which order to recite, and the text quoted here was the first one on their list, thus reflecting its importance in the culture. The text abounds in rhetorical devices, which could be expected in such a significant text. To me it is stylistically quite different from both ordinary speech and the fables *kkai* which are told for entertainment. The mechanics of story-telling and the subtle nuances of meaning expressed are of particular interest for me here. That is the reason why I give a transcription of the text and a grammatical analysis provided by interlinear glosses; a detailed commentary on the structure of the text in notes follows. It is a piece of documentation for the Nukeria language. A reader familiar with other Polynesian languages, with the help of the interlinear glosses and notes can easily figure out how the language works. A reader not interested in the language or Polynesian rhetoric can skip this section and go to the resulting English translation.

## General Remarks on Transcription and Analysis

– In Nukeria the majority of prenuclear particles are monosyllabic and the majority, if not all such particles, are lengthened before bimoraic lexical bases (a long vowel counts as two mora), for example, [ee 'tere], “(he) moves fast,” cf. [e 'tere- 'tere], “(he) moves very fast,” [tee 'toki], “the axe,” cf. [te 'toki'toki], “the axe (of a particular kind, a small one).” I have decided to analyze all prenuclear particles as monomoraic and transcribe them accordingly, for example, *e* “imperfective” and *te* “specific article, singular”. However, this may be an overgeneralization.

– I do not indicate derivations and flexions in the transcriptions in order to avoid an additional line, but they appear in the glosses separated by the period “.”. Comments on some derivations appear in the notes. If a Nukeria word corresponds to two or more elements in the gloss, these elements are joined by the same punctuation mark “.”.

– I use the hyphen “-” to indicate the optional truncated form of the article (*te*) before glottal fricatives (*h*) and dental stops (*t*); the last ones result in a geminate consonant (*tt*).

– Polynesian languages are known to be very flexible in their use of nouns and verbs, which is also true for Nukeria. Nevertheless, words are defined as noun or verb in the lexicon and word classes can be distinguished semantically and syntactically. The absence of a strict boundary between word classes can be rather explained by freedom of cross-categorical use (see an excellent treatment of the subject in the recent grammar of Rapanui in Kievit 2016: chap. 3). Lexical noun/verb correspondences are versatile and unpredictable, so sometimes I use different glosses for homophonic noun/verb pairs.

– I do not indicate fillers and false starts, except a few cases where a false start may affect grammatical analysis.

– The text was analyzed with one of my consultants who suggested a number of corrections during the transcription. His corrections and emendations are included in the transcription; some of his comments are essential for understanding and appear in the notes below.

– Last but not least, my fieldwork term was short, a little bit more than one month. Mishearing and misinterpretations were inevitable. Some shades of meaning in the translation were suggested by myself to my consultants; I mark such cases within parentheses.

– The third person nominative and accusative pronouns are almost always omitted; it is typical of Polynesian languages.

– The abbreviations of grammatical glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules (<www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>). I also use English equivalents for some prepositions, directional particles, and discourse markers, but I give them in capital letters in order to indicate that these meanings are grammaticalized, see, for example, the preposition *ma* glossed WITH that functions as both a comitative case marker and a conjunction connecting coordinated noun phrases.

Abbreviations:

AG	“agentive marker” ( <i>a</i> )
CAUS	“causative prefix” ( <i>ha-</i> and <i>haka-</i> )
CONJ	“conjunction, connector” ( <i>ka</i> “coordinating verb phrases referring to simultaneous events,” <i>no ~ ro</i> , “coordinating verb phrases referring to successive events”)
COMPL	“quotative, complementizer following speech verbs” ( <i>poro</i> )
DIS	“distal (far from the speaker and the person spoken to)” ( <i>raa</i> )
DU	“dual”
FUT	“future” ( <i>raakaa</i> )
INTES	“intensifier” ( <i>roo</i> )
IPFV	“imperfective” ( <i>e</i> )
MED	“medial (near the person spoken to)” ( <i>naa</i> )
NEC	“necessitative mood” ( <i>ki</i> )
PURP	“conjunction that introduces subordinate clauses of purpose” ( <i>ki</i> )
NEG	“negative” ( <i>te</i> )
NOM	“nominalizing suffix” ( <i>-ana</i> )
NSP	“non-specific”
PASS	“passive” ( <i>-hia</i> , etc.)
PFV	“perfective” ( <i>ni</i> )
PL	“plural”
POSS	“possessive”
PREP	“default preposition, locative-directional-ablative” ( <i>i</i> )
PRF	“perfect” ( <i>ku</i> )
PROM	“prominence marker/specifier particle” ( <i>ko</i> )
PROX	“proximal (near the speaker)” ( <i>nei</i> )
PVP	“postverbal particle” ( <i>ai</i> )
SG	“singular”
SP	“specific”

## Interlinear Glossed Text

1. *A nau raakaa hua na hua te kaamata te mahaae-ana te henua i mua.*

AG 1.SG FUT say SP.PL word SP.SG begin SP.SG burst.NOM SP.SG earth PREP before

I am going to tell the words of the beginning of the opening of the land in days of before.

2. *Na hua e takkoto peenei.*  
SP.PL word IPFV PL.lie like.this  
The words go as follows.

3. *Te puna e mahae.*  
SP.SG bubble IPFV burst  
A heap of white sand bursts.

4. *Te puna e tipu ake ka hanake hanake ro tipu mo henua.*  
SP.SG bubble IPFV grow UPWARDS CONJ come.  
UPWARDS come.UPWARDS CONJ grow FOR earth  
The heap of white sand grows up and comes up, comes up to become an island.

5. *Naa Kateariki ma Haraparapa e oo mai i te vaka no kkite i te puna naa.*  
THEN kateariki WITH haraparapa IPFV PL.come  
HITHER PREP SP.SG canoe CONJ PL. see PREP  
SP.SG bubble MED  
And then Kateariki and Haraparapa come in a canoe and see this heap of white sand.

6. *Ku mahae ka hanake no ttoha ku tipu mo henua.*  
PRF burst CONJ come.UPWARDS CONJ spread  
PRF grow FOR earth  
It bursts and comes up to spread, it becomes an island.

7. *Naa ku hua roo raaua ku kkite t-henua raaua.*  
THEN PRF say INTENS 3.DU PRF PL.find SP.SG-  
earth 3.DU  
And then they say that they have found an island for themselves.

8. *Ki oo raaua no too mai ni kai ma raaua no ttoki i aruna te henua naa.*  
NEC PL.go 3.DU take HITHER NSP.PL food  
WITH 3.DU CONJ PL.plant PREP above SP.SG  
earth MED  
They must go and bring some plants for them in order to plant them on this island.

9. *Naa laaua ku oo no too na kai ka oo mai laaua.*  
THEN 3.DU PRF PL.go CONJ take SP.PL food  
CONJ go HITHER 3.DU  
And then they go to get the plants and bring them.

