

Mythical toponym of Biak as a guardian of self and environment

Hendrik Arwam *

Papua University.

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 28(01), 1350-1358

Publication history: Received on 03 September 2025; revised on 12 October 2025; accepted on 15 October 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.28.1.3504>

Abstract

Toponym or place names are cultural heritage that is rich in historical value, mythology, and local wisdom of the community. In the tradition of the Biak people, toponym not only serves as a marker of geographical location but also contains philosophical, religious, and ecological meanings. This research aims to describe the mythical toponym of Biak, analyze its role in safeguarding self (identity and spirituality) and the environment (conservation and ecology). The study employs a qualitative approach using ethnolinguistic and cultural hermeneutics methods. Data were obtained through literature review, interviews with customary leaders, and field observations. The results indicate that the mythical toponyms of Biak functions as a means of cultural education, a reinforcement of ethnic identity, and a social tool in maintaining environmental preservation. The values of local wisdom. what is contained within it can serve as a foundation for cultural preservation as well as an ecological strategy in the face of environmental degradation.

Keywords: Toponymy; Biak myth; Identity; Local wisdom; Environment

1. Introduction

Toponyms or place naming are a form of cultural representation that has been passed down through generations by local communities. In various parts of the world, place naming is often related to the history, myths, or beliefs of the local people. Similarly, in the Biak community in Papua, toponyms serve more than just geographical identification. They appear as symbols of myths, embody sacred values, and function to maintain the balance of the relationship between humans and nature.

In the context of the Biak community, toponyms are often related to ancestral myths, customary figures, historical events, or natural phenomena that are considered sacred. For example, place names associated with mythological creatures are believed to be guardians of certain areas and therefore should not be exploited carelessly. This shows that toponyms function as 'self-guardians' because they instill identity and life rules, and as 'environmental guardians' because they limit human behavior towards nature.

However, the currents of modernization, urbanization, and globalization have led to many toponyms being marginalized. The younger generation often no longer recognizes the origins of place names or the philosophical values behind them. This has the potential to erase cultural identity as well as the ecological wisdom contained in toponyms. Therefore, this research is important to document and analyze the role of Biak myth toponyms in maintaining self and environment.

The research problem formulation is as follows:

- What is the form of mythological toponyms in Biak society?

* Corresponding author: Hendrik Arwam

- What is the function of Biak mythological toponyms in self-preservation (identity, spirituality, and social aspects)?
- How do Biak mythological toponyms play a role in environmental preservation (ecology and conservation)?

The purpose of this research is to:

- Describe the forms of toponymy rooted in Biak myths.
- Analyze the function of toponymy in self-preservation.
- Explore the role of mythological toponymy in environmental conservation.

Toponymy as Cultural Representation Toponymy, or place names, is essentially a linguistic symbol that represents the relationship between humans and their environment. According to Tentor (2017), naming places in the context of Papuan society is not only denotative but also connotative, as it contains stories of ancestors, myths, and cultural values. From a semiotic perspective, toponymy can be seen as a sign that has layered meanings: as a geographic marker as well as a marker of social and spiritual identity.

Myths and Their Functions in Social Life Myths are traditional narratives believed to be true by their supporting communities. Eliade (1963) stated that myths are sacred stories that serve to explain the origins of the world, humanity, and natural phenomena. Myths are not merely fictional tales, but rather guidelines for life that provide legitimacy to belief systems, customs, and social rules.

Local Wisdom and Environmental Preservation Local wisdom is the values, knowledge, and traditional practices that are passed down through generations and function to maintain the balance of life. According to Keraf (2010), local wisdom is a form of ecological ethics that can serve as a foundation for environmental preservation. In traditional communities, toponyms related to myths often contain ecological rules, such as prohibitions against damaging sacred forests or fishing in certain areas.

2. Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical methods. The main focus of the study is to explore the cultural and ecological meanings of the mythological toponymy of Biak through the lenses of ethnolinguistics and cultural hermeneutics.

