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## PLANTS AND PLACE NAMES: A CASE STUDY OF ABUI TOPONYMY

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**Abstract:** *This paper investigates the influence of Abui plant names on Alor Island's toponyms. Abui is a Papuan language spoken in Alor Island (Alor-Pantar Archipelago, South-East Indonesia, Timor area). Although there are rich studies on the Abui culture and language, research on how botany, an important toponymic source, shapes toponymic patterns in Alor Island remains scant. Using Field Linguistics and Language Documentation methods, the authors and a local consultant have detailed the names of ten common Abui horticultural and agricultural plants before matching them with toponyms in Alor Island to reconstruct their etymologies. Results show that toponyms in Alor Island derived from phytonyms are mostly transparent, named after plants in the area with the top toponymic sources being mea 'mango', wata 'coconut', and kanaai 'canarium'. Oral stories are highly connected with the place naming process and are frequently used to explain how places received their names. This paper would like to provide evidences and analyses as a starting point for further research on the links between Botany and Toponymy in Alor Island.*

**Key words:** *Toponymy, Phytonyms, Language Documentation, Abui Language, Alor Island*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Plants are a universal toponymic source. Signorini et al. argues that “plants are one of the most important sources for toponyms”<sup>1</sup>. Place names in many countries are

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Signorini et al., (2016), p. 235.



people<sup>11</sup>. According to Abui oral traditions, the Abui people settled in Alor in ancient times. Some later moved to the Kabola territory in Alor Island, where they lived in caves in the mountains of *Mainàng*<sup>12</sup>. Diary entries written in 1521 by Antonio Pigafetta are possibly the first known documentation of the people living on Alor Island. Pigafetta was an Italian officer on the ship of Juan de Elcano, who succeeded Captain Fernão de Magalhães after the latter's death on his round-the-world voyage<sup>13</sup>. Other records also indicate some contacts between the Hindu-Javanese sea Kingdom of Majapahit and natives of Alor Island<sup>14</sup>. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese set up the Larantuka and Dili settlements. Since Alor Island and Pantar Island were located between these two establishments, the Portuguese started conducting missionary activities in Alor Island from 1561<sup>15</sup>. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was an intense rivalry between the Portuguese and Dutch around the area of present-day Indonesia for colonies and trade. The Dutch conquered the former Portuguese stronghold of Solor in 1613 and settled in Flores Island. The Portuguese, as a result of the continued Dutch attacks in Solor<sup>16</sup>, moved to Kupang, West Timor, in 1836. In 1859, the Portuguese and Dutch signed a treaty delineating a boundary between their territories and assigning Flores, Solor, and Alor Islands to the Dutch. However, it was not until a 1914 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague that border issues were resolved<sup>17</sup>. For decades, the Dutch colonial presence in Alor Island remained limited; it was only in 1910 when Dutch Governor-General van Heutz began a military campaign to bring local rulers and people under their administration<sup>18</sup>. Friction between the Alor people and their colonisers culminated in a violent rebellion in 1917 and an uprising in September 1918 when the Abui people, angered by tax collection disputes, killed the Dutch-appointed Raja of Alor, Bala Nampira and his men<sup>19</sup>. Further revolts were also recorded in 1942 and in 1945<sup>20</sup>.

The Abui people and culture were first described by American anthropologist Cora DuBois in her 1944 book, *The People of Alor: A Social-Psychological Study of an East Indian Island*, compiled after her 18-month fieldwork in Alor Island. DuBois evaluated the island's ethnography, gathered the life histories of natives, and administered tests to uncover the personality of the Abui people living on Alor Island<sup>21</sup>. DuBois' study was the first research conducted under the basic personality structure framework<sup>22</sup>, making her an eminent scholar in the field of culture and personality studies. Early research on the Abui people can also be found in Martha Maria Nicolspeyer's Dissertation. Nicolspeyer, who travelled with DuBois, described the Abui social structure and recorded some Abui legends and words<sup>23</sup>. Current research on the Abui focuses on studying Abui oral traditions, an integral element of Abui culture. Abui

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., (2007), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Nicolspeyer, M.M., (1940); Kratochvíl, F., (2007), cit., p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Koentjaraningrat, (2007), *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hägerdal, H., (2012), *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Klamer, M., (2010), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> There was still a sizeable Portuguese population in Solor as they had married the locals in Solor.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Fernandes, C., (2015), p. 852.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Klamer, M., (2017), pp. 1-48.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stokhof, W.A.L., (1984), pp. 106-162; Kratochvíl, F., (2007), cit., p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. van Gaalen, G.A.M., (1945); Hägerdal, H., (2010), pp. 14-44.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Raybeck, D., (2013), *passim*.