10. *A Roatuu ku hiti ake i te puna ro noho i aruna te henua naa.*  
AG roatuu PRF climb.on UPWARDS PREP SP.SG  
bubble CONJ sit PREP above SP.SG earth MED

(As for) Roatuu, she climbs on the heap of white sand and sits on this island.

11. *Naa Haraparapa ma Kateariki ku oo atu ma na kai.*  
THEN haraparapa WITH kateariki PRF PL.go  
AWAY PREP SP.PL food  
And then Haraparapa and Kateariki come back with the plants.

12. *Roatuu ku noho mai i aruna te puna ... i aruna te henua naa.*  
roatuu PRF sit HITHER PREP above SP.SG bubble  
PREP above SP.SG earth MED  
(But) Roatuu sits on the heap of white sand ... on this island.

13. *Naa ku heeatu ai roo raatou.*  
THEN PRF argue PVP INTENS 3.PL  
And then they start to argue.

14. *Naa Haraparapa ma Kateariki e hua ake poro na henua raaua.*  
THEN haraparapa WITH kateariki IPFV say UP-  
WARDS COMPL SP.PL earth 3.DU  
And then Haraparapa and Kateariki tell her that these are their islands.

15. *E mua oo mai no kkite.*  
IPFV before PL.go HITHER CONJ PL.find  
They were first to come and find them.

16. *Naa raaua ku oo ro too mai na kai ki ttoki i aruna te henua raaua.*  
THEN 3.DU PRF PL.go CONJ take SP.PL food  
CONJ PL.plant PREP above SP.SG earth 3.DU  
And then they went to bring the food to plant on their land.

17. *A Roatuu e hua ake poro te ai na henua ana a ia e hanake ma te puna a ia e hiti ake ma te puna naa.*  
AG roatuu IPFV say UPWARDS COMPL NEG be  
SP.PL earth POSS.3.SG AG 3.SG come.UPWARDS  
WITH SP.SG bubble AG 3.SG climb.on UPWARDS  
WITH SP.SG bubble MED  
(As for) Roatuu, she tells them that no, these are her islands, it was she who came up with the heap of sand and it was she who moved up with this heap of sand.

18. *Naa ku heeatu ai roo ka oti.*  
THEN PRF argue PVP INTENS CONJ finish  
And then they finish to argue.

19. *Naa Kateariki ma Haraparapa ku ahe muri ma na kai.*

THEN kateariki WITH haraparapa PRF turn.back behind PREP SP.PL food  
And then Kateariki and Haraparapa turn back with the plants.

20. *raaua ku ttoki koi te nuu ma te kanokano i aruna te henua.*

3.DU PRF PL.plant ONLY SP.SG coconut.palm WITH SP.SG swamp.taro PREP above SP.SG earth  
They plant only coconut palms and swamp taro on the island.

21. *Naa raaua ku ahe muri.*

THEN 3.DU PRF turn.back behind  
And then they turn back.

22. *Na kai na kaukau na taro na mee katoon na kai katoon ku ahe muri raaua ro ttoki i na raa henua.*

SP.PL food SP.PL sweet.potato SP.PL taro SP.PL thing all SP.PL eat all PRF turn.back behind 3.DU CONJ PL.plant PREP SP.PL other earth  
(As for) the plants, sweet potato, taro, everything, every plant, they turn back and plant them on other islands.

23. *Naa raaua ku ahe.*

THEN 3.DU PRF turn.back  
And then they turn back.

24. *A Roatuu ku noho i aruna te henua naa ku haanau roo*

AG roatuu PRF sit PREP above SP.PL earth MED CONJ give.birth INTENS  
(As for) Roatuu she remains on this island and gives birth.

25. *Ku noho roo ka haanau nei mee te ai ki haanau ni tama mee e haanau na kata na ika katoon te tai na ronuu na manu na mee katoon i aruna te henua nei e mahae nei.*

PRF sit INTENS CONJ give.birth PROX but NEG exist PURP give.birth NSP.PL human.being but IPFV give.birth SP.PL snake SP.PL fish all SP.SG sea.water SP.PL sea-cucumber SP.PL bird SP.PL thing all PREP above SP.SG earth PROX IPFV burst PROX

She remains and gives birth, but she does not give birth to humans but to snakes, all the fishes of the sea, sea cucumbers, birds, all the creatures on this island which is burst up.

26. *Naa ko Roatuu e haanau haanau mai na mee na mee katoon te tai na mee i aruna na manu i aruna.*  
THEN PROM roatuu IPFV give.birth give.birth HITHER SP.PL thing SP.PL thing all SP.SG sea. water PREP above SP.PL bird PREP above

Then it is Roatuu who has given birth, has given birth to things, all the thing of the sea, the things of above, the birds of above.

27. *Naa te vaa roatuu ku noho i aruna te henua naa te vaka te maatua ku hanatu.*

THEN SP.SG time roatuu PRF sit PREP above SP.SG earth MED SP.SG canoe SP.SG elder PRF come.AWAY

And then when Roatuu sits on this earth, a canoe of elders comes.

28. *Naa te vaka te maatua ku hanatu ku haanota haare atu te ika.*

THEN SP.SG canoe SP.SG elder PRF come.AWAY PRF catch.fish walk.about AWAY SP.SG fish  
And then as the canoe of elders comes, they fish on their way (here) fish.

29. *Haanota haare atu te ika hanatu, na ika naa ku vaevae ... vaevae i aruna na tama te hoavaka naa.*

catch.fish walk.about AWAY SP.SG fish come.away, SP.PL fish MED PRF distribute ... distribute PREP above SP.PL person SP.SG crew MED  
As they fish on the way (here) fish and come, those fishes they distribute ... distribute them among the people of this canoe team.

30. *Vaevae mai ka au raa roo hakaoti.*

distribute HITHER CONJ come DIS INTENS PRF CAUS.finish  
As they distribute and follow the process of distribution, it is over.

31. *Te tama hakaoti e te tokohia.*

SP.SG person CAUS.finish IPFV NEG receive. PASS  
The last person has no share.

32. *Naa ku tapu i te ika naa.*

THEN PRF forbidden PREP SP.SG fish MED  
And then this (species of) fish is forbidden (taboo) for him.

33. *Ku mee mo tapu ana.*

PRF be FOR forbidden POSS.3.SG  
He has it as his taboo.

34. *Ku au roo toko mai roo toko mai toko haanota mai.*

PRF come INTENS punt HITHER INTENS punt HITHER INTENS punt catch.fish HITHER  
They start to come, they punt here, they punt, they fish punting here, they come.

35. *Au au roo na ika raatou vaevae ... vaevaevae ro oti.*

come come INTENS SP.PL fish 3.DU distribute ... distribute CONJ finish  
As they come, come, the fishes, they distribute them ... distribute them, it is over.

36. *T-tama raa ku te tokohia.*

SP.SG person DIS PRF NEG receive.PASS  
(Another) person has no share.

