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**LEGENDARY PLACE NAMES:
COASTAL MICRO-TOPONOMASTICS IN ALOR
THROUGH THE LENS OF AN ABUI MYTH**

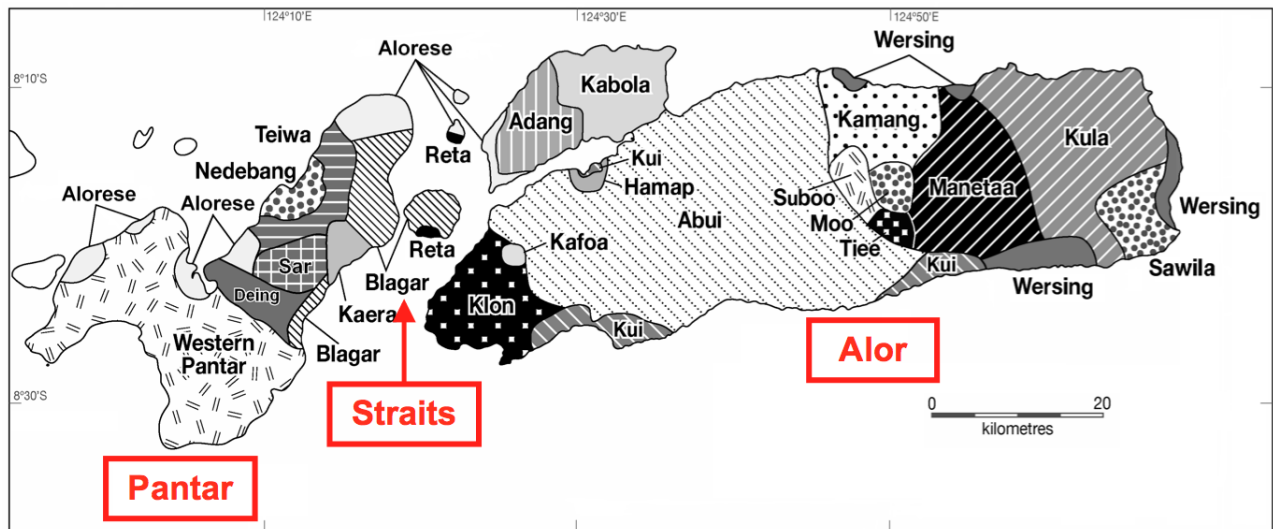
Abstract: This paper reconstructs a number of Abui (Papuan) place names and micro-toponyms from the coastal area of the Alor Island (South-East Indonesia) through the analysis of a legend about two gods of the Abui traditional religion and the replacement of the first with the second one. The myth appears as diachronically ‘multi-layered’, from ancestral times to the ‘arrival’ of the Christianity in the Alor Island and the consequent identification of the ‘bad’ (or ‘weaker’) god as a demon and, then, as the devil. The story allows the etymological explanation of the meaning of around eight place names (toponyms and micro-toponyms), drawing a map of that ‘mythological’ space and landscape that is still real, attested, existing, known, and recognized by Abui native-speakers. The etymological and historical / diachronic analysis of place names, in this case, is fruitful not only in the reconstruction of their origins and in map-tracking, but it also involves an anthropological study about cultural aspects of the oral tradition of Abui religion. The story here described is considered true (not a legend) by Abui people and all the place names part of that story are ‘felt’ and assumed by Abui people according to the features they have in the legend. These place names and micro-toponyms, therefore, show to have a relevance that goes beyond the etymological reconstruction, allowing important remarks in the fields of anthropology and history of culture and a close association between diachronic toponomastics and anthropological linguistics.

Key Words: Coastal Abui Place Names; Coastal Micro-Toponomastics in Alor; *Lamòling*; Toponyms in Legends and Myths; Diachronic Toponomastics and Anthropological Linguistics

This paper presents a preliminary reconstruction of an Abui legend in which the narrative plot is linked to place names and micro-toponyms really attested in the Alor territory and still existing.

Abui is a Papuan language spoken in the central part of the Alor Island, South-East Indonesia, Timor area¹.

