



MYTHICAL PLACE NAMES: NAMING PROCESS AND ORAL TRADITION IN INDONESIAN TOPONYMY

Francesco PERONO CACCIAFOCO

Nanyang Technological University (NTU), College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CoHASS), School of Humanities (SoH), Linguistics and Multilingual Studies Programme (LMS), Singapore

Email: fcacciafoco@ntu.edu.sg

Nurlena BINTE ADZMAN

Nanyang Technological University (NTU), College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CoHASS), School of Humanities (SoH), Linguistics and Multilingual Studies Programme (LMS), Singapore

Email: nurlena001@e.ntu.edu.sg

Nur Shahirah BTE SHARIN

Nanyang Technological University (NTU), College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CoHASS), School of Humanities (SoH), Linguistics and Multilingual Studies Programme (LMS), Singapore

Email: nurshahi001@e.ntu.edu.sg

***Abstract:** Indonesian toponymy is a largely unexplored field. By applying a convergent approach based on Historical Toponomastics, Field Linguistics, and Cultural Anthropology, this paper tries to reconstruct the origins and original meanings of four Indonesian place names. The study analyzes the development of the four toponyms both in the light of (historical) written sources and through the lens of local tales and oral traditional stories collected directly (in their different versions) on the field. In this toponymic reconstruction, therefore, Anthropological Linguistics and Language Documentation converge, with the aim to provide a comprehensive study focused not only on the origins of the analyzed place names, but also on the cultural and traditional heritage of Indonesian people that can be unveiled behind local toponymy. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to provide an initial paradigm for the historical reconstruction of Indonesian place names, representing a potential starting point for further studies on this relevant field in Historical Toponomastics.*



Key words: Indonesian Toponymy, Banyuwangi, Danau Toba, Lampung, Gunung Rinjani, Historical Toponomastics and Anthropological Linguistics, Place Names in Oral Traditional Stories, Diachronic Toponymy and Language Documentation

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian toponymy is a fascinating field in Historical Toponomastics. Being largely unexplored in their origins and original meanings, Indonesian place names, when analytically reconstructed, allow unveiling an invaluable traditional and cultural heritage belonging to Indonesian people. Due to historical reasons, to the – sometimes alarming – lack of reliable sources (and related studies), and to the vastness of Indonesia, Indonesian toponymy is still a multicolored puzzle for scholars, associating different cultural backgrounds, populations, territories, languages, and historical events. This paper tries to reconstruct the origins of four Indonesian place names. The toponymic analysis is based on available written sources and on language documentation data and reports collected and developed working directly on the field, by recovering and recording local oral tales and traditional stories (in their different versions). The aim of this paper is to provide an initial paradigm for the reconstruction of Indonesian historical and diachronic toponymy, possibly becoming one of the starting points for further studies on this still largely unexplored field.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper tries to shed some light on the origins and original meanings of four Indonesian place names through a bidirectional approach. The study analyzes, on the one hand, available (very limited, unfortunately) documentary sources, reconstructing, on the other, local stories and oral traditional tales collected directly on the field, through a Language Documentation approach. The association of Historical Linguistics (specifically Historical Toponomastics), Field Linguistics (Language Documentation), Cultural Anthropology, and Anthropological Linguistics methodologies generates a wide-ranging analysis taking into account not only historical sources, but also the extremely rich Indonesian cultural and traditional heritage, in order to provide a comprehensive reconstruction, based on all the available materials. This paper is mainly focused on ‘primary’ (‘first-hand’) sources. For this reason, the list of references of this study is rather limited, one of the aims of this paper being, indeed, to be a ‘primary’ source in itself for the reconstruction of a specific ‘branch’ of Indonesian toponymy connected with myths, legends, folklore, traditional tales, and oral stories.

3. INDONESIA

Indonesia owns a very rich heritage of culturally significant folk-tales that try to explain, according to a ‘legendary perspective’, how specific place names have been originated, mostly through events that could be defined ‘mythical’. Atavistic beliefs in white and black magic, as well as traditional stories on legendary creatures, genies, and a number of imaginary characters (with many divergent and convergent cultural

influences), are closely interwoven with local toponymy. In the XVI century, Indonesia was variably referred to as the “East Indies”, “Indochina”, “Indian Subcontinent”, and “Nusantara” (the latter in Bahasa Indonesia)¹. The toponym *Nusantara*, ‘archipelago’, should derive from two Javanese words: *nusa*, meaning ‘island’ (Ancient Greek *νήσος*), and *antero*, meaning ‘as a whole’. In the XIX century, Indonesia was also referred to as the “Malay Archipelago”, “Indian Archipelago”, and the “Indo-Australian Archipelago”. The toponym *Indonesia* was officially used as the name of the country during the XVIII century², before the independence of the nation.