37. *Naa ku tapu i te ika naa.*

THEN PRF forbidden PREP SP.SG fish MED  
And then this (species of) fish is forbidden (taboo) for him.

38. *Naa ku au au raa roo hiti ai roo no noho i aru-na te henua naa.*

THEN PRF come come DIS INTENS go.across PVP CONJ sit PREP above SP.SG earth MED  
And then they come, come there and get on this island in order to live on it.

39. *Ku hatihati ai roo te raatou vaka.*

PRF FREQ.break DIS INTENS SP.SG 3.PL canoe  
They break their canoe into pieces (in that place).

40. *Naa ku hatihati ai roo te raatou vaka.*

THEN PRF FREQ.break DIS INTENS SP.SG 3.PL canoe  
And then they break their canoe into pieces (in that place).

41. *Naa ku riaki ai loo na mee ka tahea.*

THEN PRF throw DIS INTENS SP.PL thing CONJ flow.PASS  
And then they threw away things (in that place) and the things drift.

42. *Naa e oo ai na mee no ppao i te henua.*

THEN IPFV PL.go PVP SP.PL thing CONJ PL.land.ashore PREP SP.SG earth  
And then the things go (in that place) and land ashore.

43. *Ku taptapa ai loo na inoa i na kuana naa pai a te utua nnia, t-tai t-tahaa, t-tai te uru raakau, t-tai te hoe.*

PRF PL.give.name PVP INTENS SP.PL name PREP SP.PL place MED like AG SP.SG tidal.flat SP.SG shore SP.SG coconut.shell.container SP.SG shore SP.SG bundle wood SP.SG shore SP.SG paddle  
They give names (in that place) to those places like, for example, the tidal flat of the *nnia* tree, the shore

of the coconut shell container *tahaa*, the shore of the bundle of wood, the shore of the paddle.

44. *Na mee naa ni mee te vaka.*

SP.PL thing MED NSP.PL thing SP.SG canoe  
These things are from the canoe.

45. *Naa ku nnoho ai roo.*

THEN PRF PL.sit PVP INTENS  
And then they settled (in that place).

46. *Riaki na mee te vaka naa ka oti ku nnoho roo.*

throw SP.PL thing SP.SG canoe MED CONJ finish PRF PL.sit INTENS  
They throw away the things from this boat and after that they settle and they finish to settle.

47. *Naa ku nnoho ka oti.*

THEN PRF PL.sit CONJ finish  
And then they finish to settle.

48. *Haraparapa ma Kateariki ku mahhike roo ttuu ma raaua raakau ka riaki ki hhaa te akau.*

haraparapa WITH kateariki PRF PL.arise CONJ PL.stand.up WITH 3.PL wood CONJ trow CONJ PL.split.open SP.SG reef  
Haraparapa and Kateariki get up and stand up with their sticks and throw them to break the reef open.

49. *Naa ruai tama Haraparapa ma Kateariki ku mahhike ku tutuu ka hahaa te akau.*

THEN pair person haraparapa WITH kateariki PRF PL.arise PRF PL.stand.up CONJ PL.split.open SP.SG reef  
And then these two men Haraparapa and Kateariki get up, stand up and break the reef open.

50. *Kateariki ku tere i t-taha tokorau.*

kateariki PRF move.fast PREP SP.SG side tokorau  
Kateariki starts to move on the north-east side.

51. *Haraparapa ku tere i t-taha haupuku.*

haraparapa PRF move.fast PREP SP.SG side haupuku  
Haraparapa starts to move on the south side.

52. *Naa ku hhuro ai roo raaua ... raakau naa.*

THEN PRF PL.run PVP INTENS 3.DU wood MED  
And then their sticks start to move.

53. *Naa raaua ku hurohuro raa roo.*

THEN 3.DU PRF FREQ.PL.run DIS INTENS  
And then they start to move (there).

54. *Hhati roo te raakau Kateariki i te muri te roto ka tuu ai.*

split.open INTENS SP.SG wood kateariki PREP SP.SG behind SP.SG inside CONJ stand.up PVP Kateariki's stick breaks at the end of the lagoon and stands there.

55. *Naa Haraparapa ku tere roo.*

THEN haraparapa PRF move.fast INTENS And then Haraparapa starts to move.

56. *Hakaoti mai roo tana raakau i Paona.*

CAUS.finish HITHER INTENS POSS.3.SG wood PREP paona

His stick runs to the end at Paona.

57. *Naa te akau i tokorau e hako e tere naa poroo Kateariki e kite na kanamata.*

THEN SP.SG reef PREP tokorau IPFV straight IPFV move.fast MED because kateariki IPFV see SP.PL eye

And then the reef on the north-east side goes straight it is because Kateariki sees with his eyes.

58. *Naa te akau i Haupuku e pikopiko naa poroo Haraparapa e ppuni na kanamata.*

THEN SP.SG reef PREP haupuku IPFV FREQ. crooked MED because kateariki IPFV blind SP.PL eye

And then the reef on the north-east side is crooked it is because Haraparapa's eyes are blind.

59. *Naa ku oo ai roo ro nnoho.*

THEN PRF PL.go PVP INTENS CONJ PL.sit And then they go to settle.

60. *Ruai tama naa ku hhaa te akau ku oo roo ro nnoho ka oti ku ttuku ai roo na mataapaa naa.*

pair person MED PRF PL.split.open SP.SG reef PRF PL.go INTENS CONJ PL.sit CONJ PRF put PVP INTENS SP.PL clan MED

These two men open the reef and go to settle and after this they put clans.

61. *Naa ku hhaa ai loo na mataapaa.*

THEN PRF PL.split.open PVP INTENS SP.PL clan And then they divide the clans.

62. *Naa ku mahhike no hhaa te huhi no riaki na kipakipa ka hhuro ai naa.*

THEN PRF PL.arise CONJ PL.split.open SP.SG swamp CONJ throw SP.PL digging.stick CONJ PL.run PVP MED

And then they get up to open swamp taro gardens

and throw *kipakipa* (sticks for digging swamp taro) and walk there.

63. *Ttiri te kipakipa o Hauma ka hanatu ro hhati i hee naa na keru te kuana naa ku kai Hauma.*

cast SP.SG digging.stick POSS hauma CONJ come. AWAY CONJ FREQ.break PREP where MED SP.PL taro.garden SP.SG place MED PRF eat hauma

They throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Hauma and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of the clan Hauma eat.

64. *Ttiri te kipakipa o T-Perurani ka hanatu ro hhati i hee naa na keru te kuana naa ku kai T-Perurani.*

cast SP.SG digging.stick POSS te-perurani CONJ come.AWAY CONJ break PREP where MED SP.PL taro.garden SP.SG place MED PRF eat te-perurani

They throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Te Perurani and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of the clan Te Perurani eat.