¹ Cf., e.g., Kratochvíl 2007: *passim*; Klamer 2014: *passim*.



Map of the distribution of the Alor-Pantar languages of the Alor archipelago, South-East Indonesia, Timor area

The legend has been recently recorded and reconstructed during a NTU Language Documentation Fieldwork developed in the Alor Island (June 01, 2015 - June 10, 2015)². The Abui villages involved in this linguistic investigation are *Takalelàng* and *Takpàla*, located in the Northern coastal area of Alor. The two Abui native-speakers who have reported to us the story are Mr Markus Lema and Mr Darius Delpada, both living in *Takalelàng*. The Abui native-speaker who has operated as an Abui-English translator is Mr Anselm Delpada, from *Takalelàng*. The two speakers' versions have been compared between themselves; the two speakers have subsequently repeated their versions in a common recording session. The two versions (both in the separate sessions and in the common session) substantially converge in the same version.

This is the story of the demon *Lamòling* and of the place names linked to the mythical events marking his separation from the (Abui) humankind.

In the *Takpàla* village (located on the top of the *Takalelàng* village's hill) there are two ritual / religious and ceremonial houses. They are decorated according to a specific Abui iconography. One is clearer, in the color, with the painted motif developed on a white / whitish background, the other one is dark, with black as a predominant chromatic nuance. The 'black house' represents, according to the speakers, the darkness due to the absence of Christianity ('the lack of the light of a right belief'), the 'true religion', the 'whitish' one is the architectural metaphor of the progress for the humankind and of the light brought by the 'new religion'.

² The Fieldwork has been led by Asst Prof. František Kratochvíl (Nanyang Technological University - NTU, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences - COHASS, School of Humanities and Social Sciences - HSS, Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies - LMS, Singapore), being part of the NTU Research Project *Toponymy and Language Shift: Aspects of Language Change in South-East Asia*, led by Assoc. Prof. Francesco P. Cavallaro (Nanyang Technological University - NTU, College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences - COHASS, School of Humanities and Social Sciences - HSS, Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies - LMS, Singapore).

The two houses are the expression of a kind of art, in the Abui culture, that could be called ‘architectural art’.

The same two houses define and ‘substantiate’ two different places (intended as ‘spatial areas’, since they are very close between themselves) and have two different names, **Kolwàt**, the dark one (*kolwàt* means ‘dark’, in Abui), and **Kanurwàt**, the white one (*kanurwàt* means ‘now’, ‘nowadays’, in Abui). The names highlight the perception, by Abui people, of the two houses as two (ideally) different places, even if they are distant just a few meters, symbolizing the development and the evolution of the Abui history (‘micro-history’). They indicate, indeed, two different stages in the Abui ‘absolute chronology’ (according to Abui people) and they represent the passage (always according to Abui people) from one specific ‘era’ of humankind to another one.

The Abui interpretation of the ‘whitish house’ meaning is *ex post*, at least partially, because the speakers affirm it already existed (as well as the ‘black house’) before the ‘arrival’ of the Christianity. This is not a ‘non-sense’ or an anachronism, because the ‘light’ symbolized by the ‘white house’ indicated, originally, the ‘liberation’ of Abui people from the ‘friendship’ of / with a demon (and, therefore, the passage to a less ‘dark’ religion and, then, to the ‘true religion’), *Lamòling*, indeed.

The two houses were (and, sometimes, are still) the ‘theatre’ of a very specific ritual. There are three stones, in front of them, positioned in vertical direction. Abui people, before the ritual, cooked rice. Then they brought the rice to the stones, in front of the two houses. The rice was placed on a table and offered, symbolically, to the three stones. People around, attending the ritual, were able to eat the rice. Eating it, according to the Abui belief, they established a connection with a good god (*Lahatàla*, in this context another god existing before the Christianity) – opposed to the demon *Lamòling* – or with the ‘only God’ (always called *Lahatàla*, but, this time, after the ‘arrival’ of Christianity, intended as the Christian God).