Indonesia is divided into 34 provinces, located along the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The place name *Indonesia* itself derives from Ancient Greek *Ἰνδονησία* and was coined by George Windsor Earl, a British Ethnologist, in 1850³. The word *Ἰνδονησία* originates from the combination of the hydronym *Ἰνδός*, the name of the Indus River (extensively understood as ‘Indian’), and *νήσος*, meaning ‘island’, vaguely intended as a plural, ‘islands’, in *-νησία*. *Indonesia* means, therefore, “Indian Islands”, since, according to the coinage of the toponym, these “Indian Islands” ‘making’ Indonesia are located right next to the Indian Ocean⁴.

4. FOUR ‘MYTHICAL’ INDONESIAN PLACE NAMES

4.1. *Banyuwangi*

The name of the Indonesian *Banyuwangi* Regency (geographic coordinates: 8°10'8"S 113°42'8"E; administrative capital city: Banyuwangi) is Javanese and means ‘fragrant water’. It derives from a Javanese folklore tale. Banyuwangi is located in the Easternmost Java Province, West of Bali. It is the largest Javanese Regency. Previously called *Blambangan* (*Balambangan*)⁵, it is said to have been founded in 1771⁶. Native inhabitants of Banyuwangi are called Banyuwanginese people. They speak their own dialect, which combines Javanese and Balinese.

The oral traditional story at the origins of the toponym *Banyuwangi* was already popular in the time of the Majapahit Kingdom (1293-1527)⁷. The tale is told as a song, precisely a *kidung*, a poem sung or chanted (a ballad) in Javanese poetry (Low Javanese *tembang*). The *Kidung Sri Tanjung* (“The Ballad of Sri Tanjung”) is often part of Javanese ceremonies. The name *Sri Tanjung* has been linked, over time, to the *Tanjung* tree (*Mimusops elengi*), well-known for its sweet fragrance⁸. According to the traditional story, the region of Banyuwangi was led by King Prabu Sulahkromo, who was assisted by a noble hero, whose name was Patih Sidospekso (Raden Sidapaksa in some variants of the legend). King Prabu Sulahkromo fell in love with Patih Sidospekso’s wife, Sri Tanjung, because of her divine beauty and her ladylike manners.

¹ Cf. Echols, J.M., Shadily, H., (1989), s.v. *Nusantara*.

² Cf. Friend, T., (2003), *passim*.

³ Cf. Earl, G.S.W., (1850), pp. 119-278.

⁴ Cf. Tomascik, T., Mah, J.A., Nontji, A., Moosa, M.K., (1997), *passim*.

⁵ Cf. Margana, S., (2007), *passim*.

⁶ Cf. Vickers, A., (2007), *passim*.

⁷ Cf. Ricklefs, M.C., (1993), *passim*.

⁸ Cf. Prijono, (1938), *passim*.

The king was determined to ‘steal’ Patih Sidospekso’s wife; he wanted to seduce her, persuading her, at the same time, to marry him. With this aim, he sent Patih Sidospekso to an impossible mission, in order to be sure he would have died. The hero had to go to Svargaloka, the Heaven, with a message for the gods. But the message was: “The bearer of this letter will attack the Svargaloka”, and Patih Sidospekso was not allowed to read it, remaining unaware of the contents of the letter.

While Patih Sidospekso was struggling to complete the tough mission (it was almost impossible, for human beings, to reach the Heaven), King Prabu Sulahkromo persistently contrived all ways to seduce Sri Tanjung. However, since she remained faithful to her husband and always rejected the king, to the point that he also tried to rape her, King Sulahkromo became furious against Sri Tanjung and planned his revenge. In the meantime, Patih Sidospekso had reached the Heaven, handing the king’s message to the gods. They immediately attacked him. Despite the initial ‘shock’, the hero was able to resist and to explain to the gods that he was not an enemy. The gods trusted his words and freed him, giving him a magic weapon. When Patih Sidospekso returned from his mission, he reported directly to his king. King Prabu Sulahkromo, seeking for revenge, attacked Sri Tanjung with the false accusation of conjugal infidelity, convincing Patih Sidospekso that his wife tried to flirt with him and to seduce him immediately after the hero left for his mission.