65. *Naa ttiri te kipakipa o Avela ka hanatu no hhati mai i hee naa na keru naa ku kai Avela.*

THEN cast SP.SG digging.stick POSS avela CONJ come.AWAY CONJ break HITHER PREP where MED SP.PL taro.garden SP.SG place MED PRF eat AVELA

And then they throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Avela and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of the clan Avela eat.

66. *Naa ttiri te kipakipa o Tahaa ka tere tere raa roo hakaoti ai roo i te muri roo Tahaa naa.*

THEN cast SP.SG digging.stick POSS tahaa CONJ move.fast move.fast DIS INTENS CAUS.finish PVP INTENS PREP behind INTENS tahaa MED

And then they throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Tahaa and it goes, goes and ends up at the very end of this Tahaa.

67. *Ku oti ai roo.*

PRF finish PVD INTENS It is totally completed.

68. *Ku oti ai loo peenei na hua e rrono ai maatou.*

PRF finish PVD INTENS like.this SP.PL say IPFV

PL.hear 1.PL

It is totally completed as the words we have heard.

### Notes on the Structure of the Text

**Line 1:** The verb *hua* means “to say (something to somebody)”; when combined with the directional particles *mai* “toward speaker”, *atu* “away from speaker, toward the person spoken to”, and *ake* “upward, away from the speech act participants” it can mean “to ask” and “to reply.” A homophonic noun *hua* is “word,” its plural form, literally, “words,” means “language (Nukeria, Nukumanu, etc.)” and from this noun the verb derives another meaning: “to speak (a language).” In this particular context, *na hua* “words” is a technical term which means “true story, legend, myth.” This term is contrasted with *te kkai* “fable, tale told for entertainment”. Again, the verb *hua* means “to tell a true story, legend, myth, yarn.” Two homophonic words mean “egg (of bird), roe (of fish), fruit (of tree), etc.” and “bared, naked” though they are not related to *hua* “to say (something to somebody).”

2. One can see an example of the *figura etimologica* which is a rhetorical device when two words with the same derivation, e.g., the accusative with its cognate verb, are used adjacently, literally, “I am going to tell a telling/to say a saying.”

3. The word *henua* means “island, islet” and “a group of islands” if it is plural; the derived meanings are “people of place, people of a group of islands, nation, land” and “earth, world” which is quite expectable for a language spoken by people who live on a small atoll in utter isolation.

4. The verb *mahaē* means “to crack (as a canoe), be torn open (as an old piece of cloth), burst (as a bubble).” Thus, the earth is “bursting up (as a gas bubble on the surface of water).”

5. As in many other Polynesian languages the spatial term *mua* “in front of, before” is also used to refer to remote past. So, the world is seen as fixed and time is conceived moving from the future to the past, the past is also represented as “something known” and, therefore, “visible” (Kieviet 2016: 121).

6. In Nukeria, a possessive relation is indicated by the simple apposition of two noun phrases. One can see a sequence of five noun phrases: “the words/of the beginning/of the opening/of the land/in days of before.” It is a rhetorical device we can term “multiple genitive” or “multiple possessive.” The location expressed by the preposition *i* “at, in, etc.” in the last noun phrase is also a kind of possession semantically.

**Line 2:** Surprisingly enough, in the Nukeria language words are conceived lying as flat objects, leaves, blankets, etc.

**Line 3:** 1. The word *puna* means “spring (in the sea), bubble,” “to bubble,” and “places of fine white sand where *upo* worms live and sea grass grows.” My consultants insisted that only the last translation is acceptable here. Still, the meaning “bubble” nicely fits with this context and, probably, is at play, because the heap of sand “bursts” as a “bubble.” So I chose the gloss “bubble.”

2. Two aspect markers *e* “imperfective” and *ku* “perfect” are mostly used throughout this narrative. The “perfective” form *ni* is not attested. It is similar to the historical present of European languages, also called dramatic present, which is the employment of the present tense when narrating past events. This strategy makes the narrated events closer to the listener and the story more vivid and dramatic. This alternation of present and perfect forms sounds awkward in English, so I use the present as default translation form for this text. Later the narrator makes use of another strategy employing the “zero” aspect-mood marker. Lack of any temporal, and aspectual characteristics transfers narration to another world where narrated events exist on their own.

3. I recorded but did not manage to transcribe another version of the same story. It mentions a stingray, which in primordial times swims in the ocean and from movements of its fins a heap forms which starts to grow and spreads (Fig. 4).

**Lines 3–6:** Note an example of the appositional expansion which is a rhetorical device of amplification. This can be described in the following way (Thornton 1992: 5): An initial statement is elaborated in more or less detail and then concluded by returning to the initial statement, often in form of a literal repetition, on other occasions, by a movement forward to the event that follows the initial statement, “a heap burst, etc./they come and see/the heap/it bursts, etc.” This rhetorical device abounds in the first half of the text.

**Line 4:** 1. The verb *hanake* “to come up” includes the directional *ake* “upwards”, cf. *hano* “to go” and *hanatu* “to go (towards the person spoken to)”.

2. The word *hanake* “to come up” is repeated without any tense/aspect/mood marker. It is a narrative device, which is also attested in other Polynesian traditions (see, for example, Tuvalu in Besnier 2000: 487). The number of times the verb is repeated is somehow iconic of the degree of habituality that is interrupted by, or leads to, a new turn of events. Verbs of movement are in particular prone to be marked by repetition.

3. One can see an example of the antimetabole, which is a rhetorical device in which words are re-



**Fig. 4:** A place on the main island called Mouna “mountain, hill” with a small elevation believed to appear first from the ocean during creation. The stone platform is a remain of the principal ceremonial house Te Hare Te Ariki O Muri, literally, “House of the First Man (born from *aitu* spirits)” shared by the four clans (photo of the author).

peated in inverse order: “it grows, it comes up, it comes up, it grows.”

**Line 5:** 1. The discourse marker *naa* “and then” often appears at the beginning of new sentences in narratives but not in ordinary speech. It is related to the postpositive demonstrative *naa* “there (near you)”, more precisely, the independent form of this demonstrative pronoun. Sometimes the last one is found in other contexts, even in combination with the agentive marker *a*. This discourse marker represents the space of narration in a certain way showing a sequence of events, for it appears in almost every sentence. My feeling is that this marker also functions as a reportative particle meaning something like “I did not see it myself but I was told and I tell you exactly as it was told to me.” However, I did not discuss this possibility with my consultants. On the other hand, the meaning “there (near you)” is used to incorporate the listener into the story. The postposed/dependent demonstrative *naa* found in “the heap of sand (there near you)” that can be paraphrased as “your heap of sand/this heap of yours” reflects the same rhetoric strategy (see also lines 8, 10, 12, etc.) as well as the directional particle *atu* “away from speaker, toward the person spoken to” (see also lines 27, 28, 29, etc.).

