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University of San Francisco

**Beluu el Diak le Belumam: Reclaiming and Decolonizing  
Palauan-American Cultural Heritage**

A Thesis Proposal Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education  
International and Multicultural Education

By  
Connie Ngirchemat  
May 2020

# **Beluu el Diak le Belumam: Reclaiming and Decolonizing Palauan-American Cultural Heritage**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by  
Connie Ngirchemat  
May 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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Chair/Thesis Advisor

May 13, 2020  
Date

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Ke kmal mesaul (*thank you so much*)! My ancestors ma kebliil ra Kelau ra Ngcheangel (*maternal lineage and ancestors*). Because of you all, everything will always be okay. Uncle Scott Sked and Uncle Silmai Mengidab - I am extremely thankful for you both. Dad, mom, Landers, Kimau, Dildalm, Darrell, Katie, and Kirk. My day ones, always. Faith and Lilian - I'm so thankful for you both and sharing this journey with others in the diaspora navigating academia. The Palauan American diaspora is another realm of community and belonging, and I'm grateful for those within this realm, assisting each other navigate our positions in this beautiful diaspora.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Prior to colonization, Palau practiced their own indigenous ways of knowledge and epistemologies in relation to their spirits, land, and community. Through Palau's colonial and imperial relationships under Spain, Germany, Japan, and evidently the United States, these impacts throughout Palau's history have affected the community's traditional ways of knowing. From colonial influences, to the evident emigration of the Palauan diaspora, this created a new generation of Palauan-Americans, who were raised unfamiliar with their cultural heritage and language. This lack of cultural awareness for the Palauan-American diaspora raises concerns of loss of culture, sense of self and identity, and its impact on relationships to the island, family, and community. By recentring indigenous frameworks as a method towards cultural revitalization and as the focal point of learning Palauan culture, it can assist in offering decolonial and nuanced methods of acquiring, learning, unpacking, and critiquing knowledge today.

**Key Words:** Cultural Identity, Indigeneity, Diasporic Palauans, Transnationality

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

A friend and fellow Palauan-American, Chasimon Ongeu Tarimel (2017), had written a Facebook post highlighting the phrase “*Beluu el diak le Belumam*”, which translates to “This village is not my village” or in similar respects, “This home is not my home”. Tarimel’s experience as a Palauan born and raised in the United States and not speaking fluently in Palauan, nor fully knowledgeable of Palauan cultural heritage, had isolated him from the larger Palauan diaspora. My own experience as a Palauan born and raised in the United States and facing similar disconnections and challenges isolated me from truly connecting with my cultural heritage and family. The choosing of this title was based on the collective experiences that Palauan-Americans throughout the diaspora share.

My journey to better understand my cultural identity as a Palauan-American grew from a series of events over time in relation to concepts of race, nationality, and faith, to name a few that have impacted me. My parents had moved to the United States in the early 1980’s, attending college at Western Oregon University and eventually moving to California where they chose to start a family. Despite not learning my language and culture, my parents always continued to uphold our religious beliefs as Ngara Modekngei. Over time and as I grew older, I overheard and compared snarky remarks and negative misinterpretations depicting our religion. In addition to



the wisdom I have received from my mentors and the process of learning about Palauan cultural heritage for this thesis, it had further motivated me to use this research opportunity as a

Figure 1: Map of Palau Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Retrieved May 3, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Palau#/media/1/439255/61669>



narrative against colonial influences that have affected Palauan indigenous epistemologies and practices, in relationship to Modekngai’s interdependence with Palauan culture. Through time, I begin to realize the similarities between our values as Modekngai with our general Palauan cultural ideologies and beliefs as well. And for this, I acknowledge this special part that being Modekngai has taught me.