Persuaded by the king’s story, Patih Sidospekso, blinded by anger, confronted his wife, accusing her to have been unfaithful. He raged again when Sri Tanjung tried to prove her innocence, and he was so upset to the point of threatening the life of his loyal wife, dragging her to a murky river bank. He wanted to kill her. Sri Tanjung swore for her innocence, pleading Patih Sidospekso to believe in her. But, when she realized that her husband wanted to kill her, she asked him to throw her dead body in the murky river. However, she continued to assert to be innocent, adding, as a proof of her loyalty and honesty, that if her blood would have made fetid the water of the river, then it would have been the confirmation of her alleged affair with the king; conversely, if her blood would have produced a sweet fragrance, it would have meant that she was innocent. Patih Sidospekso raged further and sank his dagger into the chest of his wife, throwing her cadaver into the murky river.

As soon as the Sri Tanjung dead body plunged into the river, the water became immediately clear and a sweet fragrance started to spread from there. Patih Sidospekso realized that his wife was honest and innocent and deeply regretted his actions. He sorrowfully shouted: “*Banyu wangi! Banyu wangi!*”, meaning “Fragrant water! Fragrant water!” The soul of Sri Tanjung ascended to the Heaven. There, the great goddess Durga⁹, after having known of her sad destiny, resurrected Sri Tanjung, reuniting her with Patih Sidospekso. The gods told the hero he would have had to revenge and punish Prabu Sulahkromo. Patih Sidospekso defeated the king (with the help of his magic weapon), killing him in an epic battle. The tradition connects this myth with the name of the place where it is believed to have happened, with a link, in the naming process, between the Sri Tanjung perfumed blood and the place name *Banyuwangi* (*banyu* + *wangi*), the capital of Blambangan Kingdom (now Banyuwangi Regency), which would mean “(The) Fragrant Water”. In Javanese, indeed, *banyu* means ‘water’ and *wangi* means ‘fragrant’, with a direct link to the legend of Sri Tanjung¹⁰.

⁹ Cf. Amazzone, L., (2012), pp. 3-9, and 14-16.

¹⁰ Cf. Margana, S., (2007), cit., *passim*.

4.2. *Danau Toba*

The Lake Toba, in Indonesian *Danau Toba* (geographic coordinates: 2°47'09.6"N 98°36'57.6"E), is a natural prehistoric lake that occupies the caldera of a super-volcano¹¹. The lake, located in Northern Sumatra, has been the site of a huge super-volcanic eruption occurred between 77,000 and 69,000 years ago, at the origins of a significant climate change¹². It was the largest known explosive eruption on our planet in the last 25 million years. Lake Toba is the largest volcanic lake in the world and the largest body of water in Indonesia. A volcanic island, called *Samosir*, rises from the waters of the lake.

Batak people are the native inhabitants of the Lake Toba territory. In Bahasa Indonesia, *danau* means 'lake', while the meaning of *toba* is unclear, even if it is associated with the word *tuba*, 'ungrateful'. According to archaeo-geological studies, Toba Lake originated from the above mentioned super-volcanic eruption of Samosir Island, currently located in the middle of Danau Toba¹³. However, Batak people have their own traditional stories on the origins of the lake and of its name, and those stories differ from scientific explanations, even though they are howsoever linked to a natural catastrophe.

According to a legend, the area of Lake Toba was, originally, a lush farmland. A farmer called Toba discovered in that territory a fertile valley and settled down there, near a very small lake. He built a farm, living in a hut. He was used to fish for hours in the waters of the lake, till the arrival of the night. He did not get married, being very contented with his life and home. However, with the passing of time, he realized that he was lonely, he felt sad, but he did not think to look for a life partner.

One day, after having worked in his fields, he went fishing to have something to eat for dinner. Despite waiting for a long time, he was unable to catch any fish. However, he did not give up. After some time, the fishing line started to move. It was a fish. He was able to take the fish, joyfully throwing it in his fish basket. He did not know to have caught a very special fish. Toba went home. The fish was big and beautiful and the farmer was already foretasting his dinner. At home, he wanted to set a fire to cook the fish. However, he realized he forgot the woods. He went out to collect some woods, leaving the fish in the kitchen, inside the basket. When he was home again, he did not find anymore the fish in the basket. The fish was disappeared, leaving only some scales similar to golden nuggets. Toba was very surprised.

