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The Legend of Lamòling: Unwritten Memories and Diachronic Toponymy 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 Alor (South-East Indonesia) through the analysis of a legend centered on two gods from the Abui traditional religion, ending with the replacement of the first deity with the second one. The myth appears as diachronically ‘multi-layered’, from ancestral times to the arrival of Christianity in Alor, with 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 real and still attested, existing, known, and recognized by Abui native-speakers. The etymological and historical / diachronic analysis of place names, in this context, is fruitful not only in the reconstruction of their origins and in map-tracking, but it also involves an anthropological study of cultural aspects of oral tradition in the Abui religion. The story documented in this paper is considered true and not a legend by the Abui people and all the place names in this story known and accepted by the Abui people according to the parts they play in the legend. These place names and micro-toponyms, therefore, have a relevance that goes beyond their etymological reconstruction, allowing important insights 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 Oral Legends and Myths; Diachronic Toponomastics, Anthropological Linguistics

1. Introduction

This paper presents a preliminary reconstruction of an original Abui oral myth, the Lamòling legend, in which the narrative plot is inextricably linked to place names and micro-toponyms really attested and still existing in the Abui territory on the island of Alor (South-East Indonesia) shown in Figure 1.

The story shows different diachronic ‘layers’, requiring a ‘stratigraphic’ analysis of the mythical tale. In the presumably most ancient version of the legend, Lamòling appears as a Dionysiac and Prometheus deity, able to be the closest god for the humans and, at the same time, a trickster and a terrible and instinctual punisher (Otto 1933; Kerényi 1976; Détienne 1986, 1998; Kott 1987) conversely, in the more recent versions, elaborated after the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch missionaries in Alor and the introduction of Christianity on the island, Lamòling is represented as the fierce enemy of (the Christian) God, Lahatàla: the devil. It is not a coincidence that, nowadays, in the Abui language, the generic (and general) Abui name for ‘God’ (the Christian God) is Lahatàla (derived from the legend and passed to indicate not a ‘spiritual god’, but the ‘one and true God’). This remark completes the path of the ‘stratigraphy’ of the Lamòling story, with the identification of the ‘other God’, Lahatàla, with God, the ‘one and true God’ of Christianity. Before Christianity, the dichotomy between Lamòling and Lahatàla could have been comparable with the one between two ancient Greek
deities, *Dionysus* and *Apollo*. With the ‘arrival’ of Christianity, they became, instead, (the Christian) God and the devil. It is useful here to point out that in the fact the name *Lahatàla* is derived from the name of the Muslim God, *Allah*. This should be due, as will be discussed later, to cultural influences from a Muslim community living in the South-Western territories of Alor, who also spoke Arabic and were able to read the *Koran* in Arabic. The reference to *Allah* is not directly linked to the Muslim religion, in this context, but, of course, to the fact that *Allah* is another ‘one and only’ god, representing a monotheistic religion (the religion of *Lahatàla*), against the animistic and polytheistic religion of *Lamòling* and his servants (and also the religion characterized by the dichotomy *Lamòling* - *Lahatàla*).

The local explanation for the name of *Lamòling* (presumably very ancient and indigenous) has, as highlighted above, shown some semantic changes over time. From ‘god’ (probably the original or the more important god of the Abui people in the ancient Abui religion) 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’.

The Abui nowadays believe that the *Lamòling* story is a true story and a historical event that happened just before the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch colonizers (and, with them, the missionaries and Christianity). According to them, *Lamòling* is real and still exists, living in the neighbouring region of *Pakulàng Hièng*.

The aim of this paper is to offer a basic source for further investigations on this unpublished myth, especially under a cultural-anthropological and comparative religion focus.

The legend reconstructed in this paper has never been collected and transcribed before, being an oral tale passed down generation-by-generation among the Abui people. It is part of the Abui cultural heritage of traditional stories and myths witnessing the oral transmission of the identity and ‘micro-history’ of that community over centuries.

The aim of the present paper, therefore, is also to safeguard this really significant (and endangered) part of the Abui tradition and oral culture.