The research location is centered in Manokwari Regency, West Papua Province – in Papua. The data sources consist of:

- Primary data: interviews with traditional leaders, community elders, and local informants.
- Secondary data: literature in the form of books, articles, and ethnographic notes.

Data collection techniques:

- In-depth interviews.
- Participatory observation.
- Documentation study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Form of Biak Mythological Toponyms

3.1.1. *Toponyms based on ancestral figures.*

Alright, I will provide an example analysis of the form of toponym based on ancestors.

This type of analysis usually connects place names with the origins of ancestors, founding figures, or ancestors who are respected by the local community.

3.1.2. *Toponym Name: Kampung Mnukwar in Biak Language (Doreh Dialect)*

Linguistic Form of Mnukwar

The word comes from Biak language mnu = village, kwar = old and is a phrase that combines into one, namely: Mnukwar means old village.

Ancestral Origins

This name is associated with an early ancestor who opened the village. This ancestor is believed to be the 'mnukwar old village' that was first inhabited in that area, and then their descendants developed into the Mnukwar community

Function of the Toponym

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker connecting the present community with the founding ancestors of the village.

Original Meaning

The spread of inhabitants of the old village (mnukwar) originated from mnukwar and then spread to form several villages in various places in Teluk Doreh.

Culture/Social

Koreri is not just a toponym, but also the cosmology of the ancestors that shapes the religious identity of the Biak community.

3.1.3. *Toponym Name: Kampung Doreh Beba in Biak Language (doreh dialect)*

Linguistic Doreh beba form

The word origin from Biak doreh = village, kwar = Bay, and Beba = Wide/large/broad is a phrase that is combined into one, namely doreh beba which means Big Bay

Ancestor Origins

This name is associated with a first ancestor who traversed Doreh. This ancestor is believed to be 'Doreh beba' who was the first to cross this area, then told his descendants and developed among the residents of Mnukwar.

Toponym Function

This toponym serves as a genealogical and Geological marker of the area reached by the exploratory journeys that connect the current community with their explorer ancestors.

Original Meaning

The inhabitants of Big Bay (Doreh beba) are known as ocean explorers from the traversed routes of their ancestors in this area and dissected the traversed routes and confirmed that this Bay is larger, indicating that there is a medium and small one.

Cultural/social

The explorers are not only toponyms, but also the cosmology of the ancestors that shapes the religious identity of the inhabitants of Doreh.

3.1.4. *Toponym Name: Mansinam in Biak Language (Doreh Dialect)*

Mansinam linguistic form

The linguistic form of Mansinam originates from the Biak language where 'man' = bird/being, meaning metaphorically to protect the sacredness of their ancestors; 'man' = inhabitant (inhabitant of land/place); 'sinan' = ancestor/forebear. There is a phoneme shift from [n] to [m] because they are in the same place of articulation. When 'sinan' changes, 'nam' from 'knam' means it does not go anywhere – only stays there. It refers to them. The literal meaning of Mansinam is

(inhabitant of ancestors). Mansinam consists of two words that form a phrase (a group of words) that creates one word, namely Mansinam

Ancestral Origins

Mansinam is identically derived from their ancestors as the inhabitants of the island (Meos) or Meos Mansinam. These ancestors are believed to be the inhabitants of 'Mansinam' who live on this island.

Function of Toponym

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker and also a geological trace related to culturally meaningful interpretations of its ancestors' inhabitants.

Original Meaning

Their ancestors as the Inhabitants (Mansinam) who existed before others in this region. Therefore, understanding the origin of the word in the Biak language dialect of Doreh when they claim that the ancestors existed in mansinam before others

Culture/Social

Inhabitant is not only a toponym but also the cosmology of the ancestors that shapes the religious identity of the inhabitants (Mansinam).

3.1.5. *Mios Nus*

Linguistic Form of Meos Nus

The word origin from the Biak language Meos = Island, Nus = big/land/country, and both words are categorized as free morphemes and each has its own meaning. Thus, Meos Nus means (An Independent Island / a separate land).