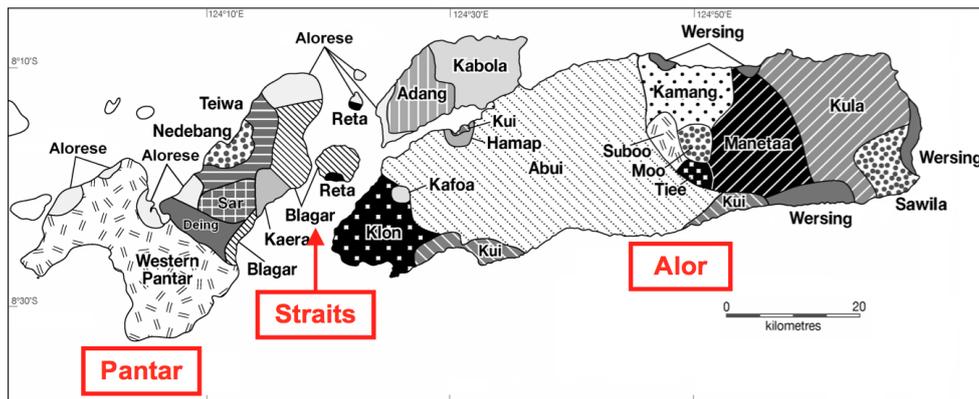
<sup>22</sup> Cf. Moberg, M., (2019), *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nicolspeyer, M.M., (1940), cit., *passim*.

myths and legends, known as *tira*, are centred on historical events. These stories are interpreted by locals under a meta-historical lens, rendering them as myths and legends. These narrative genres enact and elucidate the lasting relationship between the physical landscape (rocks, caves, water bodies, places, and coastal areas) and the Abui people<sup>24</sup>. Unsurprisingly, oral traditions have been used to account for the origins of certain Abui place names and micro-toponyms<sup>25</sup>. Perono Cacciafoco's and Cavallaro's 2018 study narrates a foundational myth telling the story of two gods from Abui traditional religion, *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla*<sup>26</sup>. Besides tracing the evolution of this story from ancient times to the colonial era, when the Dutch introduced Christianity in Alor Island<sup>27</sup>, the authors also studied the significance of sacred objects and rituals in this myth to the Abui people<sup>28</sup>.

## 2.2. The Abui Language

The Abui language belongs to the Alor branch of the Alor-Pantar language family<sup>29</sup>, a family of clearly related Papuan languages<sup>30</sup>. Holton et al. prove the genealogical relationship between the Papuan languages of Alor Island and Pantar Island by utilising form-meaning pairings in cognate sets to establish regular sound correspondences<sup>31</sup>. The Alor-Pantar language family is divided into two branches, the Alor branch (which Abui falls under) and the Pantar branch, which spread several millennia ago on the islands of Alor and Pantar respectively (see Figure 2)<sup>32</sup>.



**Figure 2.** Linguistic situation in the Alor-Pantar Archipelago

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl et al., (2016), *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2017), pp. 51-61.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2018), pp. 1-15.

<sup>27</sup> Education was used by the Dutch Colonial Government to spread Christianity in Alor Island. Like other parts of South-east Indonesia (known as Nusa Tenggara Timur, NTT), the Dutch transferred the role of running schools to Protestant and Catholic missions, who spread Christian values and ideals to students. The Dutch also re-organised and ceded political control to Catholic and Protestant leaders, facilitating the spread of Christianity in NTT. Cf. Arintonang, J.S., Steenbrink, K.A., (2008); Schröter, S., (2011); Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2017), cit., pp. 51-61; Cf., Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2018), cit., pp. 1-15.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2018), cit., pp. 1-15.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Holton et al., (2012), pp. 86-122.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Klamer, M., (2010), cit., *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Holton et al., (2012), cit., pp. 86-122.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Klamer, M., (2017), cit., pp. 1-48.

Cora DuBois, during her time in Alor Island, labelled the unwritten native language as *Abui*<sup>33</sup>. DuBois had made a list containing thousands of Abui lexical items and notebooks comprising Abui sentences and their line-by-line English translations<sup>34</sup>. However, the first linguistic description on the Abui language was done by the Dutch Linguist Willem A.L. Stokhof. Stokhof analysed a short text recorded by DuBois pertaining to the September 1918 uprising and murder of Raja Bala Nampira. In his paper, Stokhof demonstrated the connections between Abui and other Papuan languages of the Alor-Pantar Archipelago and presented a brief overview of the Abui phonology according to the variant spoken in Atèng Melàng<sup>35</sup>. Since early 2003, scholars like Marian Klamer and Frantisek Kratochvíl have conducted research in Alor Island, especially on Abui, resulting in a number of valuable publications<sup>36</sup>. Kratochvíl's Doctoral Dissertation, *A Grammar of Abui*, is the first comprehensive work on Abui phonology, morphology, and syntax. Recent studies have focused on pronominal marking on verbs in Abui<sup>37</sup>. Kratochvíl's language documentation and conservation efforts, spurred in part by the banning of Abui in schools, resulted in the creation of an Abui storybook<sup>38</sup> and dictionary<sup>39</sup>.