Abui (ISO 639-3: abz; Glottolog: abui1241) is a Papuan language (Trans-New Guinea family, Alor-Pantar sub-family) spoken approximately by 17,000 speakers in the central part of Alor, South-East Indonesia, Timor area (Author 2007; Klamer 2014). The native name of the language is *Abui tangà*, literally meaning ‘mountain language’. The Alor-Pantar languages are a family of clearly related Papuan languages spoken on islands of the Alor archipelago (Figure 1).
This oral myth is quite significant since it includes a relevant part of the Abui coastal toponymy and micro-toponomastics of Alor and because of the elements of the religious identity of the Abui people.

This report on this traditional oral story analyzes the Abui legend:

- in diachrony, with a focus on the different versions / layers of the mythical tale;
- in language description, with a focus on the Abui language and culture.

2. Hermeneutic Approach

This paper is configured as a preliminary reconstruction of the Lamòling myth, which gives an explanation of a part of the Abui toponymy and micro-toponomastics and some insights into the social and religious relations among the Papuan people in Alor.

Moreover, at the anthropological-linguistic level, it is possible to sketch a ‘stratigraphy’ of the myth highlighting different diachronic stages in the composition process of the Abui story, from an animistic and, then, polytheistic ‘layer’ to the change in people’s mentality due to the arrival of Christianity in Indonesia and, specifically, to Alor.

The analysis of this Abui myth allows, at the historical-linguistic level, the collection and etymological reconstruction of place names and micro-toponyms still attested in Alor and known by the indigenous inhabitants. It is impossible to explain the etymology of those toponyms without the story, since the traditional tale is the etymological foundation of their ancestral meaning, connected with the remote cultural identity of the Abui people and with their ‘History / Memory of the Soul’ (the ‘history’ they ‘feel’ as true and belonging to them, which is not the real evenemential history, but the ‘meta-history’ depicted by their traditional myths and legends) (Author 2011).

The Lamòling story is still believed, by the Abui people, to be (their) real history and its plot has unconsciously merged, over centuries, different diachronic stages in order to
become a ‘consistent’ and ‘coherent’ tale explaining the genesis of important Abui villages, the meaning of specific Abui traditions, and the change in the religion of the Abui community with the passage from animistic and, then, polytheistic rituals to Christianity.

The Lamòling story represents, therefore, what we could call ‘meta-history’ before – or, better, besides – the properly called History, depicted through Abui culture and traditions. Macro-history gets its ‘Abui interpretation’ meeting the ‘micro-history’ of a little Papuan community in Alor, generating a foundation myth at the basis of Abui cultural identity.

Schematically, it is possible to highlight some significant features that appear in the Lamòling story:

- it consistently links complex diachronic levels and chronological stages in the making of the plot, to make it coherent within itself;
- it developed diachronically according to different cultural systems and influences (from original Papuan traditions to a standardized Christian ‘frame’), merged and chronologically ‘leveled’;
- it is characterized by the presence of real Abui place names and micro-toponyms still existing, attested, known, and shared by the local people in Alor, founding their etymology (Author et al. 2015) and establishing the origins of social and religious relations among the Abui people (for example, through the explanation of atavistic rituals);
- it allows an investigation of the deep perceptions of their (Abui) own ‘micro-history’ (or ‘meta-history’), origins, culture, traditions, and spirituality.

3. Stratigraphy of the Abui Religion and Micro-Toponymy

The Lamòling myth is all ‘played’ on the dichotomy opposing the ancient, primordial (and probably ‘aboriginal’ / ‘epichoric’) god (trickster and friend of the Abui people) Lamòling to the ‘new’ god (ultimately, the God of Christianity) Lahatàla.

The original core of the story can be identified, therefore, in the part inherent in Lamòling itself and in his friendly relationship with the Abui people. A more recent ‘layer’ of the tale, conversely, is the one that introduces Lahatàla in the context of the Abui community. The two gods ‘cohabit’ for a while, till the moment in which Lahatàla supplants Lamòling. This part of the myth represents the introduction and the spread of Christianity among the Abui people, with the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch colonizers and missionaries, starting from the XVI century (see Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, especially Chapter 4).