I did not know of many Palauans who identified as Modekngei, let alone in the Bay Area. The Bay Area Pacific island population in general were predominantly Polynesian descent. According to *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States* (2014) compiled by Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC), their population projections from the U.S Census Bureau in 2010, the Bay Area consisted of approximately 14,928 Samoans, 12,110 Tongans, and 10,180 Fijians (EPIC, 2014, pp. 28). By comparison, the population of Palauans in the Bay Area were sparse and it was challenging to find these cultural connections around me. Towards the end of high school, I joined the Polynesian club on campus, proudly representing myself as a Pacific Islander despite no one knowing where in the Pacific I was from everytime I said I was from Palau. With the Polynesian community, there were particular social cues, jokes, and references that I understood, which helped me create an identity for myself and connect me with the larger Pacific Islander community. However, the more I hung out with other students, and noticed the way they collectively communicated with each other, I began to realize that this was a community I was forcing myself to be a part of because it was the closest to the community I was yearning for - my own Palauan community. It was my time within these spaces that I came to recognize my own identity crisis. Until I enrolled in the College of San Mateo did I come to realize a whole new perspective of race, nationality, and culture.

A former professor and friend, Dr. David 'Vika' Palaita assigned a reading titled "Our Sea of Islands" by Fijian and Tongan Anthropologist and scholar Dr. Epeli Hau'ofa. In the reading, Hau'ofa had reclaimed, "*Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper*

*still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean.*” His words and rhetoric were compelling. Oceania was more than a body of ocean, but the region that has fruitfully provided for my ancestors, in which continues to do so for my family in the islands today. Hau’ofa’s mantra has stuck with me during my transition from community college, and following me to graduate school at the University of San Francisco, all in the midst of understanding my identity as a Pacific Islander. One year, a few friends and I returned to attend Palaita’s ethnic studies lectures, sitting back and watching Palaita teach his course, as he had when I took the class previously. However, as Palaita continued to speak the words of Hau’ofa, reminding his students of his infamous line “We are Ocean”, I caught myself in an epiphany. Since taking Palaita’s courses, it had seemed that I forced Hau’ofa’s mantra exclusively as words for the empowerment of the Pacific Island community. Little did I realize, I was only limiting Hau’ofa’s ideology to fit my own narrative as a Pacific Islander in the diaspora. Our ocean has no physical boundaries, neither had it stopped our ancestors from traveling through the waters to find food, communicate with other communities, and exchange information. The very same Pacific Ocean that has raised my people has helped other communities around it including East and Southeast Asia, and even as far as South America and Australia. It was our waters. ‘*We are Ocean*’ was not exclusively to Pacific Islanders, but inclusive of every community in the Pacific and abroad. We are all dependent on the fruitfulness of our ocean, no matter the differences of our skin tone or language barrier. The following barriers that colonialism had imposed on the people of our ocean was the very same time we thought of ourselves differently than others. The impact imposed by elitists and their search for political and economic power caused the many wars, disagreements, and disadvantages that many people of color today are subordinated by. Nevertheless, despite being

exposed to these conflicting conversations and ideologies on race, resonant towards my understanding of my cultural identity, it only helped emphasize the importance of engaging in critical discussions on race, ethnicity, and identity.

EPIC's (2014) composition of the Census Bureau's findings looked at the percentage of Pacific Islanders living within the United States. "The NHPI population grew 40% between 2000 and 2010, a rate that approached that of Asian Americans and Latinos. Now over 1.2 million NHPI live in the United States. Though about 43% of the population is Native Hawaiian, the NHPI racial group is incredibly diverse" (EPIC, 2014, pp. 5). As of 2010, the United States' Census Bureau found that there were 7,450 Palauans, increasing at a rate of 115% since 2000 (p. 63). This gradual increase over the 10-year period is one of many reasons that cultural heritage is affected. The growing number of Palauan migrants, the impact of globalization, and other historical and political variables including colonization and self-determination impose a significant impact on cultural upbringing. This thesis observes the significance of the variety of variables impacting culture, especially throughout the Diasporic Palauan community. The focus of my research poses the importance of recentering indigeneity as the foundation and decolonial tool towards cultural revitalization.