### 3. MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE PAPER

Toponymy is defined as the “systematic study of the origin and history of toponyms”<sup>40</sup>. As a discipline, toponymy unearths precious socio-cultural and linguistic data. On the socio-cultural front, place names not only showcase the culture, history, habitat, historical geography, and landscape of a place<sup>41</sup>, they also provide insights into the inhabitants' lifestyles<sup>42</sup> and, importantly, they foster a sense of belonging to the place amongst locals<sup>43</sup>. Place names are useful linguistic instruments, providing researchers with clues on the languages spoken in a place or region<sup>44</sup> and demonstrating how speakers utilise their linguistic resources to locate and describe their physical environments<sup>45</sup>. Often, toponyms have been used by scholars to uncover lost and pre-historic languages, since they are very valuable linguistic ‘fossils’ and are possibly the only remains of languages spoken in the absence of written records in pre-historic times<sup>46</sup>. Although Toponymy aids the understanding of languages, history, culture, and society, little research has been done on Abui toponyms other than a few studies. A 2016 paper by Kratochvíl, Delpada, and Perono Cacciafoco is divided into two parts; the first examines the etymological origins and onomastic sources of Abui toponyms,

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bock, P.K., Leavitt, S.C., (2019), *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Seymour, S.C., (2015), *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Stokhof, W.A.L., (1984), *cit.*, pp. 106-162; Kratochvíl, F., (2007), *cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Klamer, M., Kratochvíl, F., (2006), pp. 59-70; Klamer, M., Kratochvíl, F., (2010), pp. 185-210; Kratochvíl, F., (2011a), pp. 761-792; Kratochvíl, F., (2011b), pp. 588-635.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Fedden, S., Brown, D., (2017), pp. 403-447.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., (2008a), *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., (2008b), *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Monmonier, M., (2006), p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Qian, S., Kang, M., Weng, M., (2016), pp. 546-550.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Oha et al., (2017), pp. 268-283.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Helleland, B., (2012), pp. 95-116.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Julyan, R., Julyan, M., (1993), *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Cablitz, G.H., (2008), pp. 200-226.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mailhammer, R., (2016), pp. 318-329.

while the second states that place names serve social purposes such as asserting kinship ties, claiming territorial ownership, and confirming the reliability of oral stories<sup>47</sup>. Perono Cacciafoco, Cavallaro, and Kratochvíl's study (2015) applied an experimental convergent methodology<sup>48</sup> to Abui place names based on Diachronic Toponymy, or “the science of studying toponymy in undocumented and/or endangered languages”<sup>49</sup>. The authors investigated two local toponymic systems to establish a ‘stratigraphy’ in the coining of toponyms in the Abui area. Furthermore, current studies on the Abui people and culture recount a story of two Abui gods, *Lamòling* and *Lahatàla*, where *Lahatàla* eventually becomes worshipped as the ‘true’ Abui god<sup>50</sup>. Abui native-speakers explained the etymological origins of eight local place names and/or micro-toponyms through this myth. These oral traditional legends have been viewed as ‘truth’ by the Abui, as though they really happened, and illustrate the value of oral stories in the place naming process. Notwithstanding, while it is known that Abui toponyms stem from the agricultural and horticultural use of the land, present research does not provide a comprehensive study of place names derived from plant names or other toponymic sources and the way according to which various species affect the place naming process, areas which our paper addresses.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study combines Field Linguistics and Language Documentation methods. The authors conducted field work to collect original and ‘first-hand’ data, utilised existing field work reports, documented plant species and place names in Alor Island, reconstructed the links between phytonyms and toponyms in the Abui area, and explored local myths and legends connected with the local toponymic naming process. After determining common plant sources in the Abui culture, especially in Alor Island as briefed by locals, the authors, together with their Abui consultant, Mr Benidiktus Delpada, collected toponymic data which matched these plant varieties. The toponyms were discovered, collected, documented, double-checked in their morphology and variants, and analysed by exploring the Abui territory. The authors also engaged in map drawing and interviews with local native-speakers to document oral traditional stories, myths, and legends. The authors then organised the data in a database structured according to the following fields (see Table 1).

Thereafter, the authors analysed the toponyms derived from each of the ten plants from their specific sample. Emphasis was given to the naming patterns and morphemes of the toponyms, their types, geographical locations, as well as the crop(s) grown in these places. The authors also sought to reconstruct the etymology and the related oral narratives on the origins of these place names.

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> The experimental convergent methodology applied by the scholars’ analyses place names, hydronyms, and oronyms from an all-encompassing angle, not limited to an etymological and historical phonetic lens. This method systematically implies data collection from other disciplines, like historical geography, landscape archaeology, historical cartography and topography, paleo-anthropology, and genetics, to shed light on the ancient origins of place names and languages.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., Kratochvíl, F., (2015), cit., p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2017), cit., *passim*; Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., (2018), *passim*.

**Table 1.** Abui toponymic database sections

Field	Content
Toponym	Place name in Abui
English gloss	English gloss of the Abui toponym
Possible roots	Plausible etymological reconstruction of the Abui toponym
Type	Describes the toponym in general terms e.g. town, village, settlement, etc.
Location	Location of the toponym in Alor Island (North/ South/ East/ West)
Landscape use	Records whether the locality has the plant specie
Date	Date when data was collected and verified

Essentially, the authors employed an Intensive Toponymy approach in this study, a method “answering questions on the etymology and meaning of particular toponyms”, as defined by Jan Tent<sup>51</sup>. Tent likens this process to the writing of the ‘biography’ of a place name as the researcher attempts to answer the *wh*-questions, namely: (1) Who named the place? (2) When was the place named? (3) Why was it given this particular name? (4) What does the name mean? What kind of feature is it? (5) Where does the name come from? Where is the place located?<sup>52</sup>. As shown in Table 1, the authors focused on addressing the following *wh*-questions:

1. Why was the place given that name? (See possible roots and landscape use).
2. What does the name mean? (See toponym, English gloss, and possible roots);
3. Where is the place located? (See type and location);

In the absence of readily available and accessible toponymic *corpora* and maps of Alor Island, the authors relied on grassroots research. In the next section, the authors examine Alor place names extracted from ten prominent Abui plant sources which are either commonly found trees, nuts, and fruits in the Abui landscape or a staple in the Abui diet.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1. *mea* ‘mango’ (*Mangifera indica*)

Most toponyms named after *mea* ‘mango’ (see Table 2) describe either landscape features or characterise a property of mango found in the locality. Consistent with previous findings, Abui place names derived from basic landscape concepts like ravines, villages, and plains are commonplace in Abui society<sup>53</sup>. This is seen in *Meabuung* ‘mango ravine’ and *Mea Meelang* ‘mango village’. Other toponyms illustrate particular features of mangoes. These include *Mea Takuukul* lit. ‘tangled mango’ and *Mealati* ‘twisted mango’. Most toponyms derived from *mea* ‘mango’ are villages and fields. The only exception is *Mea Lulang*, a resting place. A resting place is “a flat place on a mountain slope”<sup>54</sup>. These resting places usually have trees which

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Tent, J., (2015), p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Tent, J., (2015), p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., *passim*.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., p. 87.

provide shade and, in some cases, place names like *Mea Lulang* might have been named after the trees growing there. Resting places are an essential component of the Abui landscape. With a good view of the sea, people traversed and rested at such places before getting to the coast for trading and business.

**Table 2.** Abui toponyms derived from *mea* ‘mango’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of mango
1	<i>Meabuung</i>	mango ravine	Village	North-west Alor	Yes
2	<i>Mea Takuukul</i>	lit. tangled mango	Village	North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Mealati</i>	twisted mango	Field AND Village	North-central Alor	Yes
4	<i>Mea Meelang</i>	mango village	Village	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Mea Kilikil</i>	idle mango	Field	North-central Alor	No
6	<i>Mea Ron Loohu</i>	lit. straight long mango (tree)	Field	North-central Alor	No
7	<i>Mea Munuma</i>	lit. fragrant mango	Field	North-central Alor	No
8	<i>Mea Malieng Pe</i>	lit. near a type of mango	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
9	<i>Mea Lulang</i>	lit. mango resting place	Plain resting place	North-central Alor	Yes

It is also noted that an overwhelming majority of these places are located in North-central Alor. Although place names are often linked to the use of the landscape or to its agricultural features, mangoes do not grow in places like *Mea Kilikil* ‘idle mango’, *Mea Ron Loohu* lit. ‘straight long mango (tree)’, and *Mea Munuma* lit. ‘fragrant mango’. In this situation, oral stories attempt to explain how these places got their names. Native-speakers tell that there was only one mango tree in *Mea Kilikil* ‘idle mango’. Once, a hiker was feeling idle and thus decided to rest under the only mango tree that grew in *Mea Kilikil*. This would explain how this place got its name. In *Mea Munuma*, lit. ‘fragrant mango’, locals believe that a fragrant mango plant grew in that area in the past.

## 5.2. *wata* ‘coconut’ (*Cocos nucifera*)

*Wata* ‘coconut’ is another common toponymic source in Abui (see Table 3). This may arise from coconut being a commodity that was highly sought after and traded in the islands of Timor, Alor, and Pantar during the barter system in the past. Bartering is the exchange of one product or service for another<sup>55</sup>. This system has existed in Abui culture for centuries; Abui oral stories detail how villagers will bring nuts, maize, bananas, and certain tubers to trading places along the coast, especially when the harvest is plentiful, to exchange them for fish, salt, and other goods<sup>56</sup>. Most places named after *wata* ‘coconut’ allude to landscape categories. Examples include *Wata*

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Vickers, M., (2015), *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), *cit.*, p. 94. The Abui people also bartered goods like the *moko* drums (which are used still in ceremonial dances in local villages and even as dowries), gongs, fabrics, porcelain, and metal tools.

*Meelang* ‘coconut village’, *Wata Fuui* lit. ‘coconut plain’, *Wata Puti* lit. ‘coconut grove’, and *Wata Tuku* lit. ‘coconut stump’. Some toponyms, like *Wata Kiika* ‘red coconut’ describe the colour of the coconuts found in the place. Here, we have the opportunity to observe the importance of *mea* ‘mango’ as a toponymic source. Besides having toponyms named after the fruit, it is also compounded with other horticultural plants, best exemplified in *Wata Mea* lit. ‘coconut mango’.