The two ritual and ceremonial houses still visitable in the center of the Abui Takpàla village represent this epochal change in local beliefs. They are called Kolwàt, ‘the dark house’, and Kanurwàt, ‘the bright house’. They represent (native speakers are all in agreement on this) two different stages in the Abui ‘micro-history’ (or ‘meta-history’), 1) ‘the darkness of the past’, when people were ‘blind’ wandering among animistic and polytheistic cults, and 2) the ‘light of current times’ (from the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch missionaries), with the introduction of Christianity and the revelation of the ‘only and true God’.
Kolwât shows still, in its decorations, the pattern of a snake, primordial chthonic deity hypostasis of Lamòling (who, during a ritual called karilik hè hàk, ‘offer to the big old stones’ – that gives the name to the related place, Karilik –, joined the Abui people in the ceremony, appearing in the shape of a snake). Kanurwât, conversely, is deeply characterized by a white geometric pattern, representing the ineffable and bright nature of Lahátàla, the Christian God in Abui culture. In the Abui language, indeed, the name Lahátàla is currently used to indicate the Christian God. However, the name is connected with the Muslim God name, Allah, not because of a direct relationship with Islam, but due to the influence on Abui religious language of an Islamic community still attested in the South-Western territory of Alor Rodemeier 2010). Currently, the name Lahátàla is not a synonym or local variant for the Abui word for “God”, but it is exactly the word “God” in the Abui ‘contemporary lexicon’, while, in the past, it should have been ‘only’ the name of the deity complementary and, then, opposed to Lamòling.

Figure 2. The two Abui ritual and ceremonial houses, Kolwât and Kanurwât (Author)

4. Data Collection

The legend was recorded and reconstructed during fieldwork conducted by the authors in Alor (June 01, 2015 - June 10, 2015). The Abui villages involved in this linguistic investigation are Takalelâng and Takpâla, located in the Northern coastal area of Alor.

Two Abui native-speakers from Takalelâng recounted the story over a period of several recording sessions. At first separately, then the two storytellers subsequently repeated their versions in a common recording session. The two versions (both during the separate sessions and in the common session) substantially converge in the same version.

5. A Story by the Abui People
This is the story of the god Lamòling and the place names linked to the mythical events leading to his separation from the (Abui) humankind.

In Takpàla village (located on the hill above the village of Takalelàng), there are two ritual and ceremonial houses. They are decorated according to a specific religious Abui iconography. The two houses are the expression of a kind of art, in Abui culture, that could be called ‘architectural art’. One is painted with motif developed on a white / whitish background, the other one is dark, with black as a predominant chromatic nuance. According to the native-speakers, the ‘black house’ represents the darkness derived from the absence of Christianity (‘the lack of the light of a right belief’), which to them is now the ‘true religion’. The ‘whitish’ house is the architectural metaphor of the progress in history of humankind and of the light brought to the Abui people by the ‘new religion’.

The two houses themselves define and symbolically ‘substantiate’ two different places (intended as two ‘metaphorical spatial areas’, since they are very close to each other) 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 the Abui people, of the two houses as two (ideally) different places, even if they are just a few meters distant from each other, symbolizing the development and the evolution of Abui history (‘micro-history’ or ‘meta-history’). They indicate, indeed, two different stages in the Abui ‘mythical chronology’, representing the passage from a specific (‘dark’) ‘era’ of (Abui) humankind to another (‘bright’) one.

The Abui interpretation of the ‘whitish house’ metaphorical meaning is ex post facto, at least partially, since native-speakers affirm it already existed (as well as the ‘black house’) before the arrival of Christianity in Alor. Nevertheless, this is not a ‘non-sense’ or an anachronism, since the ‘light’ symbolized by the ‘white house’ indicated, originally, the ‘liberation’ of the Abui people from the ‘friendship’ of / with a demon, Lamòling and, therefore, the passage to a ‘less dark’ religion and, then, to the ‘true religion’. Lamòling was a god. He became a demon.

The two houses were (and, sometimes, are still) the ‘theatre’ of a specific ritual. The Abui name of the ceremony is karilìk hè hàk (shortened to karilìk), meaning ‘offer to the big old stones’. There are three flat stones, in front of them, positioned upright on an altar in front of the two houses. Before the ceremony, the Abui people bring cooked rice to the stones. The rice is placed on a table and offered, symbolically, to the three stones. People attending the ritual are then able to eat the rice. Eating it, according to the Abui belief, they establish a connection with the god Lamòling. Later, after the arrival of Christianity in Alor, they offered the rice to Lahatàla, intended as the Christian God – opposed to the demon Lamòling.