The offer to the stones (to the ‘god of the stones’, *Lahatàla*, or to the ‘gods of the stones’, *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla*) was mainly finalized to establish a good relationship with the ‘good god’ (or with the ‘two gods’) and to give people (especially to the ‘rice eaters’) a good destiny in life.

Speakers cannot tell about the ‘age’ of this ritual, but, according to the different anthropological parallels, it could be really ancient³.

The Abui name of the ritual is *karilik hè hàk* (shortened in *karilik*), meaning ‘offer to the big old stones’.

These are some data about the ‘plane’ and ‘exterior’ nature of the ceremony. But Abui speakers report that the original ritual was devoted to the demon *Lamòling* and not to the ‘good god’ *Lahatàla*. *Lamòling* should have been, therefore, the ‘original lord’ of the ritual, according to the same definition provided by speakers. The stones are symbolic belongings of the two Abui gods, *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla*. They are located in the **Takpàla** village, but they do not belong to the Abui people, they are ‘something extra-territorial’ coming directly from the two gods. The ‘human owners’ (who have a sort of ‘usufruct’ on them) of the stones are the Abui clans.

What is the link between the demon *Lamòling* and Abui people? First of all, the definition “demon”, for *Lamòling*, seems inappropriate. *Lamòling*, in the speakers’ story, appears originally as a

³ Cf., e.g., Kerényi 1976: 83-87, 88-93, 94-101, 183-190, 225-244; Kerényi 1995: 45-68 and 138-146; Lévy-Strauss 1979: 15-24 and 34-43; Kott 1987: 17-58 and 218-270.

god, *in toto* equivalent to *Lahatàla* and, possibly, ‘more ancient’. With the development of the Abui traditional religion, *Lamòling* has become part of the dichotomy opposing him and / to *Lahatàla*. Later, with the introduction of Christianity in Alor, he has been compared with the devil of the *Bible* and *Gospels* (even if the *Satàn* of the *Bible* is quite different from the devil of the Christian tradition, at least starting from the Middle Ages)⁴.

Lamòling was, originally, a god comparable to the *Dionysus* of the ancient Greek mythology, or with other figures of ‘freedom gods’ (and ‘tricksters’) as, for example, *Loki* in the Norse tradition and *Kokopelli* in the native-Americans’ religion⁵. A god linked to the nature and to a vision of life favoring the freedom against inhibitions and dogmas. An anthropomorphous god friend of humans and really similar and close to them, who is the *pròtos euretès* of technological discoveries offered by him to the humans, introducing them to technology. As a primordial deity, nevertheless, he is also a terrible and merciless god, instinctual punisher and trickster, being non-human and bringing all the human instincts to the extreme.

According to the legend reported by speakers, in ancient (mythical) times, *Lamòling* and Abui people lived together. *Lamòling* liked to live on the Earth among humans (he liked them) and to have relationships with them in the ‘everyday life’. *Lamòling* danced with them, shared his life with them, was helpful, taught different arts (for example the architectural technology) to Abui people, and was almost considered as a part of the ‘Abui family’.

Lamòling and Abui people had a specific (‘sacred’) place for their meetings, especially for rituals. In those moments, *Lamòling* taught them important secrets for improving their daily life and showed to be always benevolent. The name of the place is the same name of the ritual of ‘rice-offer’, ***Karilik***. This could be the evidence of the fact that the ritual is more ancient than its ‘standardized description’ by Abui people and it could be the confirmation of the hypothesis that it was originally linked with *Lamòling*. After the traumatic breaking of their relationship with *Lamòling*, the humans do not pronounce anymore his name and also the name of the place that still exists and that still survives in the name of the ritual. Abui people know the place, but they do not ‘like’ to pronounce its name.

Karilik, as a place, was (and is) a part (external) of the ***Takpàla*** village. In the time of the *Lamòling*’s expulsion, its area has been devastated by Abui people. Metaphorically and symbolically, *Lamòling* had no more a place to meet the (Abui) humans and to live on the Earth and he had to ‘escape’ in the Kabola territory, not far – in the North of the Alor Island, at the borders with the Abui Northern villages – from the Abui area. Abui people destroyed the ***Karilik*** on purpose, in order to expel *Lamòling* and to delete his memory (*damnatio memoriae*).