### **Background and Need**

Before elaborating on the need for methods of decolonial and cultural revitalization for the Diasporic Palauan community, it is important to acknowledge Palau's colonial history that has impacted how the island's culture has changed over time, affecting how cultural heritage is practiced today. Palau's first recorded contact with European voyagers is argued to have been between 1522 to 1542 when Spanish navigators stumbled upon Palau's southwestern island of

Sonsorol, cataloging into their records (Rechebei, 1997, pp. 57). The continuous and ongoing expeditions of Western explorers during the following centuries eventually led to the interaction with Captain Henry Wilson in 1783. Since this interaction, Palauans, and the greater region of

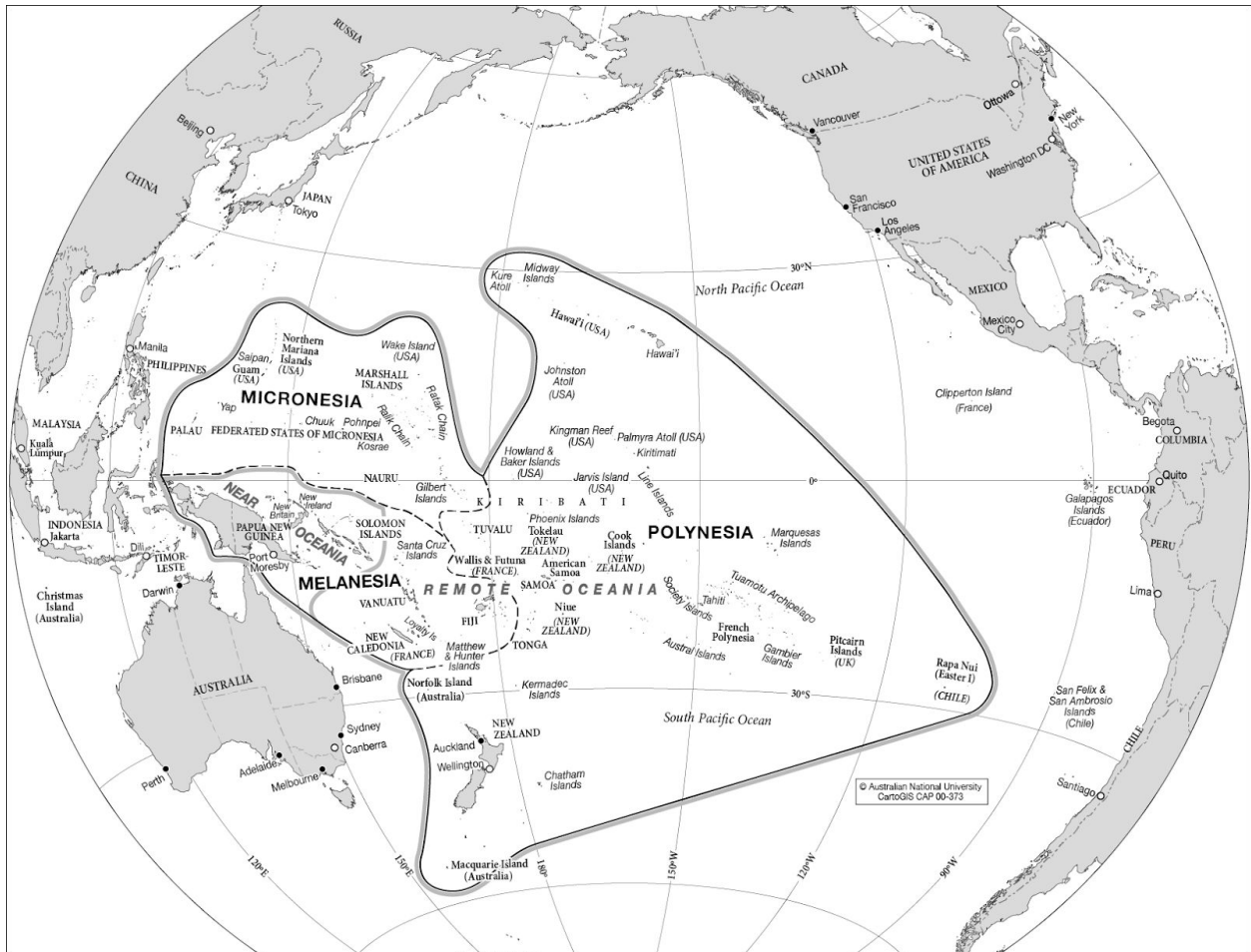


Figure 2: Map of Oceania: Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia. CartoGIS Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University. Retrieved May 3, 2020 from <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/maponline/base-maps/oceania-sub-regions>

Oceania, were introduced to a variety of European, Japanese, and American influences that have integrated into the native culture. In addition, the arrival of the French explorer Jules Dumont D'Urville categorized the Pacific into three regions: Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia, as pictured in figure 2. D'Urville's naming of these regions was based on physical attributes,

segregating these three regions since his arrival to the Pacific. From the labeling of Oceania, to how the colonization of island nations has led to the economic dependency of capitalist societies including the United States, it evidently showed impacts on cultural heritage and upbringing as well. As we will eventually discuss in this thesis, Dr. Epeli Hau'ofa and other scholars have expressed that we are not limited by the imaginary boundaries set upon us by D'Urville, or our interactions in our colonial past.

Throughout the course of this thesis, it will provide detailed background information on the associations and impacts of colonization, from the political formation of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), to Palau's relationship with the United States under the Compact of Free Association (COFA). As more foreign interactions continued with the Palauan people over the span of history, different facets of Palau's culture have been changing over time as well.