The offer to the stones (to the ‘god of the stones’, Lamòling at a first stage, then Lamòling and Lahatàla, in a second stage, and Lahatàla in a final stage) was mainly meant to establish a good relationship with the ‘good god’ (or with the ‘two good gods’) and to give people (especially to the ‘rice eaters’) a good destiny in life. The stones are symbolic ‘ownership’ 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.

Abui people nowadays cannot attest to the ‘age’ of this ritual, or to its ‘chronological stages’. However, according to different anthropological parallels, it could be considered very old (Kerényi 1976, 1995; Lévy-Strauss 1979; Kott 1987. The Abui people report that, originally, the ritual was devoted in its entirety only to the demon Lamòling and not to the ‘good god’ Lahatàla, for the simple reason that, in that remote stage, Lamòling was not a demon, but a ‘good god’. Lamòling would have been, therefore, the ‘original lord’ of the ritual, according to the story provided by native-speakers, in a time where Lahatàla did not exist yet.

What is the link between the god (or demon?) Lamòling and the Abui people? First of all, the definition “demon”, for Lamòling, seems inappropriate. Lamòling, in the oral story told by speakers, originally appears as a god, in toto equivalent to Lahatàla and ‘more ancient’ / primordial. With the development of the Abui traditional religion, over centuries, Lamòling has become part of a dichotomy opposing him to Lahatàla. Later, with the introduction of Christianity in Alor, he has been compared with the devil of the Bible and Gospels, not quite the Satàn of the Bible as that is quite different from the devil of Christian tradition, at least starting from the Middle Ages (see Rudwind 1970; Forsyth 1987).

Lamòling was, originally, a god comparable to Dionysus or to Prometheus in ancient Greek mythology or with other figures of ‘freedom gods’ (and ‘tricksters’) as, for example, Loki in Old Norse tradition and Kokopelli in a number of native-American religions (Radin 1956; Miceli 1984). A god linked to nature and to a vision of life favoring freedom against inhibitions and dogmas. An anthropomorphous god friend of humans and very similar and close to them, who is the pròtos euretés of technological discoveries offered by him to the mortals, introducing them to technology and to arts. 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 (Meyer 2014).

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

Lamòling and the 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 denomination of the ceremony of ‘rice-offer’, Karilik. This could be the evidence of the fact that the ritual is more ancient than the ‘standardized description’ by the Abui people and it could be the confirmation of the hypothesis that the ritual and place were originally linked only to Lamòling. After the traumatic breaking of their relationship with Lamòling, the mortals do not pronounce his name anymore and not even the toponym that still exists and that still survives in the name of the ritual. Abui people know its location, 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 expulsion, the Abui people devastated this area. Metaphorically and symbolically, Lamòling had no more a place to meet the (Abui) humans and to live on Earth, and he had to ‘escape’ in the Kabola territory, not far – in Northern Alor (Figure 1), on the border with the Abui Northern villages – from the Abui area. The Abui people destroyed Karilik on purpose, in order to expel Lamòling and to delete his memory (damnatio memoriæ).

Something considered ‘unclear’ by local people, since it is taboo happened that caused the Abui people to break their relationship with Lamòling. According to the speakers this ‘something’ showed the fierce nature of this ancient god. The Abui people are almost unable to tell what, but it is quite clear that the reason for the cruel act by Lamòling was the ‘introduction’, in the Abui traditional religion, of the figure of the ‘good god’ Lahatàla. Before he became complementary to Lamòling and, then, opposed to him, Lahatàla lived mainly in the sky and, being a metaphysical god (‘pure spirit’), did not meet the humans very frequently. He was a good and generous god and appreciated by the people. The ‘arrival’ of Lahatàla was at the origins of Lamòling’s jealousy.