Moving to the bedroom, he was scared, since someone was there. He found a beautiful girl with long hair. She was lying in his bed. The girl looked at Toba. He was shocked and speechless. The beauty of the girl was otherworldly. The girl asked Toba to turn on a lamp, since it was almost dark. Toba was very scared, but he had still the strength to turn on his lamp. The girl asked him not to fear her. She did not want to hurt him. Toba asked her if she was a genie. The girl, smiling, explained to him to be the incarnation of the fish he caught in the afternoon. She had observed him for a long time, till she decided to be taken by him from the waters. Toba was incredulous. The girl asked him again not to be scared and offered to stay with him and to help him in the

¹¹ Cf. Rampino, M.R., Self, S., (1993), pp. 269-280.

¹² Cf. Ninkovich, D., Shackleton, N.J., Abdel-Monem, A.A., Obradovich, J.D., Izett, G., (1978), pp. 574-577.

¹³ Cf. Chesner, C.A., Westgate, J.A., Rose, W.I., Drake, R., Deino, A., (1991), pp. 200-203.

housework. Toba felt happy and accepted. The girl told him that the golden nuggets were her scales. Then, she went to the kitchen to prepare dinner for Toba. The girl and Toba shared all the moments of their days together for some time. Toba was very happy. He decided to ask the girl to marry him. She accepted to become his wife as well as to bear him children. However, she gave him a condition to become his wife. Toba would have had to keep the secret of the original form of the girl. No one would have had to know that the girl was, originally, a fish. Toba agreed with that. He swore. They got married. They were happy, together, and they loved each other. After some time, the girl gave birth to a child, a boy. He was named Samosir. The girl (now become a woman) and Toba were very happy.

Time passed. The woman was so sweet with her son, to the point that he became a spoiled child. He did not want to help Toba in the farm and in the fields. He became very lazy. One day, the woman had some additional homework to do and asked Samosir to bring the lunch to his father (generally the mother was bringing the lunch to her husband). But Samosir refused. He wanted to play, instead of going to bring the lunch to his father. His mother was very angry and told him that, if he would not have brought the lunch to his father, she would not have cooked the lunch for him. Samosir felt forced, therefore, to obey his mother. He left, to bring the lunch to his father, complaining, since he wanted to play. On the way, he slowly ate the lunch of his father, since he was hungry, and only a small part of the lunch was left for Toba. Then, the child ate also that part.

In the meantime, Toba decided to stop a moment his work and to rest under a tree, since the sun was becoming very hot. He was thirsty and hungry and surprised that his wife was not yet there with his lunch. He became angry and nervous. When he saw someone in the distance, he was expecting the arrival of his wife. He was surprised to see Samosir and he asked him why his mother did not come. The child answered his mother was busy and that she asked him to bring the lunch. He gave Toba the lunch. But the farmer got only an empty basket, since Samosir had eaten everything. Toba was very angry and asked his son why the lunch was disappeared. Samosir, scared, told the truth, he had eaten the lunch, since he was very hungry. Toba scolded heavily Samosir, who apologized in vain. Toba was really angry. He accused Samosir to be lazy and useless. He was so infuriated that he did not refrain himself from saying something forbidden. He told Samosir he was behaving like a little animal and that it was because his mother had spoiled him. He told him he was naughty. And that it was because his mother was a fish. And, therefore, Samosir was like her. Then, he sent his son away from there.

Toba did not realize to have revealed the original nature of his wife and to have committed a forbidden act. Samosir went back very hurt, crying. His mother asked him why he was crying. He told his mother what happened and repeated to her the Toba's sentence about the fish. Toba's wife was very sad and hugely angry with her husband. He had broken his oath to her. The woman tried to calm down Samosir. Then, she told him something unexpected. The child would have had to climb the highest tree of the farm and to stay there. She told him that soon a big flood would have devastated the valley, which would have sunk, disappearing. Samosir was astonished, but his mother told him to obey her without questioning. Samosir climbed the farm's highest tree, staying there. His mother was desperate, since she was thinking Toba did not love her anymore. She thought he was changed, since he did not care to break his oath to her. She felt she had not reason to live and decided to commit suicide, diving into the small

lake. Her desire was to return, in death, to her origin, the water. The sky became suddenly dark and a huge rain, with never seen before lightning strikes and thunders, began to fall. As prophesied by the woman, the heavy rain originated a huge flood. The valley ceased to exist, replaced by a large lake.