2. It is difficult to say what the names of the big spirits mean. Perhaps, Kateariki is related to *katea* “side of canoe opposite to outrigger” and *riki* “small”. On the other hand, it might be somehow related to the proto-Polynesian *\*ʔariki* “chief” (Greenhill and Clark 2011). Haraparapa is probably related to

*rapa* “to speak foreign languages (English, Pidgin)” and *ha-* is a causative/simulative prefix here: “One who speaks foreign languages/one who speaks indistinctly.”

**Lines 6–7:** A new episode is marked with the “perfect” *ku*. This use of the perfect form is also found in other texts and sometimes it marks the end of an episode only. See also lines 18–24.

**Line 7:** 1. The postverbal particle *roo* roughly glossed as “intensifier” indicates that the clause expresses something new and unexpected, related to proto-Polynesian *\*loa* “intensity, immediacy (postposed manner particle)” and perhaps *\*iloa* “to know”. 2. When the verb *kite* takes an object marked with the preposition as the verbs of perception do, it means “to see”; when the object is zero-marked, it means “to find.”

**Line 8:** 1. The verb *kai* means “to eat,” the related noun, always in plural, has a lexicalized meaning: “food, in particular, tubers (sweet potato, taro, yams, etc.).”

**Line 9:** They come *atu* “away from speaker, toward the person spoken to” and she sits *mai* “toward speaker”, since “but” is added to the translation.

**Line 10:** The verb *noho* “to sit” also means “to live, dwell, remain (in a place).” I use the gloss “sit” for all these contexts.

**Line 13:** The postverbal particle *ai* is different in meaning and use though related to the proto-Polynesian *\*ai* “postposed verbal particle, oblique case anaphor”. Sometimes a suggested translation was “about this (to think, to argue),” see also lines 67, 68.

**Line 22:** One can see an example of rhetorical enumeration in the list of edible plants. List of birds and fishes below show the same structure (see lines 25 and 26).

**Line 24:** 1. There are three main biological taxons in the language: *ika* “creatures that dwell in sea water and possess fins (fishes, whales and turtles)”, *manu* “creatures that possess legs, commonly, also wings, and are covered with fur (birds, insects, rats, dogs, crabs, etc.)”, and *kata* “creatures that possess neither wings nor fins (eels, worms, land snakes)”. Thus, Roatuu gives birth to every living creature but not humans.

2. The common noun *tai* means “sea water,” “shore, shallow sea near shore,” and “tide,” the homophonic locative noun means “lagoonward (moving from inside of the island), front of the island (moving from the open sea).”

3. The noun *mee* means “something (any object, thing or animal)” and “somebody (any human being)”; the homophonic verb means “to be, exist,” “to have, possess,” and “to do.”

**Line 25:** The word *tama* means “person, human being,” “child,” and “young man.” Note that in this text “big spirits,” *aitu*, are also referred to by this word.

**Line 26:** The prominence marker *ko* is different in distribution and function from the related *\*ko* “specifier particle (preposed)” attested in the majority of Polynesian languages (Greenhill and Clark 2011; but see also Moyle 2011: 160). It is attested before personal pronouns, the question word *ai* “who” and seldom before proper names.

**Line 27:** 1. My consultant insisted that the correct form is not *hanatu* “to come away (sg.)” but *au atu* “to come away (pl.)”. I think that both forms are correct, it depends on how one conceives “the canoe of elders” in this context – either as a plural entity (elders who sit in a canoe) or as a single entity (a group of elders).

2. Suddenly the narrator changes her style. Firstly, she uses the “zero” aspect-mood marker. Secondly, events are repeated to background and introduce the following ones, for example, “as she sits, a canoe comes/as the canoe comes, they fish/as they fish,

they distribute.” This rhetorical device is similar to the figure of speech known as anadiplosis, which is the repetition of the last word of a preceding clause. It is typical in Nukeria traditional narratives and extremely redundant to a European ear. Thirdly, enumerations and appositional expansion disappear giving place to another type of repetitions which resemble of cumulative tales. The same episode is repeated with slight variations two, three, four times and only the main character is replaced with another one, which still belongs to the same group of characters, e.g., one of two big spirits (cf. lines 50 and 51, 57 and 58) and one of four clans (cf. lines 28–33, 34–37, and 63–66). It is worthy to note that in a cumulative tale an action repeats and builds up in some way as the tale progresses. In this text, an action is split in a set of identical ones, according to the numbers of the actors involved. The observed change in narration situates two halves of the text in different periods of time and creates a feeling that the two have little to do with one another.

**Line 34:** Not rowing with a paddle, but punting with a pole is the common Nukeria way for moving in a boat traditionally.

**Line 48:** One may see that the verb *mahike* “to get up” is lexicalized as “to start (to do something)” here; see also line 62.

**Line 49:** Note the degeminated forms *tutuu* “to stand up (pl.)” and *hahaa* “to split open (pl.)” for ordinary *tuu* and *hhaa* (cf. line 48). Sometimes such expanded forms are found in traditional narratives and songs.

**Line 52:** Note that *huro* is the suppletive plural form for the verb *tere* “to move fast (about humans)”.

**Lines 57–58:** Tokorau is the name of the original village of the Tahaa clan on the main island, it is also “north-east quarter and wind from that quarter.” Haupuku is the name of the village of the Hau-ma clan.

**Line 50:** According to my consultants, Haraparapa and Kateariki actually stand quietly, but their magical sticks move, so Haraparapa and Kateariki move too, better to say, they run together with their sticks in a magical way. The idea of running has peculiar connotations in the culture. Islanders “never” run, because if you run, then you train yourself planning to kill somebody. Warriors and heroes used to do this in olden days. Again one speaks about running in a “magical” way.

**Line 52:** Note that in “their sticks” the article *na* is omitted. I have no explanation for this; it may be because the sentence is cut off mid-utterance and restarted.

**Line 58:** Haraparapa is Kateariki’s slave. In older days, a slave was supposed to look down in the presence of his master and because of this Haraparapa could not look into the distance and see properly where to run.

**Lines 62–63:** The word *keri* refers to “a (particular) garden of swamp taro” which belongs to a particular family or a particular clan; the word *huhi* to “a swampy area inland where taro is cultivated.”

**Lines 63–66:** 1. The possession marker *o* is rare in the language, in fact, its appearance can be triggered by the old text. Its use is optional and according to my consultant it is restricted to the contexts where the possessor is a group of humans, so it is plural and human.

2. Note the repetition pattern when practically only the name of the clan changes. It is difficult to explain why the directional particle *mai* appears in line 65, possibly because the narrator is from the Avela clan.

**Line 67:** It is a typical closing sentence of Nuke-ria traditional narrative. It is also found at the end of tales.

**Line 62:** Note a relative clause introduced with the imperfective *e*. The post-verbal particle *ai* is not obligatory in relative clauses; see lines 25, 63–66.

### Translation into English

I am going to tell the words of the beginning of the opening of the land in days of before. The words go as follows.