Ancestral Origins

Meos Nus is linked to its origins when viewed from a distance before approaching, to ensure the truth that it really is an island. When repetition (pleonasm) is mentioned. Therefore, its main meaning is Island – islands. The second literal meaning provides certainty that it is indeed a separate island. The origin of the name-giver has a significant influence on the place of its new discovery.

Function of Toponym

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker, a geological trajectory marker, and also a cosmological marker that connects origins, culture, mythology, and folklore

Original Meaning

The inhabitants (Meos Nus) name it based on the origins of their homeland from its form, meaning, and also recalling their ancestry.

Culture /social

Meos Nus is not just a toponym, but also a cosmology of ancestors that forms the cultural identity of ocean explorers, who are dubbed as sea kings, pirates, according to Adrian Lapian.....

3.1.6. *Toponym Name: Arfak in the Biak Language*•

Linguistic Form of Arfak

The word originates from the Biak language, arfak, consisting of a phrase combined into a single word, namely: ar: part, while fak: reference point. It is related to maritime cosmology in the sense that the mast/front of the boat is aligned with the mountain above when they sail toward Mnukwar village. Therefore, Mount Arfak is an important part in determining the direction of a journey.

Ancestral Origins

For the Biak people, storms, waves, winds, and the sea are not obstacles, but living spaces. The sea is considered the highway of their ancestors, a space inhabited by spirits, and the place of their ancestors' journeys.

Function of Toponyms

These toponyms serve as markers of genealogy and maritime cosmology of ancestral journeys to other lands, facilitating trade relations between intermediaries known as manibob.

Meaning of culture

The naming of cultural significance to Mount Arfak is based on maritime cosmology. It means ar: part; tip of the boat, while fak: benchmark; view. In Biak cosmology, the land (fak) is seen as an important part of life, because it serves as both a point of footing and a legacy of ancestral navigation.

Culture / Social

Continuous sailing involves various events encountered, such as storms, wind, and sea currents. These events act as obstacles to achieving intended goals and targets, especially when the scheduled time is delayed or not accurate. Consequently, this situation and condition have given rise to a toponym, used to name a place based on events and cultural motifs.

3.1.7. Toponym Name: Randani in Biak Language

Linguistic Form Rendani

The word originates from the Biak language Randani village, ran = fly, dani : eat while i : already, meaning the fly has already eaten. Rendani was originally named randani, but underwent a phoneme change from a to e, becoming rendani. Rendani is a phrase combined into one, that is: the meaning of Rendani

Origins of the Ancestors

The origin of the word 'rendani' appeared when the sea princess was along the Rendani coast. It refers to a type of fish that is named according to its physical characteristics, called 'Roiwin' in the Biak language. This type of fish has a body somewhat similar to humans, has fruits, and sheds tears. Their ancestors settled in 1946, and after 1948, one of them was chosen as the first village head of Randani with a total of 5 households.

Function of Toponyms

These toponyms function as markers of genealogy and maritime cosmology, reflecting how their ancestors understood the Randani area in 1946, when Mr. Domingus Orisu was 17 years old.

Meaning of the Event

The interpretation of an area is based on the event of the Rowini fish dying, so the naming is based on an event that actually happened at that time, such as the swarms of flies on the Rowini fish carcass.

Culture / Social

The Biak human culture gives names according to the context based on what is seen and relevant events that occur. Therefore, this situation and condition have given rise to a toponym, specifically for naming a new place motivated by events and culture.

3.1.8. Toponym Name: Wousi in the Biak Language

Linguistic Form of Wousi

The origin of the word from the Biak language is Wouwi (village), souw = lift, i = them; together it means lift them. Wousi was originally named Wousi, but the phoneme 'u' was dropped, becoming Sowi. Wousi is a phrase combined into one, and the word Wousi means 'lift them'.

Origins of the Ancestors

The origin of the word Wousi emerged when their ancestors, as inhabitants, knew the mountain residents of Arfak and lived alongside them in Wousi. Therefore, they gave the name Warmarei as a spirit that they were elevated.