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

Lamòling had almost always an anthropomorphous appearance, he was also able to change himself into an animal or into whatever he wanted (he was surrounded by a number of servants, minor deities, who had all his skills, but were characterized by weaker powers, if compared with the god, always following him and his orders). He appeared as a primordial, ancestral, atavistic, and archetypal god, very close to humans. Lahatàla was, instead, a ‘pure spirit’ and a transcendental god, able, in any case, to enter the bodies of people in order to spend time with humans and to talk with them. Probably during the party – or, maybe, before, in a ‘private communication’ with the Abui people, Lahatàla entered the body of a woman, called Fikàr, and told the people that Lamòling was not a good god and that the relationship they had with him would have to be only temporary (and would have had to be ‘terminated’). While the new relationship with him (Lahatàla) would be eternal, Lahatàla being the ‘only and true god’. According to Lahatàla, Karilik would have to become the place for ritual offers exclusively to and for him. The story is vague on how, but Lamòling found out what Lahatàla had told the Abui people.

As it is evident even in a preliminary analysis, there are many elements, in this part of the story (and not only in this part), linked to the Bible (Old Testament), to the symbology of Christianity, and to the introduction of the Christian beliefs in the Abui area and in Alor (for a detailed look at the introduction of Christianity in Indonesia see Schröter 2011).

Lamòling felt threatened by Lahatàla and was offended by the mortals. He understood that the Abui people would follow Lahatàla and that his time among the humans was ending. The Abui people were willing to change their religion according to 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 in the party in harmony and friendship with each other and with the humans. After the party, though, a terrible event happened. An Abui child was kidnapped by Lamòling, probably through his servants. Lamòling, having been offended and abandoned, at least in his perception, was looking for revenge. The Abui people did not realize who had committed this crime and, not expecting anything bad from the ‘friend’ Lamòling, started to look for the child.

The mortals decided to go to look for the child on the coast. In order to descend from Takpàla and Takalelàng to the sea, they had to pass through what was at that time a nameless place somewhat down the mountainside. This place was used by Lamòling to rest, alone or with the minor deities of his retinue, and to meet with humans in order to celebrate some specific events and their friendship. The Abui people did not find the child. However, coming back up the mountain, they met some of the servants of Lamòling who at that time were assuming human appearances. These servants in a very friendly manner invited the Abui to have dinner with them. The menu included meat, but it was a terrible and 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, was the head of the child.

The Abui people being mere mortals, surrounded by Lamòling’s minor deities, were unable to do anything or to fight against them. They did not eat the meat and simply asked to be able to carry the head and the body parts of the child to the village (Takpàla) to bury them (with the excuse of eating them later with potato leaves). They were given the head and the body parts and they took them back to their village.

From that moment, the place in which the Lamòling servants offered the horrible dinner was called Lamòling Bèaka (‘bad Lamòling’, ‘Lamòling the evil’). Abui people even now are still able to identify the place, located in an intermediate point between the Takalelàng village and the sea, in the lower part of Takpàla and Takalelàng hill.

From that day, the Abui people prepared their revenge. They organized a party in Takpàla a few days after the macabre ‘meal’ offered by Lamòling through his servants. Lamòling was invited, with all his servants, who now could be referred to as ‘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, still belonging, in any case, to the territory of Takpàla. The Abui people made Lamòling and his demons eat a lot and they danced with them for days, without rest. When Lamòling and the demons became tired, the Abui people offered them to rest and to sleep in a house they had prepared for them. Falling asleep, Lamòling’s servants, being anthropomorphous, recovered their original appearances of monstrous animals. Lamòling was sleeping, maintaining, however, his human appearance. He was in fact pretending to sleep, having perceived through his intuition that the humans were setting a trap. Seeing that all of within the house were sleeping, the Abui people locked the door of the house from the outside and, with Lamòling and his servants inside, they burned down the place. All of Lamòling’s demons were burned and killed. Lamòling, though, changed himself into a pregnant woman and was able to escape by hiding himself among the people in the confusion caused by the fire.
According to one version of the story, it was after this event that Lamòling ‘escaped’ (voluntarily) to the Kabola territory.

The place of the Abui people’s vengeance is located, as pointed out above, in the Takpàla area, but close to Lù Melàng (in Abui lù means ‘river’ and melàng means ‘village’), an ancient abandoned village further up the mountain (some families in Takpàla and Takalelàng are originally from Lù Melàng). According to a parallel version of the story, Karilik is specifically located in the Takpàla territory, close to Lù Melàng, and when the Abui people indicate the place, they turn themselves in the direction of Lù Melàng.