Why did Abui people break their relationship with *Lamòling*?

Something unclear (but, in reality, explained, even if considered ‘unclear’ as if it were a taboo) happened, according to the speakers, something showing the fierce nature of the ancient god. Abui speakers are almost unable to tell what, but it is quite clear that the reason of the cruel act of *Lamòling* was the ‘introduction’, in the Abui traditional religion, of the figure of the ‘good god’ *Lahatàla*. *Lahatàla* lived mainly in the sky and, as a metaphysical god, did not meet so frequently the humans.

⁴ Cf., e.g., Rudwind 1970: *passim*; Forsyth 1987: *passim*.

⁵ Cf., e.g., Radin 1956: *passim*; Miceli 1984: *passim*.

He was a good and generous god and got the appreciation of humans. The ‘arrival’ of *Lahatàla* was at the origins of the *Lamòling*’s jealousy.

In order to celebrate the friendship with the two gods, Abui people organized a party, with dances. Both *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla* were present, they shared the food and the goods with humans and they danced with them.

Lamòling had almost always anthropomorphous appearance, he was also able to change himself in an animal or in whatever he wanted (he was surrounded by a number of servants, demons with his features, but characterized by very weaker powers, compared with those of the god, always following him and his orders). He appears as a primordial, ancestral, atavistic, and archetypal god, very close to humans. *Lahatàla* was, instead, a ‘pure spirit’ and a transcendental god, but he was able to enter the bodies of people in order to stay with humans and to talk with them. Probably during the party – or, maybe, before, in a ‘private communication’ with Abui people ‘discovered’ by *Lamòling*, as the story seems to show in order to have a logic chronology – *Lahatàla* entered the body of a woman, called *Fikàr*, and told humans that *Lamòling* was not a good god and that the relationship they had with him would have had to be only temporary, while the new relationship with him (*Lahatàla*) would have been eternal, being *Lahatàla* the only ‘true god’. According to *Lahatàla*, the *Karilik* would have had to become the place of the ritual offers exclusively to him and for him.

As it is evident, there are many elements of this part of the story (and not only of this part) linked to the Christianity and to the introduction of the Christian belief in the Abui (Alor) area⁶.

Lamòling felt threatened by *Lahatàla* and offended by the humans, and understood that Abui people would have followed him (*Lahatàla*). Abui people were really willing to change their religion according to the *Lahatàla*’s ‘instructions’, but, well aware of their long and good relationship with *Lamòling*, decided to invite him to the party.

Lamòling and *Lahatàla*, as mentioned, participated to the party in harmony and friendship between themselves and with the humans. After the party, nevertheless, a terrible event happened. A child was kidnapped. And the one who committed that crime was *Lamòling*. The god was looking for revenge. Abui people did not know the author of this horrible act and they started to look for the child.

Lamòling, having been offended and abandoned, at least in his perception, had organized his vengeance.

The humans decided to go to look for the child at the sea. In order to descend from the *Takpàla* and *Takalelàng* hill, they had to pass through a place then called *Lamòling Bèaka* (meaning, in Abui, ‘bad *Lamòling*’, ‘*Lamòling* the evil’), located in a lower area. There *Lamòling* was used to rest and to organize some meetings with humans in order to celebrate some specific events and their friendship. They did not find the child where – in that place and at the sea – they went to look for him. Coming back, Abui people found in the *Lamòling Bèaka* the servants of *Lamòling* (as mentioned demons assuming human appearance, they also able to change themselves in animals and in whatever they wanted) who, very friendly, invited them to have dinner with them there. The ‘menu’ provided meat. But it was a terrible disguise and a horrible deception. The ‘meat’ the servants of *Lamòling* offered to the Abui people was the body of the child, dissected in many parts. And, in the center of the table, Abui people saw the head of the child.

⁶ Cf., e.g., Schröter 2011: 9-157.

The humans, surrounded by the *Lamòling*'s demons, were unable to do anything or to fight against them. They did not eat the meat and just asked to be able to carry to the village (*Takpàla*) the head and the body parts of the child to bury him. The demons gave them the head and the body parts and the Abui people came back to their place, apparently without doing anything. In the meantime, they prepared a plan.