Throughout the course of this thesis, I will also discuss in more detail concepts that have impacted how Palauan culture has changed and evidently affected future generations of Palauans today. Throughout history, including the introduction of colonization, it has offered a direction toward economic dependency, changes in political practices, and effects on Palau's relationship with the land, spirituality, and indigenous epistemologies.

By acknowledging these histories and the impacts that colonization and globalization have had on the Pacific, it has changed the ways in which culture has been practiced, evidently leading to the loss of cultural heritage throughout the diaspora. The gradual loss of cultural heritage has affected many communities of color, including Diasporic Palauans and Palauan Americans living abroad.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to discuss and elaborate the importance of cultural revitalization as a method for the Palauan-American community to reconnect with our cultural heritage. In doing that, this thesis will discuss the history behind cultural disengagement and recognize the effects of colonization, politics, emigration and globalization in today's society.

This thesis will first introduce the Palauan-American community and how their lack of cultural knowledge affects their cultural identity and engagement in contemporary spaces in the Palauan community. In addition to the importance of cultural revival, I would like to emphasize an indigenous-focused and decolonial cultural framework. In looking through this lens, it both assists in the process of cultural revival and critically interprets contemporary issues within the community today. I pose the concept of Palauan cultural revitalization as a contemporary issue in context with the community's recent rates of out-migration and the effects of globalization that have offered changing perspectives on how cultural heritage is practiced. I recognize the similarities between other migrant communities who have endured similar experiences related to transnationality, race, and culture. However, this thesis will focus specifically on the Palauan-American diasporic community to provide a more tangible and culturally-relevant resolution based on their particular situation.

In the process of decolonizing aspects of Palauan cultural heritage apparent in this thesis; it will include the historical context of cultural heritage from historical and indigenous tenets and values, discuss Palau's history of colonization, and how modern day influences have affected the ways in which these certain values and tenets are being practiced today. The combination of changes in cultural priorities and the increasing number of emigrants leaving Palau to seek educational and other opportunities, imposes a number of challenging outcomes and issues that