Toba, who was still in the fields, was dragged away by the waters and died. Also Samosir died. Despite he was on the highest tree, waters overwhelmed him too, killing him. His floating body was mercifully changed by the gods into an island, which was called *Pulau Samosir*, the “Samosir Island”. The whole valley was swallowed up by the waters and replaced by a huge lake that was named after Toba the farmer. That lake is *Danau Toba*, the “Toba Lake”. Another (complementary, but different) version of this oral traditional story shows some significant variants. That version tells that after the marriage of the girl with Toba the family grew, having a happy life, with two sons. Each day the father and his sons attended to their farming work in the harsh conditions of Sumatra, while the faithful wife was bringing them lunch and cool water to drink, spending, then, her time with them, talking and laughing with her family.

One day, while she was preparing lunch for her husband and sons, she had an accident in the kitchen and she attended to her wounds before heading off to deliver food and water to her family. However, her husband turned impatient and furious when she did not appear at the usual time of the day when they most needed food and water. Father and sons continued working, but, as time passed, Toba became more tired, intolerant, and nervous, being very hungry and almost fully dehydrated because of the sun. Unavoidably, he raged and vent out his anger by yelling to his sons that their mother was not being a faithful wife and that he was a stupid man, having married a fish. As soon as he broke his oath, his wife was instantaneously transformed back into a fish, diving back into the small lake that ran along the farm. Being suddenly changed into a fish, the woman realized that her husband had broken the oath. She was grief-stricken, since it would have been impossible, to her, to see her family again for the rest of her life. She cried miserably, being inconsolable. Her tears were so copious and uninterrupted to the point to entirely fill the valley, submerging all the places and originating the huge *Danau Toba*, the Toba Lake.

As shown by the two versions of the legend, the name of the lake derives, apparently, from the name of the main character of this traditional story, the farmer Toba. However, it is possible, if not probable, that the direction of the naming process is the opposite one. The farmer has been named *Toba*, in the legend, in order to give an explanation to the name of the lake. As mentioned above, the word *tuba* means ‘ungrateful’ and can be connected with the character of the farmer, who was unable to respect the oath to his wife, showing ingratitude towards her and their family. This strategy in storytelling could configure an explanation *ex post* for the hydronym, quite common in Indonesian legends involving place names and the ‘mythical’ etymology, provided by local speakers, of their origins¹⁴. The fact that the name *Toba* was given to the farmer of the legend to explain the hydronym *Danau Toba* could be also confirmed by the existence, in the area of Toba Lake, of a Batak ethnic group called “Toba people”, also known as the “Batak Toba people”. They are the main Batak people of North Sumatra, predominantly living in the Toba Samosir Regency (Tobasa), besides Lake Toba¹⁵. Paleo-anthropological findings state that human presence in Sumatra is attested at least from 6,500 years ago. However, it was around 2,500 years ago that

¹⁴ Cf., for example, Perono Cacciafoco, F., Cavallaro, F.P., (2017), pp. 51-61.

¹⁵ Cf. Ter Keurs, P., Niessen, S., de Monbrison, C., Martin, S., (2008), *passim*.

Austronesian speakers entered Sumatra from Taiwan and the Philippines, passing through Borneo and Java. It seems that Batak people, despite having been considered isolated populations, probably descend from these Austronesian settlers. While Neolithic inhabitants, as just mentioned, are attested in Sumatra (predominantly in the Southern part of the island), it is possible that the Northern part of Sumatra was settled by farmers at a considerably later stage¹⁶.

Toba, in any case, seems to be a very ancient ethnonym, connected also with the title “King of Toba”, which should predate the other title “King of Batak”. The diachronic reconstruction of this hydronym depends from the chronology of the name / word *Toba / tuba*. The legend explaining the name of the Toba Lake shows interesting tracks of a remote past that could be connected with prehistoric times or with the origins of the Batak Toba people.

4.3. Lampung

Oral traditions linked to remote memories of eruptions in the Toba Lake area are elements of another local legend explaining the origins of another Indonesian place name, *Lampung*. Lampung (geographic coordinates: 5°27'S 105°16'E) is an Indonesian province located at the far South of Sumatra. Its administrative capital city is Bandar Lampung. Lampung people (*Ulun Lampung*) are indigenous of the region. They speak their own language and use a local writing system, the *Had Lampung*¹⁷.