Function of Toponyms

These toponyms serve as genealogical markers, geological transit markers, and also cosmological markers that connect previous states; they are elevated/the previous states are uplifted to progress

Cultural Meaning

Wousi is culturally understood as a marker for being elevated to experience the era of civilization, and thus Wousi is given as a spirit.

Culture / Social

The Biak people's culture gives names according to the context based on what is seen and relevant events that occur. Therefore, this situation and condition have given rise to a toponym, but to name a place with a meaning and cultural motif.

3.1.9. *Toponym Name: Souwi in the Biak Language*

Linguistic form Souwi

The origin of the word from Biak language Souwii means village, souw = lift, i = them: together it means lift them. Warmarei was originally named Souwi, but underwent the loss of the phoneme 'u' to become Sowi. Souwi is a phrase combined into one, and the word Souwi means lift them.

Ancestral Origin

The origin of the word Souwi appeared when their ancestors, as inhabitants, got to know the mountain dwellers of Arfak and lived alongside them in Suowi. Therefore, they gave the name Souwi as a spirit to signify that they were elevated.

Function of the Toponym

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker, a marker of geological pathways, and also a cosmological marker that connects the previous state, indicating that they were elevated/rising from their previous state to a more advanced one.

Cultural Meaning

Souwi is understood culturally as a marker indicating that they are being raised to experience an era of civilization, therefore Souwi is given as a spirit.

Culture/Social

The Biak people name things according to the context based on what is seen and the relevant events that occur. For this reason, this situation and condition have given rise to a toponym, but to name a new place, they are motivated by meaning and culture.

3.1.10. *Toponym Name: Warmare in the Biak Language*

Linguistic Form of Warmare

The origin of the word in the Biak language: Warmare village, war = river, marei: flows irregularly, spreading and unordered. Warmarei consists of three words and is categorized as a group of words (phrase). Therefore, the name "Warmarei" becomes a word.

Ancestral Origins

The origin of the word Warmarei appeared when their ancestors traversed this region as prominent explorers in the history of oceanic routes. Thus, the northern part of Papua, mostly the coastal areas and islands, were given names according to the characteristics of the place.

Function of Toponyms

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker, a geological route marker, and also a cosmological marker that connects previous conditions, so Wamare is interpreted based on the events that occurred.

Meaning of the Event

Warmare is culturally interpreted as a marker to remind people that the water called Wamare flows irregularly; as a result, floods have occurred, so the surrounding environment needs to be protected.

Culture / Social

The Biak people name things according to context based on what they see and the events that occur. For this reason, this situation and condition have given rise to a toponym, which is used to name a new place with the motif of the meaning of an event.

3.1.11. *Toponym Name: Fanindi in Biak Language*

Linguistic Form Fanindi

The origin of the word from Biak language fanindi = to reflect, di = refers to a place and is a preposition combined into one, that is: fanindi means to reflect here

Origin of Ancestors

This 'Fanindi' is related to the messages from the first ancestors who opened the village or carried out activities here. Ever since their ancestors were in this area, they believed that 'Fanindi' was a place where the spring water was very clean and clear.

Function of the Toponym

This toponym serves as a genealogical marker that connects the current community with their ancestors regarding the very clean spring water of Fanindi. When the ancestors were carrying out activities around it, they would comb their hair and look at their reflection in the very clear water. The naming serves as a reminder that in the past, this place had very clear and clean water.

Original Meaning

The meaning is based on what is observed by the villagers, the original environment that is still pristine, so that the ancestors gave names according to the context.

Culture/Social

Culturally, rivers and springs, being clear, are the main sources for daily life consumption. But it is not just a toponym; it also reflects the ancestors' cosmology that 'larangan' (Kalar) means to protect and preserve, for the sake of survival.