Lamòling escaped and/or decided to leave the Abui people, who are unable to explain why he decided to retire in the Kabola territory, maybe – they say – because the Kabola people also had a relationship with Lamòling or the Kabola territory enabled him to leave the Abui villages without being too far from them (since the Kabola people live in a territory neighboring the Abui area). This might be in memory of their ancient friendship or in order to continue to threaten them. As far as the first explanation, it seems that the Kabola people were also scared of Lamòling and they never go (still) in the place to where Lamòling ‘escaped’. This would exclude the hypothesis of a ‘friendship’ between Lamòling and the Kabola people. The place in which Lamòling is said to have ‘retreated’ to is called Pakulàng Hièng (meaning, non-literally, but extensively, ‘bad place’) and is currently uninhabited (and unanimously considered a ‘sinister place’). Both Abui and Kabola people think that Lamòling still lives there. The Kabola people are not considered ‘bad’ by the Abui people, even if their territory ‘hosts’ Lamòling. The Abui believe only the place is ‘bad’, and they do not consider the Kabola ‘friends’ of Lamòling.

From that day the Abui people started to devote the ‘stones ritual’ exclusively to Lahatàla.

After the ‘arrival’ of Christianity in Alor, the version of the final part of the Lamòling story was changed slightly. From that moment, in the Abui people’s perception, Lamòling has become no longer a god comparable (or complementary) to Lahatàla, but his name became translatable, into English, as ‘devil’ (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 ‘revised’ version, Lamòling did not decide to go to Pakulàng Hièng following his personal choice, but he was hurled there from the sky by Lahatàla (in this version already the Christian God), sinking in the rock and remaining imprisoned there. The similarity of this version of the story with the Christian story of Lucifer is evident, the most beautiful angel of Heaven, who rebelled against God and was sunk by Him to the bottom of Hell.

The figures of Prometheus and Lucifer become archetypally overlapping in the Lamòling character. The sharing of attributes between Prometheus and Lucifer, indeed, has been already theorized by Raphael Judah Zwi Werblowsky in his celebrated work Lucifer and Prometheus (published in 1952) (Stroumsa 1987).

6. The dichotomy Lamòling - Lahatàla
As highlighted above, it is possible to establish a clear dichotomy, in the Abui story, between the two gods who act in the tale. This dichotomy represents:

1. The evolution of the Lamòling legend. It began from a possible original core focused on the figure of Lamòling as a ‘Promethean’ deity, friend of the mortals, trickster, and deeply connected with humans and their lives. It then came to a moment in time when Lamòling had to be necessarily replaced by the new god (the Christian God), spiritual, ‘heavenly’, and transcendent. This was in fact Lahatàla.

2. The passage from an animistic stage to a Christian one. The Abui religion and culture, was historically characterized by animistic and/or polytheistic (if we consider the ‘servants’ of Lamòling as deities) cults. The legend tells of the people’s passage to a monotheistic creed, Christianity (emblematized by the figure of Lahatàla).

3. The effort, by Abui storytellers and spiritual leaders, to merge the two religious aspects of their history. The story unfolds through the animistic / polytheistic stage and the monotheistic one. The story told by the Abui people merge the two different diachronic layers, the original core on Lamòling and the new materials inherent in Lahatàla, in a coherent plot, in order to keep the story consistent in itself and to allow the myth to be an effective explanation of the Abui cultural identity and tradition.

4. The historical foundation of a number of local toponyms, with place names that have their denominations from the different parts of the story. The basis of these toponyms are related directly to the actions of the two gods as told in this story. The deep link between the Lamòling legend and local place names is especially emblematic in the toponymic dichotomy between the two houses, Kolwàt, the ‘dark’ one, connected with Lamòling, and Kanurwàt, the ‘bright’ one, linked to Lahatàla.

Lamòling is configurable as an ancient (plausibly aboriginal and epichoric) Abui god, friend of humankind, living with humans, having an anthropomorphous appearance, and supporting the Abui people.

Lamòling existed, in Abui culture, before Lahatàla, being a primordial deity and also, potentially (as ancestral deities in different religious traditions all over the world), a trickster and terrible punisher. He became, over time, after the introduction of Lahatàla in Abui culture, a demon and, with the ‘arrival’ of Christianity in Alor, the devil.