The Lampung territory is volcanic and geologically instable. The most famous volcano in the area is the Krakatoa (that originated, among others, the 1883 catastrophic eruption). It is natural, therefore, that local legends are connected with eruptions and earthquakes. However, an oral myth explaining the origins of the toponym *Lampung* is not directly linked to the volcanoes of the Lampung area, but, as mentioned, to a ‘legendary’ eruption of the prehistoric volcano located in the Toba Lake territory.

According to the local myth, in remote times, a volcanic eruption devastated the area of Tapanoeli (possibly the current Central Tapanuli Regency, located in Northern Sumatra, on the Western coast). Many villagers died due to the violent and catastrophic eruption. However, a few people managed to save themselves from the disaster. The eruption, according to the legend, was the geological event at the origins of Lake Toba (Danau Toba). Among those who were able to save themselves, there were four siblings: Ompung Silamponga, Ompung Silitonga, Ompung Silatoa, and Ompung Sintalaga. They fled to the South-East, escaping from Tapanoeli. They rode on a raft along the West coast of the Swarnadwipa Island, now known as Sumatra (*Swarna Dwipa* means “Island of Gold”, “Golden Island”).

They spent days floating aimlessly on their raft in the middle of the Ocean with depleting food supplies. Sometimes, they moored in abandoned lands along their journey, in order to hunt for food, before setting sail again. One day, Ompung Silamponga fell ill and his condition deteriorated over time. Nevertheless, he was determined to continue the journey. However, his three siblings felt tired. They decided to stop sailing. They alighted on an unnamed island and decided to let Ompung Silamponga to continue the journey on his own. They pushed the raft carrying the sick Ompung Silamponga into the sea and, slowly, the raft got carried further and further away by the waves. Ompung Silamponga was unconscious on the raft for a long time.

¹⁶ Cf. Bellwood, P., (1997), *passim*.

¹⁷ Cf. Pain, M. (Ed.), (1989), *passim*.

One day, he was awakened when the raft suddenly crashed into an unexplored land. He was surprised to find himself stranded on a beach surrounded by calm waves. Strangely, Ompung Silamponga was no longer feeling ill. He alighted from his raft and went to have a look around the island. At the same time, he had no idea how far he had travelled and where his siblings were. Over time, he grew fond of the place and decided to settle there. According to some versions of the story, that place was Krui, a town formerly located in the West Lampung Regency, now the administrative center of the new West Pesisir Regency, on the Western coast of Lampung. After settling there for quite a long time, Ompung decided to explore the island further. He walked into the forest and climbed the mounts. One day, he arrived at a mountain (possibly the Mount Pesagi – 2,262 meters above sea level –, the highest Lampung’s peak). He stood there overlooking the vast Ocean in the distance. He was really amazed by the beautiful scenery and he started shouting out: “*Lapping! Lapping! Lapping!*”. *Lapping* means ‘wide’, ‘vast’, in Tapanoeli language. Ompung descended the mountain and was determined to settle down within the area of that peak forever. After staying there for quite a long time, Ompung finally met some local villagers coming from the vicinity of the area he had chosen. They were still leading an underdeveloped and primitive life. He joined them.

Many years later, Ompung passed away in the village. The place is now known as Skala Berak or the Belalau Plateau in Western Lampung. Skala Berak is considered, by natives, to be the first village of the Lampung people. Its inhabitants were called the “Tumi people” or “Buay Tumi”. Some native-speakers believe that the toponym *Lampung* derives from the name of the hero of the story, *Ompung Silamponga*, with a series of phonetic passages and coordinate assonances producing the ‘mix’ and a sort of ‘macro-metathesis’ between **-pung* from *Ompung* and **-lam(p)-* from *Silamponga*. Other native-speakers, conversely, think that the place name *Lampung* originated from the exclamation uttered by Ompung Silamponga when he was standing on Mount Pesagi, overlooking the beautiful scenery in awe, *lapping* (with consonantal passage of the first /p/ into /m/), meaning ‘wide’, ‘vast’. The Lampung legend is another story featuring an eponymous hero giving the name to a place. It is often difficult, in Indonesian context, to establish if the story has been invented in order to provide an explanation of a toponym or if the toponym itself derives from the story that, therefore, in this second option, would predate it¹⁸.