**Table 3.** Abui toponyms derived from *wata* ‘coconut’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of coconut
1	<i>Wata Meelang</i>	coconut village	Village	North-central Alor Central-west Alor West Alor	Yes
2	<i>Wata Kiika</i>	red coconut	Village AND Field	Village: North-west Alor Field: North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Wata Mea</i>	lit. coconut mango	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
4	<i>Wata Fuui</i>	lit. coconut plain	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Wata Puti</i>	lit. coconut grove	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
6	<i>Wata Tuku</i>	lit. coconut stump	Village	Central-west Alor	Yes

All toponyms named after *wata* ‘coconut’ are villages and fields. The most frequent toponym, *Wata Meelang* ‘coconut village’, occurs across Alor Island. The morpheme *meelang* often appears in place names because it is a generic word describing a settlement. Although most toponyms are located in North-central Alor, some places like *Wata Meelang* ‘coconut village’ and *Wata Tuku* lit. ‘coconut stump’ are found in West and Central-west Alor Island. Although coconuts are found in all toponyms named after the fruit, the quantity of coconuts varies from area to area. Locals report that *Wata Tuku* lit. ‘coconut stump’ has many coconut trees, while few coconut trees grow in *Wata Fuui* lit. ‘coconut plain’ and *Wata Puti* lit. ‘coconut grove’. In cases where the quantity of coconut trees is small, locals use myths and legends to explain these place names. For instance, one village christened *Wata Meelang* got its name from the local religious practice of roasting rice in a coconut although only two or three coconut trees presently exist there. Some native-speakers also report that a local religious leader used to live under a coconut tree, hence giving birth to the place name. Therefore, it is evident that oral traditions and religion perform important functions in Abui place naming practices. Nevertheless, the value of oral traditions in Abui toponyms extends to places with an abundance of crop. In *Wata Tuku* lit. ‘coconut stump’, where many coconut trees are found, locals tell a story according to which the sea level rose and filled places around the valley. However, this height increase stopped at the area where coconut trees were growing, and the place came to be known as *Wata Tuku*.

### 5.3. *fiyaa* ‘candlenut’ (*Aleurites moluccanus*)

Historically, *fiyaa* ‘candlenut’ is a common toponymic source in Alor Island<sup>57</sup>. At present, however, relatively few places named after *fiyaa* appear in our sample of Abui toponyms (see Table 4). *Mea* ‘mango’ is compounded with another species, i.e. *fiyaa* ‘candlenut’, to produce a place name, *Fiyaa Mea* ‘lit. mango candlenut’. In the case of *Fiyaa Lelang*, one can observe the inclusion of the morpheme, *Lelang*, which denotes familial ties. The place name has a clear etymological origin and can be parsed in the following manner:

#### *Fiyaa Lelang*

Fi	yaa
Verb ‘be probable’	Article for ‘kin or family’
Le	lang
Interrogative	‘A hand-made set of wood’ <sup>58</sup>

Both places are located in North-central Alor and a significant number of candlenut plants are cultivated in and around this area, which demonstrates a transparent naming process.

**Table 4.** Abui toponyms derived from *fiyaa* ‘candlenut’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of candlenut
1	<i>Fiyaa Lelang</i>	lit. candlenut kins	Village	North-central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Fiyaa Mea</i>	lit. mango candlenut	Field	North-central Alor	Yes

### 5.4. *kanaa* ‘canarium’ (*Canarium indicum*)

*Kanaa* ‘canarium’ is a popular tree common in the Abui landscape and a considerable number of place names derive from *kanaa* (see Table 5). Many toponyms, like *Kanaa Lohu* ‘long canarium’, *Kanaa Sua* ‘triplet canarium’, *Kanaa Kaai* ‘gluttonous (to eat) canary (nut)’, and *Kanaa Ron Lohu* ‘long straight canarium (tree)’, allude to a specific aspect of the tree or crop. There are also a couple of places pointing at canarium trees within proximity such as *Kanaa Pea* ‘nearby canarium’, *Kanaa Awee Pe* ‘near top of canarium’, and *Kanaa Tuku Pe* ‘near canarium stump’.

Locals state that the etymologies of many place names are unclear to them. However, the exceptions are *Kanaa Lohu* ‘long canarium’ and *Kanaa Kaai* ‘gluttonous (to eat) canary (nut)’ which have transparent etymologies. The place name *Kanaa Lohu* describes a canarium tree having bean-shaped nuts that used to grow in the related locality.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> This ‘hand-made set of wood’ can be used to hang gong instruments or be placed at the border of a field to mark it, like locals did in the past.



Therefore, it is highly possible that *tamal* is a borrowing from the Portuguese word *tamarinda* ‘tamarind’.

**Table 6.** Abui toponyms derived from *tamal* ‘tamarind’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of tamarind
1	<i>Tamal Liiki</i>	cruel tamarind	Field AND Settlement	North-central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Tamal Raloowang</i>	sweet tamarind	Field AND Settlement	North Alor AND North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Tamal Pataqa</i>	thin tamarind	Field	North Alor	Yes
4	<i>Tamal Atiing</i>	jungle of tamarind (tree)	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Tamal Afeeng</i>	tamarind village	Field	North-central Alor	Yes