A heap of white sand bursts. The heap of white sand grows and comes up, comes up to become an island. And then Kateariki and Haraparapa come in a canoe and see this heap of white sand. It bursts and comes up to spread, it becomes an island. And then they say that they have found an island for themselves. They must go and bring some plants for them in order to plant them on this island. And then they go to get the plants and bring them.

Roatuu climbs on the heap of white sand and sits on this island. And then Haraparapa and Kateariki come back with the plants. Roatuu sits on the heap of white sand on this island. And then they started to argue. And then Haraparapa and Kateariki say her that it is their islands. They were first to come and find them. And then they went to bring the food to plant on their land. Roatuu says them that it is not, it is her islands, it was she who came up

with the heap of sand and it was she who moved up with this heap of sand. And then they finish to argue. And then Kateariki and Haraparapa turn back with the plants. They plant only coconut palms and swamp taro on the island. And then they turn back. As for the plants, sweet potato, taro, everything, every plant, they turn back and plant them on other islands. And then they turn back.

Roatuu remains on this island and gives birth. She remains and gives birth, but she does not give birth to humans but to snakes, all the fishes of the sea, sea cucumbers, birds, all the creatures on this island which is burst up. And then, it is Roatuu who has given birth, has given birth to things, all the thing of the sea, the things of above, the birds of above.

And then when Roatuu sits on this earth, a canoe of elders comes. And then as the canoe of elders comes, they fish on their way fish. As they fish on the way fish and come, they distribute those fishes, distribute them between the people of this canoe team. As they distribute and follow the process of distribution, it is over. The last person has no share. And then this species of fish is taboo for him. He has it for his taboo. They start to come, they punt here, they punt, they fish punting here, they come. As they come, come, they distribute fishes, distribute them, it is over. Another person has no share. And then this species of fish is taboo for him.

And then they come, come there and get on this island in order to live on it. They break their canoe into pieces. And then they break their canoe into pieces. And then they threw away things and the things drift. And then the things go and land ashore. They give names to those places like, for example, “The Tidal Flat of the *Nnia* Tree,” “The Shore of the Coconut Shell Container *Tahaa*,” “The Shore of the Bundle of Wood,” “The Shore of the Paddle.” These things are from the canoe.

And then they settled in that place. Haraparapa and Kateariki get up and stand up with their sticks and throw them to break the reef open. Kateariki starts to move on the northeast side, Haraparapa starts to move on the south side. And then their sticks start to move. And then they start to move there. Kateariki’s stick breaks at the end of the lagoon and stands there. And then Haraparapa starts to move. His stick runs to the end at Paona. And then the reef on the northeast side goes straight, it is because Kateariki sees with his eyes. And then the reef on the northeast side is crooked, it is because Haraparapa’s eyes are blind. And then they go to settle.

These two men open the reef and go to settle and after this they establish clans. And then they divide the clans. And then they get up to open swamp taro gardens and throw *kipakipa* sticks (for digging swamp taro) and walk there. They throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Hauma and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of the clan Hauma eat. They throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Te Perurani and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of the clan Te Perurani eat. And then they throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Avela and it goes and breaks where there are gardens of this place from which the people of

the clan Avela eat. And then they throw the *kipakipa* of the clan Tahaa and it goes, goes and ends up at the very end of this Tahaa.

It is totally completed. It is totally completed as the words we have heard.

### Parallel Versions of the Text

A comparison of different versions is crucial for textual analysis in particular in the case of oral traditions. During my fieldwork, I managed to find another version of the same text in English. A woman has told it to her granddaughter who wrote it down and presented it at primary school. Unfortunately, the old lady had passed away by the time of my arrival. The text bears the title “The Story of How the Islands of Nuguria Formed.” In the following retelling I preserve the original orthography which does not distinguish long vowels and double consonants, but I add italics to the words from Tok Pisin and Nukeria, including proper names, and give notes in square brackets.

#### Version No. 2

Long long ago, *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* were drifting on a canoe. Suddenly, they noticed the current cycling with sand. They waited to see what it would likely be. After some hours it formed into a thick sandy land. The pair decided to go back to an island to look for some plants to plant. They turn their canoe and paddle to an island by *Auri*.

*Auri* lived by himself on an island which grow different types of food. But the only thing is that he is running out of water. *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* came to him while he was busy digging the ground for water. *Kateariki* was holding a rod. He threw down his rod in the hole and there appeared water. *Auri* bent down and drank until he was satisfied. So he asked them, “Why are you here?” Then the two of them said, “We are here to get some crops to plant on our island.” So *Auri* went and brought *kaukau* [Tok Pisin, “sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*)”] taro, *tapiok* [Tok Pisin, “cassava (*Manihot esculenta*)”], pineapple and all sorts of food that grew on his land. After they’ve taken all the crops, they paddle back to the thick sandy land.

From their investigation of the canoe, they saw someone sitting on the thick sandy land without plants and other things. They came up arguing with that woman called *Roatu*.

– This is our land, we just saw this land, – cried *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki*.

– No, this is my land. I formed up with this land, – cried *Roatu*.

So the two got nothing more to say, so they told her:

“Because you said you formed up with this land and this is your land, make human beings and plants to live and grow on this land”. So *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* threw all the plants they brought.

*Roatu* lay down to give birth to the human being. Instead of human being she gave birth to all types of sea creatures. She tried to make plants. Instead of plants she made all the stones that were in the sea. After doing what she could do, the island is still left with no people and plants. She got up and said: “This is all I can do, you two can do what you think so”.

So *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* made customs [here “spells,” cf. Tok Pisin, *kastom* “traditional ways and beliefs”] for a canoe to come. After some hours a canoe arrived and it is called *Te Vaka Te Haimatua* [Nukeria, literally, “The Canoe of the Elders”]. On the canoe were *Te Atuai* and *Porerei*, a newly married couple with some spirits. They brought with them a *kanokano* [Nukeria, “swamp taro (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*)”] and a coconut to replace the crops that *Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* have thrown.

*Haraparapa* and *Kateariki* welcome the couple and provide a house for them. The house was known as *Hare Mapila*. They planted the plants that the canoe had brought. From there on, *Porerei* and *Te Atuai* started the multiplication of people on this island.

That is how the islands were formed, how fish and stones were in the sea and how swampy taro and coconut grew in *Nuguria*.

Another version was published in German by Parkinson (1897: 105f.; see also 1907: 519). It is a detailed summary and probably a compilation of different versions of the same story. It reflects Parkinson’s objective to derive historical evidence for identifying Nukuoro and Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, as sources of original settlement for Nukuria. This version was recorded more than one hundred years earlier than the other two. It is shorter but still includes some details which are absent in the already presented texts. I give its translation into English and also preserve the original spellings of proper names.