Lahatàla is, conversely, a ‘younger’ god in Abui culture, imagined as a ‘pure spirit’, good and merciful, able to enter human bodies in order to talk with people. His name, as mentioned, derives from the Muslim God’s name, Allah, a ‘monotheistic god’. He is the opposed god (but originally complementary) to Lamòling in the symbolic dichotomy highlighted above. He becomes, over time, the Lamòling ‘contender’ and, with the ‘arrival’ of Christianity, the ‘only and true Christian God’.

Lamòling is an original local deity, god of freedom from inhibitions and dogmas, god of nature, prótos euretès of technological discoveries offered by him to the humans, instinctual trickster very skilled in arts. As an ‘archetypal’ figure, Lamòling is comparable, as mentioned, with Dionysus and Prometheus, Loki, and Kokopelli, respectively in Ancient Greek, Old Norse, and native-American traditions.
Lahatàla is a less ancient and (at least at a certain stage, after the introduction of Christianity in Alor) non-originally local god symbol of order and spirituality. As an ‘archetypal’ figure, as mentioned, he is comparable with Apollo in Ancient Greek mythology and, in Abui culture, he represents the gestalt of the Christian God.

The dichotomy Lamòling - Lahatàla could be effectively described by the notions of Dionysian and Apollonian, established by Friedrich Nietzsche in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872 (Porter 2000).

7. Summarizing the Stratigraphy of the Myth

As mentioned, the Lamòling story shows different diachronic stages, requiring a ‘stratigraphy’ of the traditional tale.

Analyzing the myth according to a ‘cultural archaeology’ approach, we can see that in the ancient version of the story, possibly identifiable as its original core, Lamòling appears as a Dionysiac deity, presumably the closest god for / to the humans and, at the same time, as a trickster and instinctual punisher. This ‘portrait’ makes the figure of the god comparable with Kokopelli (the native-American trickster, skilled in arts, and hiding various ‘dark sides’) and with Dionysus, the closest gods to the mortals, in Ancient Greek mythology, but the horrible and possibly irrational (since, being a god, he is ‘beyond rationality’) punisher protagonist of the Euripides’ *Bacchae* (Franklin 2007). It is of extraordinary intensity the act in which Agave, driven into a frenzy by Dionysus, kills her son, Pentheus, cutting off his head and exposing it on a stick, without being able to see that the young man was not a mountain lion. Dionysus, the God of the Irrational, ‘accomplishes’ his task as a punisher without an apparent proportion between the ‘crime’ of the unlucky king and the punishment. Dionysus, however, is also the compassionate god saving Ariadne when Theseus abandoned her. The unpredictable god feels mercy for the forsaken girl, and makes her his wife, not a simple character among his followers. Dionysus is beyond everything that is rational, since Dionysus represents what is before (older than) the rational.

In the more recent versions, the ‘Christian’ ones, Lamòling is represented, conversely, as the fierce enemy of (the Christian) God (Lahatàla), and, consequently, as the devil of the medieval Christian tradition (as Lucifer).

The ‘paths’ of the two gods’ names can be schematized in this way, according to at least three different diachronic stages in the story’s development,

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Lamòling

↓

Original, primordial, ancestral, atavistic, and archetypal god, with anthropomorphous appearance, very close to the mortals

↓

Demon

↓

Devil
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Lahatâla

Originally a pure spiritual and transcendental god living in the sky, communicates with humankind and approaches humans by entering the bodies of people

↓

Good spiritual god opposed (in dichotomy) to the ‘demon’ Lamòling

↓

The ‘only and true’ God in Christian tradition

According to an anthropological and/or cultural analysis, it is also 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 kidnapped child to the Abui people reminds us of the Greek myths of Atreus and Thyestes, Proce and Tereus, Lycaon, and other mythological tales widespread among aboriginal populations in Australia and New Zealand (Kerényi 1958; Jung and Kerényi 2001).

The myth of Atreus and Thyestes tells us that when Atreus learned of his brother’s, Thyestes, and his wife’s, Aerope, adultery, he killed Thyestes' sons and cooked them. He then tricked Thyestes into eating the flesh of his own sons.