4.4 *Gunung Rinjani*

Gunung Rinjani (Mount Rinjani, 3,726 meters above sea level, geographic coordinates: 8.414414°S 116.459767°E) is an active volcano¹⁹ located on the Lombok Island (one of the Lesser Sunda Islands), West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The volcano (rising in the Regency of North Lombok) is one of the most popular hiking destinations of that area, due to its beautiful landscape and scenery. The caldera is partially filled by a crater lake²⁰ known as Segara Anak or Anak Laut. *Anak Laut* means “Child of the Sea”. This micro-toponym derives from a specific characteristic of the water of the volcanic lake, which is as blue as the sea water (however, the water of the lake is not hydro-geologically connected with the sea). Hindu people, as well as Sasak people,

¹⁸ Cf. Perono Cacciafoco, F., (2015), pp. 1-9.

¹⁹ The last eruption of the volcano is quite recent, dating back to September 27, 2016.

²⁰ Cf. Foden, J.D., (1983), pp. 98-130.

consider sacred the volcano and the lake. Both areas are venues for occasional rituals. In Sanskrit, the word *rinjani* describes ‘a burning desire’. The association between the characteristic of ‘burning’ and the fact that Mount Rinjani is a volcano has been considered an evidence of Sanskrit origins for the oronym. However, this reconstruction is disputed and other possibilities can be taken into account.

Local people believe that *rinjani* is a native word from Jawa Kuno (the ancient Javanese language²¹), meaning ‘god’. According to this hypothesis, the volcano would have been considered a god (or the hypostasis of a god) by the original inhabitants. Another explanation of the oronym derives from an oral story²². According to the traditional tale, in ancient times, there was a royal princess, named Anjani, who was in love with a poor man. Her father, the king, disapproved their love. He opposed to their desire to marry and, in some versions of the legend, he sent hired assassins to kill the man Anjani loved. Princess Anjani, desperate, escaped to a mount in Lombok, disappearing from the world.

She spent the rest of her life meditating at the top of the mountain, becoming spiritual and venerable to the point that the genies of that *locus amœnus* crowned her as the ‘Queen of the Mountain’, making her a goddess. Her kingdom, the *Gunung Rinjani*, was named after her, *Anjani*. Local people and believers still celebrate Queen Anjani on Mount Rinjani through a ritual consisting in ideally freeing a golden fish into the Segara Anak Lake. A language documentation fieldwork conducted by the authors²³ of this paper in Lombok in the year 2008 has provided some additional interesting details on the oronym *Gunung Rinjani*. Some local native-speakers believe that the legendary Kingdom on Gunung Rinjani is real and that it still exists in the area of the mountain. However, according to the speakers, it could not be seen by the mortals, since it is part of another world belonging to another dimension. The Kingdom of Gunung Rinjani would be, therefore, another world within our world, a supernatural ‘realm’ where different types of genies live. Humans cannot see that mythical place with their eyes, unless they are able (thanks to their purity or to their knowledge or by accident) to cross over a mystical border, entering the other dimension. According to the speakers, the Kingdom of Gunung Rinjani would be ruled by mystical women, called *Dewi Rinjani* (*dewi* means ‘goddess’ / ‘goddesses’). Those goddesses / legendary women would be the offspring of Anjani, the first ‘Queen of the Mountain’. Several traditions converge, showing variants and (also significant) differences, in the process of explanation of this place name, by local people, through epichoric myths and local legends.

5. CONCLUSION

Indonesian toponymy is a widely unexplored field of study in Historical Toponomastics. The combination of various cultural backgrounds and traditions among different ethnic groups living in the vast territory of this Asian country offers an irreplaceable opportunity to study and document the toponymic stratigraphy of a macro-region by investigating the connections among local myths, cultural and linguistic contacts, atavistic legends, oral traditions, and intangible heritage and memories. In Indonesian context, the link between ancestral myths (witnessing the cultural identity of the different communities) and place names is strong and widespread. An

²¹ Cf. Zoetmulder, P.J., (1995), s.v. *rinjani*.

²² Cf., for a common, widespread paradigm, Knappert, J., (1977), *passim*.

²³ Interviews with local native-speakers were conducted by Nurlena Binte Adzman.

anthropological and anthropological-linguistic analysis of local legends, therefore, combined with the evaluation of the historical geography of territories and landscapes, can unveil the origins of the naming process of this ancient, fascinating toponymy.

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