An interesting place name is *Tamal Liiki* ‘cruel tamarind’. This toponym appears to have an unclear etymology; the roots of *Tamal Liiki* are *tamal* ‘tamarind’ and *liiki* ‘platform (dialect)’, which is inconsistent with its gloss of ‘cruel tamarind’. Additionally, the adjective ‘cruel’, connected with a plant, does not mean anything at a first glance. However, an explanation for this ‘oddity’ can be derived from local oral traditions and the cultural background of Abui people. Our consultant and locals’ postulate that this place was named after a local warrior who built a house and lived under a tamarind tree around *Tamal Liiki*, and the morpheme *liiki* would symbolise the character of this warrior. Hence, it appears that the adjective ‘cruel’, in this context, has a somewhat positive connotation, since the Abui people believed that the Abui warriors like the warrior of living at *Tamal Liiki* had to be ‘cruel’ or ‘fierce’ towards their enemies to protect their people and lands. Toponyms bearing the root *tamal* ‘tamarind’ are found in fields and settlements located mainly in North and North-central Alor Island. Tamarind trees are found in all localities, indicating a widespread naming process. However, it is unclear whether there are any direct links between the tamarind trees cultivated there and the property of tamarind (as glossed in the place names).

### 5.6. *muur* ‘lemon’ (*Citrus limon*)

Abui places have been named after *muur* ‘lemon’ (or in some alternative translations by locals, ‘citrus’) (see Table 7). Some toponyms like *Muur Maasang* ‘sanctuary/ altar lemon’ and *Muurafang* ‘old lemon village’ depict an attribute of lemon or the place, although toponyms blending two horticultural sources, like *Muur Mea* ‘mango lemon’, and place names indicating generic landscape properties, like *Muur Meelang* ‘lemon village’, have been recorded. Local speakers have an explanation to ‘decipher’ the seemingly inconsistent gloss of *Muur Maasang* ‘sanctuary/ altar lemon’.

*Muur Maasang*

Muur  
‘Lemon (or citrus)’

Maa                      sang  
'Cooked'                'Ripe'

**Table 7.** Abui toponyms derived from *muur* 'lemon'

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of lemon
1	<i>Muur Mea</i>	mango lemon	Village	North Alor	Yes
2	<i>Muur Maasang</i>	sanctuary/ altar lemon	Village	North Alor	Yes
3	<i>Muurafang</i>	old lemon village	Village	North Alor	Unattested
4	<i>Muur Meelang</i>	lemon village	Village	North Alor	Yes

Locals explain that the lemon (or citrus tree) was surrounded by stones, therefore creating the impression of *maasang* 'sanctuary'. At this juncture, we need to, for clarity and for completeness of information, highlight the difference between two terms describing villages – *afeeng* and *meelang* – in the Abui language. The suffix of *Muurafang* could be derived from *afeeng* 'village'. *Afeeng* is the oldest Abui term for 'settlement' and derives from the proto-Alor-Pantar (pAP) form *\*haban* 'village'. This pAP form has been modified by a widespread and regular Abui sound change where pAP *\*-b-* = Abui *-f-* (and thus *\*haban* → *afeeng*). Today, *afeeng* refers to a hamlet or a small village<sup>60</sup>. In contrast, the most common Abui word for village, *meelang* (as found in *Muur Meelang* 'lemon village'), possibly originates from a semantic shift from the proto-Central-Alor term *\*mila* 'field'<sup>61</sup>. All four place names belong to villages located in North Alor. Excluding *Muurafang* 'old lemon village', lemon trees and/or fruits are found in all the other villages.

### 5.7. *soong* 'jackfruit' (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*)

Two places derive from *soong* 'jackfruit', in our toponymic sample, namely *Soong Meelang* 'jackfruit village' and *Soong Pet* 'jackfruit bow' (see Table 8). These places are a village and field respectively where jackfruits are found.

**Table 8.** Abui toponyms derived from *soong* 'jackfruit'

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of jackfruit
1	<i>Soong Meelang</i>	jackfruit village	Village	North-west Alor	Yes
2	<i>Soong Pet</i>	jackfruit bow	Field	North-central Alor	Yes

### 5.8. *kalang* 'kusum/ cussambium tree' (*Schleichera oleosa*)

A handful of toponyms derive from *kalang* 'kusum/ cussambium tree' (see Table 9). Majority of the places named after *kalang* make reference to landscape features like villages or slopes. These include *Kalang Meelang* 'cussambium village' and *Kalang Watika* 'cussambium on slope'. The practice of combining an agricultural plant with a

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F., Kratochvíl, F., (2015), cit., p. 42; Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., p. 90.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., p. 90.

horticultural plant in a place name is also witnessed in *Kalangfaat* ‘corn in cussambium trees’. Like *Muur Maasang*, *Kalang Maasang* was also enclosed by stones, being a local sanctuary. Most places are villages, although a whole settlement has also been called *Kalangfaat*. Abui toponyms derived from *kalang* are also evenly distributed across North, Central, and West Alor. Many toponyms bearing the root *kalang* match with the presence of kusum trees. The primary exception is *Kalangfaat*, where cussambium trees can no longer be found in the area as many trees have been removed for resettlement.