3.1.12. *Toponym Name: Arfai in the Biak Language*

Linguistic Form of Arfai

The origin of the word from the Biak Arfai language consists of 'ar' and 'fai', which are phrases combined into one word. Each has its own meaning: ar = part and fai = prediction / guess. Literal meaning: Arfai: the part that is guessed.

The Origin of Ancestors

This Arfai is related to the message from the first ancestors who opened or carried out activities for the first time. Since their ancestors were in this area, they guessed "Arfai" as a place for observing.

Function of Toponym

Dutch colonial records, the Arfai area was once used as one of the defense points and a center for civil-military administration. This was due to its strategic location, not far from the old city center of Manokwari (around Doreri Bay), yet with a sufficiently large plain to build a headquarters. At that time, Arfai became known not only as a forested area but also as an administrative region.

Original Meaning

Arfai is not merely a place name but also a cultural and ecological symbol. The name reminds people that the land of Papua is fundamentally forested—a source of life that needs to be preserved. From an anthropological perspective, toponyms like Arfai reflect the close connection between the community and its environment.

Culture /social

Along with the development of Manokwari city, Arfai underwent a transformation. During the Indonesian administration, especially since the expansion of West Papua Province, Arfai was chosen as the location for the provincial government center. The office of the Governor of West Papua and various governmental facilities were built in this area. As a result, Arfai is now identified as the center of bureaucracy and a political symbol of West Papua.

3.1.13. Toponym Name: Roswar in Biak Language

Linguistic Form: Roswar

The origin of the word from the Biak language, Roswar consists of Ros = coral reef and war = water, whereas rosar is a phrase combined into a single word with the meaning of a coral reef filled with fresh water.

Ancestral Origins

The name Roswar recalls the journey of the Biak tribe ancestors to this place as a stopover and their great admiration for the nature provided.

Function of Toponym

Biak society tradition, place naming (toponym) is often related to: Natural conditions (rivers, bays, islands, mountains), Mythological events (stories of ancestors who have visited this place), and Ecological functions (for example, places for fishing, hunting, farming, and others).

Historical Meaning

Roswar is not merely a place name, but also a cultural and ecological symbol. The name reminds the community of the ancestral landings from long ago.

Cultural / Social

As a marker of the Biak ancestors' journey, and as a symbol of the close relationship between humans and nature, by establishing kinship and cultural and social transformation.

3.2. The Function of Toponyms as Self-Guardians

- Strengthening ethnic identity.
- Providing spiritual protection.
- Reinforcing social solidarity.

3.3. The Function of Toponyms as Environmental Guardians

- Creating customary conservation rules.
- Serving as a means of ecosystem protection.
- Fostering ecological awareness

3.4. Although beginning to be eroded by modernization, toponyms are still relevant for:

- Local cultural education.
- Conservation based on local wisdom.
- Cultural tourism and ecotourism identity.

4. Conclusion

The mythological toponyms of Biak play an important role in protecting the self (identity, spirituality, and social solidarity) as well as preserving the environment (conservation, ecology, and ecological awareness). Toponyms are not

only geographical markers but also cultural heritage that contains sacred and ecological values. In the modern era, Biak's mythological toponyms remain relevant if integrated into cultural education, conservation strategies, and sustainable tourism. Thus, the mythological toponyms of Biak are important instruments for maintaining identity and environmental sustainability.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The author expresses gratitude to the traditional leaders, the Biak community, and the institutions that supported this research.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

- [1] Eliade, Mircea. (1963). *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [2] Keraf, A. Sonny. (2010). *Environmental Ethics*. Jakarta: Kompas.
- [3] Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1964). *Mythologiques I: The Raw and the Cooked*. Paris: Plon.
- [4] Tentor, J. R. (2017). *Toponymy and Cultural Identity of Papua*. Jayapura: Balai Bahasa Papua.
- [5] Koentjaraningrat. (2009). *Introduction to Anthropology*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- [6] Nababan, P. W. J. (1993). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- [7] Samiyono, D. (2015). "Local Wisdom and Nature Conservation in the Perspective of Ecolinguistics." *Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 16(2), 45–S