#### Version No. 3

In the beginning, two gods and three women came by ocean in a canoe. They came from *Nukuoro* and *Tarawa*. The gods’ names were *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa*; the women were *Lopi*, *Tefuai*, and *Tupulelei*. As the canoe arrived at the reef, *Katiariki* struck the water with his stick and a bubble came up from the deep of the sea. As the bubble came up to the surface, it burst and a third god *Loatü* appeared. At this very moment a sandbank arose under *Loatü*’s feet. *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa* were big friends and they accepted *Loatü* as a friend too. *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa* noticed that the island was barren and uncultivated, so they decided to set off in order to find

foodstuffs, while *Loatū* was told to keep guard over the island. When they were away, another god called *Tepū* appeared. He arrived from *Nukumanu*, drove away *Loatū* and took possession of the island. Meanwhile *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa* came back and found that *Tepū* had taken the island. In their fury they threw the brought foodstuffs away, this is why yams and some seashells are found on the north-western atoll only, but not on the main island of *Nuguria*. *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa* called expelled *Loatū* back and all settled down on *Nuguria*. *Tepū* inhabited the small hill *Maiūga*, and from that time on *Maiūga* is a sacred ground consecrated to gods and reserved for their worship. *Katiariki* and *Haraparapa* settled down on the right and *Loatū* on the left from *Maiūga*. The four are worshiped as big spirits today.

A summary of another version was published by Thilenius (1898: 315; see also 1902: 34). He recognized that his version was different from the version recorded by Parkinson. He also tried to identify sources of original settlement for Nukuria. It is easy to see that the extracts published by Thilenius are heavily edited.

#### Version No. 4

There are seven canoes that come from different islands in the following order, each one with its passengers:

1st canoe: *Katiariki*, his servant *Haraparapa* and *Haurua* from Nukuoro;

2nd canoe: *Loatu* from Sikaiana;

3rd canoe: *Tepu*, *Apua* and *Akati* from Tarawa;

4th canoe: *Nuguria* and *Mahuike* from Sikaiana;

5th canoe: *Arapī*, *Tupulei* (female) and *Tefuai* (female) from Tarawa;

6th canoe: *Ranatau* and *Lopi* (female) from Nukufetau;

7th canoe: *Hooti*, *Aitu*, *Arei* and *Atipu* from Nukumanu.

At the days of *Tepu*, *Pakewa* arrives in the form of fish by sea.

From these settlers the most important for the islands are *Katiariki*, who brings usable and edible plants, *Tupulei*, who gives birth to edible fishes, marine animals and then humans to *Tepu*, and finally *Tepu* himself who brings tools, utensils, ornaments and teaches how to use them. He sends a canoe back to bring in coconut shell containers forgotten rats and mosquitoes.

*Katiariki* and *Tepu* divide between them the *Nuguria* island, and other settlers move to other islands of the same atoll. After nine generations *Katiariki*'s lineage dies out and nowadays the chiefs on *Nuguria* are all *Tepu*'s descendants.

Additional information on the characters of this story is found in Thilenius' report (1902: 37, 67 f.). Sometimes it is not clear whether these data belong to the same text, but sometimes evidently it derives from other stories. *Tepu* brings the art of plaiting

mats. *Tepu* becomes the supreme deity, his body is completely covered with tattoo. His house is in heaven. He kills dolphin and forbids to eat its meat. By his order cuckoo exterminates big snakes on *Nuguria* which have been born by *Loatu*, and in reward cuckoos are claimed taboo. *Tepu* makes good and bad weather, he controls storm, thunder and lightning, day and night. He creates stars, meanwhile *Katiariki* creates the Sun and the Moon. *Tepu* is the protector of thieves and in order to protect one of them he deprives kingfisher and plover of the ability to speak.

#### Motif Analysis

In order to be able to tell a story one needs elementary units of narration which are combined to make a coherent text. Such units, known as motifs, are not invented in the process of narration but borrowed by the narrator from the stories and statements either s/he heard or read, that is to say, such units are subject to replication. For practical reasons motifs can be defined as combinations of features in folklore texts (images, episodes, sequences of episodes) found in different texts, *par excellence*, in texts that belong to different traditions (Berezkin 2015). A geographical distribution of the motifs found in the analyzed texts and their historical interpretation is beyond the scope of this article, nor is the plot as a sequence of interrelated events inside a story of my concern. I am interested in identifying units of narration that form part of the text and can be defined as ideas, meanings, or statements of any kind. Such meanings are always of a predicative nature, i.e., "X is/was like Y," "X is/was," "X does/did Z," "Z is/was done to X." Below I give identified motifs with nicknames and definitions and supply them with index numbers. The more specific definition of the motif is better for the comparison of texts and traditions and for identifying meanings of narration, so specific details are of my primary concern. It is possible to identify meanings of narration without referring to other texts and folkloric traditions, though it is easier to analyze texts in this way. The following reference works on Oceanic mythology are of great help in such a task: Dixon (1916), Beckwith (1970), Lessa (1961), see also Berezkin (n. d.). The indices in Kirtley (1980) and Thompson (1955–1958) are of less help, because descriptions of motifs are intentionally deprived of details there. I try to keep established nicknames and definitions of the discussed motifs if found in the folkloristic indices and catalogues (Berezkin n. d.; Thompson 1955–1958).

1. **Primeval Ocean/Water:** In the beginning of times there was only ocean.
2. **Incomplete Creation/Necessity of Humans:** There are no humans, they are to be created (in order to worship supernatural beings).
3. **Incomplete Creation/Necessity of Food Plants:** There are no food plants, they are to be brought (for humans to subsist on).
4. **Incomplete Creation/Necessity of Reefs and Passages in Reefs:** There are no passages in reefs and no reefs (which are necessary for humans).
5. **Growth of Earth:** Earth grows out of a handful of solid substance.
- 5.1. **Growth of Earth out of an Object on the Bottom of the Ocean:** Earth grows out of a handful of solid substance on the bottom of the ocean (this motif is a particular version of motif 5, so two digits in the number are assigned to it).
6. **Builder of an Island:** A supernatural/human being builds an island.
- 6.1. **Person Grows with an Island:** A supernatural being builds an island and grows up with it.
7. **Earth is Discovered by Supernatural Beings:** Supernatural beings discover an island and want to take possession of it (in order to be worshiped).
8. **Antagonistic Creators:** Kateariki and his slave Haraparapa, on the one hand, and Roatuu, on the other, compete in creation of humans. The first two are male and responsible for the creation of humans, social institutes, gardens of swamp taro, passages in the reef, which are necessary for humans; the last one is female and responsible for the creation of wildlife. The first two make use of magic spells, the last one procreates.
9. **Humans and Culture are Contrasted with Nature:** Different beings are responsible for the creation of humans and culture, on the one hand, and wildlife, on the other.
10. **Failed Creation:** A creator tries to create humans but gives birth to birds, fishes, and snakes, i.e., all living creatures except human beings.
11. **Quest for Food Plants:** Food plants are brought from somewhere else.
- 11.1. **Quest for Food Plants Which Are Kept by Their Owner:** Food plants are received from their owner in exchange for fresh water.
12. **Paradise Lost:** Food plants are brought but thrown away and lost because supernatural beings get angry.
13. **Humans Created by Magic Spells:** A canoe of the elders who are founders of the clans is created by magic spells in the ocean and arrives to the island.
14. **Clans Receive Their Taboos:** Every clan receives its taboo for eating a certain kind of fish on the way to the island accidentally.
15. **Places Receive Their Names:** Places receive their names from landed pieces of the canoe that was broken.
16. **Clans Receive Their Taro Gardens:** Supernatural beings create taro gardens for every clan.
17. **Reefs Are Created by Magic Spells:** Reefs and passages in reef are created by magic spells, some characteristics of the atoll are explained by this event – Kateariki’s magic stick breaks at Paona while his slave Haraparapa cannot see properly in the presence of his master.
18. **Fight between Supernatural Beings:** Supernatural beings fight and compete because they want to take possession of the island (in order to be worshiped).
19. **Tricked Owner of the Island:** During owners’ absence another supernatural being takes possession of the island.
20. **Order of Things Is Established:** Current order of things is established.
- 20.1. **Order of Gods Is Established:** Hierarchy of spiritual beings and order of their worship is established according to the events which took place in primordial times, in particular their role in creation.