affect the ways in which Palauan cultural heritage is attained and practiced. In order to further reconcile these ideas, this thesis serves to also recognize the many unique narratives of community members in the Palauan diaspora, and how their upbringing, lived experiences, and identities influences their way of thinking and being in the world. In relevance to the title of this thesis, “*Behuu el diak le belumam*”, or “This village is not my village” resembles the many narratives of diasporic Palauans born and/or raised outside Palau and the idea of not feeling at home. My intentions throughout this thesis are to acknowledge, listen, and learn from these discussions and what research has offered on the subject. In addition, I hope to better reflect on our cultural identity and sense of belonging within our communities as well.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. How do Palauan-Americans define and construct their identity?
  - a. In what ways do they center indigeneity and their cultural and linguistic practices?
2. How do they navigate and resist elements of Palauan and/or American identity?
  - a. What does cultural revitalization mean for the Palauan-American diaspora?

#### **Theoretical Framework:**

This thesis’ intention is to base my research on indigenous epistemologies as the foundation that incorporates indigenous cultural tenets, ideologies, and practices relevant to communities of color, including the Palauan diaspora. By acknowledging these key tenets and practices, it guides us in how our communities perceive ourselves authentically in the world today. The following indigenous-based frameworks are significantly relevant with Palauan experiences around cultural heritage and themes of race, nationality, and transnationalism. The



unique tenets that have been offered through frameworks including Kaupapa Maori Research, TribalCrit, and KanakaCrit, have argued the importance of indigenous communities reclaiming their cultural identities in relationship to indigenous epistemologies and ways of thinking.

**Kaupapa Maori Framework** This framework, which posits that culture is composed of multiple interdisciplinary factors, is used to better understand the ways in which non-indigenous narratives have been presented in research. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith differentiates between Kaupapa Maori Research versus Indigenous Maori Knowledge Epistemology, arguing that in Kaupapa Maori Research, *kaupapa* “implies a way of framing and structuring how we think about those ideas and practices... Kaupapa Maori is a ‘conceptualisation of Maori knowledge’... The critical theory of Kaupapa Maori also applies, therefore, to Maori ways of thinking, and to Maori ways of doing things, but it does not deny either the existence or fundamental legitimacy of Maori values and attitudes, Maori language, and Maori ways of living in the world” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1997, p. 188). The fundamental principles outlined in Kaupapa Maori Research include Whakapapa (genealogy), Te Reo (language), Tikanga Maori (cultural practices and obligations), Rangatiratanga (autonomy), and Whanau (family). Fundamental to Maori life, these principles recognized the interconnectedness of these values, upholding familial relationships, connections in association with cultural behaviors, values, and ideologies that extend itself both within the household and throughout Maori society. Tuhiwai-Smith critiques Western research by centering indigenous Maori narratives and epistemologies as the focal perspective of indigenous research. Kaupapa Maori research has created a structured way of identifying Maori values, practices, and ideologies in order to better conceive Maori priorities. Tuhiwai-Smith looks further into how “Kaupapa Maori research is to be found clustered around issues of identity... [arguing] that

being Maori, identifying as Maori, and as a Maori researcher, is a critical element of Kaupapa Maori research” (p. 186). Understanding the importance of cultural revitalization can only be discussed through the perspective of the community members themselves, facing cultural loss from their own, rightful perspectives. Kaupapa Maori Research offers a founding platform when discussing beliefs that resonate with all Pacific Island communities. Tuhiwai-Smith’s work on Kaupapa Maori Research acknowledges the lack of cultural awareness, similarly resonating with Diasporic Palauans as well.

**TribalCrit** Similar to Kaupapa Maori Research, Bryan Brayboy’s (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory, or TribalCrit, delves into particular ideologies relevant to his particular cultural framework. Brayboy acknowledges the advantages of Ladson-Billings and Tate’s work on Critical Race Theory, however, also understands its limitations of American Indian experiences with the United States. In addition to the tenets of Critical Race Theory, Brayboy (2005) outlines nine tenets from TribalCrit in order to acknowledge the historical context and associations of colonialism specifically to American Indians in modern day society:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.