From that moment, the place in which the *Lamòling*'s servants prepared the horrible dinner was called *Lamòling Bèaka* ('bad *Lamòling*', '*Lamòling* the evil'). The speakers are still able to identify the place, located, as told, in an intermediate point between the *Takalelàng* village and the sea, in the lower part of the *Takpàla* and *Takalelàng* hill.

Abui people prepared their revenge. A party was organized in *Takpàla* in the days after the macabre 'meal' offered by *Lamòling* through his servants. *Lamòling* was invited, with all his demons. The place, according to the speakers, is located not in the center of the village, but in an external area closer to the top of the hill, belonging, in any case, to the territory of *Takpàla*. They made them eat a lot and they danced with them for some days, restless. When *Lamòling* and the demons became tired, Abui people offered them to rest and to sleep in a house the humans had prepared for them. Falling asleep, the *Lamòling* servants, before anthropomorphous, recovered their original appearances, as monstrous animals. Also *Lamòling* was sleeping, maintaining, however, his human appearance. He was pretending, indeed, having perceived through his intuition the trap. Seeing all of them sleeping, Abui people locked the door of the house from the external with *Lamòling* and his servants inside and burned down the house. All the *Lamòling* servants were burned and killed, while *Lamòling*, being able to change himself into a pregnant woman, was able to escape, hiding himself among people in the fire's confusion.

According to a version of the story, after this event *Lamòling* escaped (voluntarily) in the Kabola territory.

The place of the Abui people's vengeance is located, as told, in the *Takpàla*'s area, but close to *Lù Melàng* (in Abui *lù* means 'river' and *melàng* means 'village'), an upper and ancient abandoned village (some families in *Takpàla* and *Takalelàng* are, originally, from *Lù Melàng*). According to a version of the story also *Karilik* is specifically located in the *Takpàla* territory close to *Lù Melàng* and when speakers indicate the place, they turn themselves in the direction of *Lù Melàng*.

Lamòling escaped and/or decided to leave Abui people. Speakers are unable to explain why he decided to go in the Kabola territory, maybe – they tell – because also Kabola people had relationships with *Lamòling* or in order to abandon the Abui villages without being too far from them (since Kabola people live in a territory neighboring the Abui area), in memory of the ancient friendship or, rather, in order to continue to threaten them. About the first explanation, it seems that also Kabola people were scared by *Lamòling* and that they never go (still) in the place in which *Lamòling* would have 'escaped' or would have been 'expelled'. This would exclude the hypothesis of a 'friendship' between *Lamòling* and Kabola people. The place in which *Lamòling* would have 'retracted' is called *Pakulàng Hièng* (meaning, non-literally, but extensively, 'bad place') and is currently uninhabited (and unanimously considered as a 'sinister place'). Both Abui people and Kabola people think that *Lamòling* still lives there. Kabola people are not considered 'bad' by Abui people, because their territory 'hosts' *Lamòling*, only the place is believed as 'bad'.

Abui people started to be devoted only to *Lahatàla* and the ‘stones ritual’ was exclusively for him.

After the ‘arrival’ of Christianity in Alor the version of the final part of the *Lamòling* story has been slightly changed. From that moment, in the Abui people’s perception, *Lamòling* has become no longer a god comparable to *Lahatàla*, but his name is translatable, into English, in ‘devil’ (as told, the devil of the medieval Christian tradition). The dichotomy *Lamòling* - *Lahatàla* is no more represented as the ‘co-existence’ of two – possibly ‘alternative’ – gods, but as the opposition between the Christian God and the devil. According to that ‘reviewed’ version, *Lamòling* would not have gone by himself and following his personal choice in *Pakulàng Hièng*, but he would have been hurled there from the sky by *Lahatàla* (in this version already the Christian God), sinking in the rock and remaining imprisoned there. It is evident the similarity of this version of the story with the Christian story of Lucifer, the most beautiful angel of the Heaven, rebel against God and sunk by Him at the bottom of the Hell.