**Table 9.** Abui toponyms derived from *kalang* ‘kusum/ cussambium tree’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of kusum tree
1	<i>Kalang Meelang</i>	cussambium village	Village	North Alor	Yes
2	<i>Kalang Maasang</i>	cussambium sanctuary	Village	Central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Kalangfaat</i>	corn in cussambium trees	Settlement AND Village	Settlement: West Alor Village: North-west Alor	No
4	<i>Kalang Watika</i>	cussambium on slope	Field	North Alor	Yes

### 5.9. *ayak* ‘rice’ (*Oryza sativa*)

*Ayak* ‘rice’ is historically a widespread agricultural toponymic source<sup>62</sup>. However, only one field bearing the root *ayak* has been documented in our toponymic sample (see Table 10). Ostensibly, this place naming pattern is of sound logic since rice is cultivated in *padi* fields, or areas in Southeast Asia where rice is grown. It is interesting that the voiceless velar stop of *ayak* becomes a voiceless uvular stop in the toponym *Ayaqlei* ‘step over rice’. Besides, the place name has an intriguing gloss, ‘step over rice’, which seems to have an anecdotal etymology although no oral story or etymological explanation have been reported thus far.

**Table 10.** Abui toponyms derived from *ayak* ‘rice’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of rice
1	<i>Ayaqlei</i>	step over rice	Field	Central Alor	Yes

### 5.10. *daa* ‘cassava’ (*Manihot esculenta*)

Cassavas are a staple in the diet of the Abui people<sup>63</sup>. Two toponyms derive from *daa* ‘cassava’ in our database (see Table 11). They are *Daafuku* ‘a traced lane in the forest where tuber/ yams grow’ and *Daalelang* lit. ‘cassava kins’. The etymology of *Daafuku* is fascinating; *daa* refers to ‘cassava’ while *fuku* means ‘wild pig’s or deer’s traced lane to be trapped (by hunters)’. Although it is unknown how wild pigs or deer are

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., (2007), cit., p. 3.

associated with *Daafuku*, one plausible theory is that local men, when hunting for wild pigs or deers, hide in the bush of the cassava plants at *Daafuku*, before shooting an arrow at their prey. In *Daalelang*, we can observe the blending of an agricultural plant, *daa* ‘cassava’, with a kinship article, *lelang* ‘kin’. *Lelang* refers to an allied congenial kin group or relatives. It is possible that people living in *Daalelang* are related to each other or trace their roots to a common ancestor. This toponym highlights that Abui place names can be used as an attestation of kinship ties, a theme that also features prominently in the *tira* tales<sup>64</sup>. Both place names refer to fields found in North-central Alor. Cassavas grow in these places, with many cassava plants growing in *Daalelang* as most of its residents cultivate the crop.

**Table 11.** Abui toponyms derived from *daa* ‘cassava’

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of cassava
1	<i>Daafuku</i>	a traced lane in the forest where tuber/ yams grow	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Daalelang</i>	lit. cassava kins	Field	North-central Alor	Yes

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the present research is a fieldwork report and linguistic analysis of local toponymy in the context of an endangered and undocumented language in South-East Indonesia. This paper tries to determine the relationship between plants and place names in the Abui area of Alor Island, derived from the millenary link among Abui people, their landscape, and agriculture. The data gleaned from this study supports previous research of a direct linkage between agricultural and horticultural plants and place names.

According to our survey, many Abui toponyms are named after agricultural and horticultural species found in the Alor landscape, with *mea* ‘mango’, *wata* ‘coconut’, and *kanaai* ‘canarium’ being the foremost toponymic sources. A fair number of toponyms also derive from *tamal* ‘tamarind’, *muur* ‘lemon’, *kalang* ‘kusum/ cussambium tree’, while a few places are originated from *fiyaa* ‘candlenut’, *soong* ‘jackfruit’, *ayak* ‘rice’, and *daa* ‘cassava’. According to our study, most toponyms describe either basic landscape concepts and categories or include adjectives highlighting traits of the related plant. Some place names, like *Kanaai Pea* ‘nearby canarium’, *Kanaai Awee Pe* ‘near top of canarium’, and *Kanaai Tuku Pe* ‘near canarium stump’, are connected with the short distance of the places from the related species. Occasionally, like in the case of *Fiyaa Lelang* ‘lit. candlenut kins’, researchers can observe how place names also serve the role of affirming kinship ties. In naming places, in Abui the names of plants are compounded with other species (mostly *mea* ‘mango’) or common nouns for settlements like *melang* ‘settlement’ or ‘village’ and *afeeng* ‘hamlet’ or ‘small village’. This study also shows that most of the Abui place naming trends are transparent, with places named after the agricultural or horticultural plants cultivated in the landscape. However, in the absence of such plants, oral stories have been developed and are used by native-speakers to fill the void of information. This is consistent with the argument that oral stories are adopted to explain the etymological

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Kratochvíl, F., Delpada, B., Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2016), cit., *passim*.

origins and meanings of Abui place names. It is worth noting that oral traditions are also recorded even when the place has an abundance of the plant connected with the related place name (see the example of *Wata Tuku* lit. ‘coconut stump’), thereby displaying the strength of ancestral oral traditions in Abui culture.