The identification of motifs permits us to retrieve additional information from the text, discern meanings that are not stated implicitly, see the structure of the text better, and identify its general message. The last one is “gods compete for the possession of the island which they need to be worshiped and the order of their worship is established according to the events.” The new picture which emerges after the motif analysis is due to several reasons. Firstly, some of the motifs are attested in one of the versions only; see motifs 4, 9, 10, 12.1, 13–17, 20.1. Secondly, some of the motifs are not explicitly stated and/or not strictly defined in the texts, but can be retrieved from the context. I use brackets to indicate such cases; see motifs 2–4, 7, 18. Thirdly, some ideas are scattered in the text, as, for example, there is no explicit statement about the gods who compete and one can see two kinds of creators contrasted in every possible respect only if s/he compares different motifs, see motifs 8 and 9.

The three fixations differ significantly in the number of motifs included, which is typical of oral traditions. However, the three are versions of the same text, they follow the same plot and show identical opening and closing scenes. Some of the identified motifs are widespread in world’s mythology and folklore, see, e.g., “Primeval Ocean,” “Incomplete Creation,” “Necessity of Humans for Gods to Be Worshiped,” “Growth of Earth,” “Antagonistic Creators,” “Paradise Lost,” “Order of Things

Is Established.” It has been noted that “Growth of Earth” is absent in Eastern Polynesia but widely attested in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Western Polynesia where it is associated with the motif “Earth from Object Thrown on Primeval Water” (Lessa 1961: 275–289). Interestingly enough, the particular version of this motif, “Growth of Earth out of an Object on the Bottom of the Ocean”, is restricted to the atoll societies and, except for one case, to the Polynesian Outliers. Thus, see Rennell: from a shell (Elbert and Monberg 1965: 86), Pukapuka: from a white coral head (Macgregor 1935: 8) or a rock (Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1938: 375 f.), Sikaiana: from an unspecified (Donner 1992: 323). The motif “Builder of an Island” is also attested in Western Polynesia where a “Supernatural Being Builds an Island With Sand”: see Rotuma (Churchward 1937: 112–114; Gardiner 1898: 503 f.), Funafuti, Niutao, and Nanumea of Ellice Islands (Turner 1884: 281, 287; Chambers, Chambers, and Munro 1978), for Polynesian Outliers see Luangiua (Keopo 1981: 2), Nukumanu (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 380–384), Sikaiana (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 492 f.), Nukuo-ro (Eilers 1934: 183, 298, 308), Kapingamarangi (Elbert 1948: 121 f.). The particular version “Person Grows with an Island” is also attested on Luangiua (Parkinson 1907: 520; Hogbin 1930–31: 29–32, 1940: 211) and Pukapuka (Macgregor 1935: 8). The version “Animal Builds an Island” is restricted to Melanesian Outliers, see Luangiua for an octopus (Hogbin 1940: 210), Nukumanu for a kind of bird (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 385), and Pelau for a dove (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 312). Two different motifs for the origin of Earth “Growth of Earth out of an Object on the Bottom of the Ocean” and “Person Builds an Island and Grows with It” coexist in one text. This kind of controversies is common in traditional narratives all over the world.

Names of at least two personages Roatuu and Tepu are found in other Outlier traditions and, thus, can be reconstructed for a proto-level: for Roatuu see Takuu (making an island, male, one of the founders; Moir 1989: 71 f.), Nukumanu (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 381), Pelau (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 384), and Luangiua (Thilenius 1898: 315; Moir 1989: 73); and for Tepu see Takuu (Moir 1989: 69), Pelau (Sarfert und Damm 1931: 384).

## Final Considerations

The Nukeria creation story is a relatively short text about six minutes of recordings. It is a text of an exceptional beauty replete with a number of rhetorical devices and exploiting the different possible mean-

ings of a word, which can be revealed by a thorough philological analysis. When the text is situated in ecological and cultural contexts, its beauty goes far beyond rhetoric and narration skills, because this short text describes the origin and gives explanations for everything that would be known on the atoll in the precontact period: earth and form of islands, reef and passages in reef, cultural plants and different life forms, humans and social institutions, gods and the order of their worship. This creation story bears a close resemblance to cosmogonic myths recorded on other Polynesian Outliers, but at the same time different versions of the Nukeria text are much closer to one another than to origin texts of other Polynesian traditions. Remarkably, the text published by Parkinson and two versions recorded more than one hundred years later represent the same narrative, although they differ significantly in length and number of motifs.

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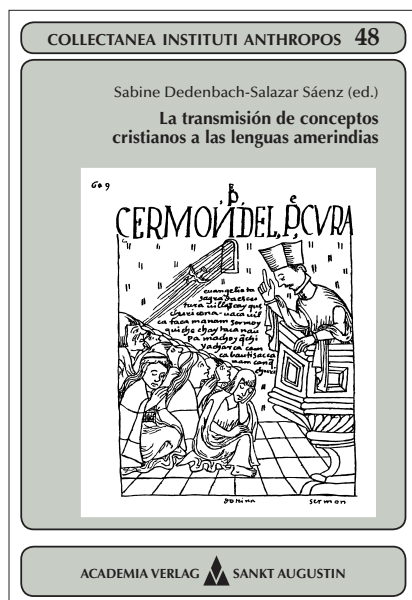
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## Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 48



**Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz (ed.)**

La transmisión de conceptos cristianos a las lenguas amerindias:  
Estudios sobre textos y contextos de la época colonial

Las contribuciones a este libro se centran en las estrategias y los métodos lingüísticos interculturales usados por los misioneros coloniales de la América Latina. Aparte de una aparente confusión de los indígenas, en los artículos se observa la integración del cristianismo en las culturas nativas, en la mayoría de los casos en la forma de una 'nativización' de la religión europea.

Con contribuciones de  
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