The story, therefore, shows different diachronic layers, requiring a sort of ‘stratigraphy’ of the mythical tale. In the most ancient version *Lamòling* appears as a Dionysiac deity, able to be the closest god for the humans and, at the same time, a terrible and instinctual punisher⁷; in the most recent version, elaborated after the arrival of the Dutch missionaries in Alor and the introduction of Christianity in the Island, *Lamòling* is represented as the fierce enemy of God (*Lahatàla*), the devil. It is not a case that the generic (and general) Abui name for ‘God’ (the Christian God) is *Lahatàla* (derived from the legend and passed to indicate not a / the ‘spiritual god’, but the ‘only and true God’). This remark accomplishes the path of the ‘stratigraphy’ of the *Lamòling* story, with the identification of the ‘other God’, *Lahatàla*, with God, the ‘only and true God of the Christianity’. Before Christianity *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla* could have been comparable with the two ancient Greek deities (dichotomy) *Dionysus* and *Apollo*, with the ‘arrival’ of Christianity they became (the Christian) God and devil. It deserves a mention the fact that the name *Lahatàla* is derived from the name of the Muslim God, *Allah*. This could be due to a cultural influence of / by some Muslim communities living in the Western part of Alor, speaking also Arabic or, at least, able to read the *Koran* in Arabic.

The explanation of the name of *Lamòling* (presumably very ancient, also according to the speakers) has, as highlighted above, shown some semantic changes over time. From ‘god’ (probably the original or the most important god of Abui people) to ‘demon’ – in the unequal dichotomy with *Lahatàla*, the ‘other spiritual god’ – to ‘devil’, with the identification with the most relevant enemy of the God of Christianity and with the parallel assumption of *Lahatàla* (the ‘other spiritual god’) as the ‘only and true Christian God’.

Speakers think the *Lamòling* story is a true story and a historical event, happened a little bit before the arrival of the Dutch colonizers (and, with them, of the Christianity).

According to them, *Lamòling* is real and still exists, living in *Pakulàng Hièng*.

According to an anthropological and/or cultural analysis, it is possible to highlight in this story some mythological archetypes. For instance, the fact that *Lamòling* and his servants offered the dissected parts of the body of the child to Abui people reminds the Greek myth of Atreus and Thyestes

⁷ Cf., e.g., Otto 1933: 80-84, 85-91, 109-127, 141-150, 211-217; Kerényi 1976: 69-82 and 142-182; Détienne 1986: *passim*; Détienne 1998: 99-116 and 123-156; Kott 1987: 218-270.

and some mythological tales widespread among the aboriginal populations in Australia and New Zealand⁸.

The *Lamòling* story is relevant not only for its cultural meaning and for the possible diachronic comparison with other mythologies and religions, in a sort of ‘cultural archaeology’, but also for the presence and description of the places that are the ‘theatre’ of those legendary events. In particular, as shown above, it is possible to identify all of those places (place names and micro-toponyms), still existing, documented, attested, recognized, and known by the local (Abui) people. This helps in drawing the map of Abui place names and in connecting the toponyms with the history of Abui people, not only the evenemential ‘real’ history, but also the ‘history of the soul’ of Abui people, their deep perception of their own ‘micro-history’, origins, culture, traditions, and spirituality. Place names and micro-toponyms, according to this interpretation, are connected with the cultural roots of this population of the Alor Island and are part of the preservation and transmission, by the same Abui people, of their stories and identity.

In order to summarize, it is possible to recognize, in the *Lamòling* story, eight place names, all with the explanation / etymology of their denominations, coming directly – in the most of cases – from the legendary tale, place names still existing and attested, integral part of the Alor landscape and of the ideal map of the Abui world (and traditions), *Takalelàng*, *Takpàla*, *Kolwàt*, *Kanurwàt*, *Karilik*, *Lamòling Bèaka*, *Lù Melàng*, *Pakulàng Hièng*. These toponymy and micro-toponomastics have their roots in the most original and ancestral age of Abui people, producing what we can define ‘meta-history’ before the properly called history.

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⁸ Cf., e.g., Kerényi 1958: 514-518.

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