Finally, this research can be a possible starting point for further studies on plants and place names in the Abui context. As most place names documented here are concentrated in North and North-central Alor, it would be surely worth investigating whether such trends are observed in other parts of Alor Island or even in other places in Alor where other Papuan languages, connected with Abui, are spoken. Additional research can also be done on the impact of other plants, such as those used in building, clothing, etc., and their names on toponyms in the Papuan and Austronesian linguistic contexts (especially in a linguistic border area like the Alor-Pantar Archipelago). This will lend a well-rounded dimension to scholarly research on Abui people, language, culture, and also contribute to other fields like aboriginal Toponymy and the Botany of South-East Indonesia.

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**Appendix A.** Full list of toponyms derived from horticulture and agriculture plants  
(correct as of 08 October 2019)

<b>1. mea ‘mango’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of mango</b>
1	<i>Meabuung</i>	mango ravine	Village	North-west Alor	Yes
2	<i>Mea Takuukul</i>	lit. tangled mango	Village	North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Mealati</i>	twisted mango	Field AND Village	North-central Alor	Yes
4	<i>Mea Meelang</i>	mango village	Village	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Mea Kilikil</i>	idle mango	Field	North-central Alor	No
6	<i>Mea Ron Lohu</i>	lit. straight long mango (tree)	Field	North-central Alor	No
7	<i>Mea Munuma</i>	lit. fragrant mango	Field	North-central Alor	No
8	<i>Mea Malieng Pe</i>	lit. near a type of mango	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
9	<i>Mea Lulang</i>	lit. mango resting place	Plain resting place	North-central Alor	Yes
<b>2. wata ‘coconut’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of coconut</b>
1	<i>Wata Meelang</i>	coconut village	Village	North-central Alor Central-west Alor West Alor	Yes
2	<i>Wata Kiika</i>	red coconut	Village AND Field	Village: North-west Alor Field: North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Wata Mea</i>	lit. coconut mango	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
4	<i>Wata Fuui</i>	lit. coconut plain	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Wata Puti</i>	lit. coconut grove	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
6	<i>Wata Tuku</i>	lit. coconut stump	Village	Central-west Alor	Yes
<b>3. fiyaa ‘candlenut’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of candlenut</b>
1	<i>Fiyaa</i>	lit. candlenut kins	Village	North-central	Yes

	<i>Lelang</i>			Alor	
2	<i>Fiyaai Mea</i>	lit. mango candlenut	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
<b>4. kanaai ‘canarium’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of canarium</b>
1	<i>Kanaai Loohu</i>	long canarium	Field	Central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Kanaai Sua</i>	triplet canarium	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Kanaai Pea</i>	nearby canarium	Village	Central Alor	Yes
4	<i>Kanaai Kaai</i>	gluttonous (to eat) canary (nut)	Field	Central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Kanaai Awee Pe</i>	near top of canarium	Field	Central Alor	Yes
6	<i>Kanaai Hoong Tuku</i>	canarium tree stump	Field	Central Alor	Yes
7	<i>Kanaai Ron Loohu</i>	long straight canarium (tree)	Field	Central Alor	Yes
8	<i>Kanaai Tuku Pe</i>	near canarium stump	Field	Central Alor	Yes
<b>5. tamaal ‘tamarind’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of tamarind</b>
1	<i>Tamal Liiki</i>	cruel tamarind	Field AND Settlement	North-central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Tamal Raloowang</i>	sweet tamarind	Field AND Settlement	North Alor AND North-central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Tamal Pataga</i>	thin tamarind	Field	North Alor	Yes
4	<i>Tamal Atiing</i>	jungle of tamarind (tree)	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
5	<i>Tamal Afeeng</i>	tamarind village	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
<b>6. muur ‘lemon’</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Toponym</b>	<b>English gloss</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Presence of lemon</b>
1	<i>Muur Mea</i>	mango lemon	Village	North Alor	Yes
2	<i>Muur Maasang</i>	sanctuary/ altar lemon	Village	North Alor	Yes
3	<i>Muurafang</i>	old lemon village	Village	North Alor	Unattested
4	<i>Muur Meelang</i>	lemon village	Village	North Alor	Yes
<b>7. soong ‘jackfruit’</b>					

No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of jackfruit
1	<i>Soong Meelang</i>	jackfruit village	Village	North-west Alor	Yes
2	<i>Soong Pet</i>	jackfruit bow	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
<b>8. kalang 'kusum/ cussambium tree'</b>					
No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of kusum tree
1	<i>Kalang Meelang</i>	cussambium village	Village	North Alor	Yes
2	<i>Kalang Maasang</i>	cussambium sanctuary	Village	Central Alor	Yes
3	<i>Kalangfaat</i>	corn in cussambium trees	Settlement AND Village	Settlement: West Alor Village: North-west Alor	No
4	<i>Kalang Watika</i>	cussambium on slope	Field	North Alor	Yes
<b>9. ayak 'rice'</b>					
No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of rice
1	Ayaqlei	step over rice	Field	Central Alor	Yes
<b>10. daa 'cassava'</b>					
No.	Toponym	English gloss	Type	Location	Presence of cassava
1	<i>Daafuku</i>	a traced lane in the forest where tuber/ yams grow	Field	North-central Alor	Yes
2	<i>Daalelang</i>	lit. cassava kins	Field	North-central Alor	Yes