In the story of Proce and Tereus, we read that Proce married Tereus, king of Thrace, and they had a son, Itys. At a later time, Tereus seduced Proce’s sister Philomela and, to stop her from telling her sister, cut off her tongue. When Proce found out, she murdered her own son, Itys, and served his flesh for her husband to eat.

In a version of the Lycaon myth, the then king of Arcadia wanted to test if indeed Zeus was omniscient. So he killed and roasted his own son, Nyctimus, and served his flesh to Zeus to see if the god would know what the meat was. An enraged Zeus transformed Lycaon and his offspring into wolves and restored Nyctimus to life.

The ‘meal of children’ is also a recurrent topic in other Abui legends. Among others, it is possible to mention, as an example, the story of the seven children and the demi-god Karfehawa, who planned (unsuccessfully) to eat them (Author 2008).

8. ‘Legendary Place Names’ in Alor

As highlighted above, some Abui place names derive their direct origins (or, at least, the explanations of their origins and etymologies) from the Lamòling story. There are eight (toponyms and micro-toponyms).

The eight place names and micro-toponyms are:

- Takalelàng
- Takpàla
- Kolwåt
• Kanurwat
• Karilik
• Lamòling Bèaka
• Lù Melàng
• Pakulàng Hièng.

These place names and micro-toponyms are characterized by the following common features:

- they are Abui place names and micro-toponyms all with etymological explanations derived from the Lamòling story;
- they are all real, still existing and attested, known, and recognized by Abui people;
- they are an integral part of the Alor landscape and of the ‘ideal map’ of the Abui world according to the Abui people and their perception of the territory;
- their stories are shared by all the Abui people (storytellers and audience);
- they are all linked to Abui traditions and culture and are part of the foundation of the Abui identity.

All these toponyms, as discussed above, get their etymological explanation from the Lamòling story. Among them, the place name Lamòling Bèaka shows to be a more significant one, since:

- it indicates the area of the horrible meal with the child’s body, an area that did not yet have a name ‘before’ the legend and the terrible event;
- the name Lamòling Bèaka, indeed, has been given to the place by the Abui people after that brutal dinner (that they believe really happened), in order to link the area to that monstrous act (it means ‘Bad Lamòling’, ‘Lamòling the evil’);
- the Abui people still know and recognize the place Lamòling Bèaka (even if it is not a village) and are able to indicate its exact position;
- it is located in the Takpàla area and on Takalelàng hill, lower than the two villages, towards the seashore, and, therefore, it is a very relevant and symbolic place for the two Abui communities;
- the place, as the others highlighted above, derives its name from the Lamòling legend. The myth, therefore, is a foundation story not only in relation to Abui culture, but also in the context of Abui toponymy.

9. Conclusions

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 local Abui people. This helps in drawing the map of these Abui place names and in
connecting the toponyms with the history of indigenous people, not only the evenemential, 'real' history, but also the 'History and Memory of the Soul' of the 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 Papuan population on the island of Alor and are part of the preservation and transmission, by the Abui people, of their stories and identity.

On closing, since it is a very significant fact in Historical Toponomastics, it can be useful to repeat that it is possible to list, in the Lamòling story, eight place names and micro-toponyms, all with consistent explanation / etymology for their denominations, coming directly from the legendary tale, place names still existing and attested, that are integral part of the Alor landscape and of the ideal map of the Abui world and traditions 'depicted' in the traditional Abui culture, Takalelàng, Takpàla, Kolwàt, Kanurwàt, Karilik, Lamòling Bèaka, Lù Melàng, Pakulàng Hièng. These local toponymy and micro-toponomastics have their roots in the most original and ancestral age of the Abui people, producing what we can define as 'meta-history', the history that Abui people feel is theirs and is 'true' before – or, better, besides – the properly called History.

References


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The Legend of Lamòling: Unwritten Memories and Diachronic Toponymy through the Lens of an Abui Myth

Highlights

- an original and unpublished foundation myth from a Papuan (Abui) context;
- 'stratigraphic' analysis of an Abui legend where animistic, polytheistic, and Christian elements diachronically converge;
- the myth gives Abui places their names, establishing local toponymy and micro-toponomastics;
- the etymological explanation of Abui toponyms and micro-toponyms is impossible without knowing (and interpreting) the story;
- Historical Toponomastics and Anthropological Linguistics are combined in the exegesis of this Abui foundation myth.
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