Native Americans's specific historical relationship under the United States' colonization and how it has perpetuated changes in indigenous freedoms including speech, practices, and ideologies, in turn has affected governmental policies and customs, forging new realities onto indigenous peoples. Specifically indicative of this thesis' discourse is the fourth, fifth, and seventh tenets, arguing that indigenous knowledge systems are central to reflecting the realities of indigenous peoples. The fourth tenet argues that indigenous peoples have both the desire and right to obtain tribal sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification, as is appropriate and just. Colonization is so embedded within the societal contexts that the basis of self-autonomy and self-determination in many colonized communities, including Native Americans, is refrained from reconceptualizing indigenous decolonization. Continuously recognizing and reemphasizing these rights and historical pasts are methods of potentially working towards means of self-determination. In addition, the fifth tenet emphasizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power observed through an Indigenous lens. This particular tenet recognizes the importance of reclaiming indigenous values and epistemologies as another means of cultural strength and reclamation. This ultimately shows resonance with the seventh tenet, which argues that Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups. The ongoing battle of colonialism is not an individual consequence, and reveals different struggles, culturally, politically, and socially. The traumatic occurrences from the past are still relevant in tribal communities today and illustrate the importance of recognizing the past today. How tribal

communities today choose to move forward, resonates back to their ancestors experiences and the intergenerational impacts from the past. Evidently, all tenets that Brayboy have proposed are interrelated with each other to their own extent, all of which depict the continuing and corrupt suffering in which indigenous communities still face today.

**Kanaka Ōiwi Critical Race Theory** Lastly, similar to the Maori and American Indian experiences, the Kanaka Maoli community of Hawaii have taken on similar prospects of cultural empowerment and praxis in lieu of American colonization. Specifically in academia and research, the focus should not just be through the creation of new knowledge over time, but emphasizing how their community can create praxis from indigenous-based knowledge. As are many culturally-relevant frameworks, Kanaka Ōiwi Critical Race Theory similarly incorporates Ladson-Billings and Tate principles of Critical Race Theory, in addition to Brayboy's TribalCrit framework as well (Ladson-Billings et al, 1995, as cited in Salis Reyes, 2018). Of Kanaka Ōiwi Critical Race Theory, three particular values reflect similarities relative to the Palauan American diaspora and their seeking of recentering indigenous frameworks: 1) Aloha 'Āina, 2) Kuleana, and 3) Acknowledging the consequence of colonialism and American occupation are particularly unique issues specific to Hawai'i contexts, and its relevance to the exploitation of the 'āina and appropriation of cultural identity (Salis Reyes, 2018, p. 609). Aloha 'Aina, or 'love of the land' immediately centers the focus of prioritizing land and all of which it holds for the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the community. Kuleana, or responsibility, holds similar fashion in respects to Palauan indigenous values, arguing that it is the innate and holistic responsibility to work together and protect the aina (land) and lahui (people, sovereignty of the nation). Finally, the third tenet acknowledges Hawaii's colonial history and impacts affecting indigenous

communities, who are continuously enduring these effects in present times. “The first two tenets are fundamental pillars of Hawaiian epistemology that counter the US educational principles of individualism and meritocracy. The third tenet pertains to the awakening and realization of a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi critical consciousness. In response, theorizing spaces from an indigenous epistemological perspective and emphasizing indigenous narratives can reconceptualize spaces for communities of color (Salis Reyes, 2018, pp. 609). Building upon these frameworks can assist in further acknowledging their collective assessment of the historical effects of colonialism and the impacts it sets for the diaspora. In addition, these frameworks also suggest the importance of retracing indigenous knowledge in order to reclaim cultural heritage and methodologies within society today. Taking upon these frameworks can assist to argue that the practices of these tenets are important for our upbringing and acquisition of cultural knowledge. *Eual Saus*, similar in the sense it acknowledges the importance of indigeneity as a form of resolution against hegemonic ideas and actions, is more nuanced to traditional Palauan epistemologies that are reflected in their association to land and culture, and how it resonates with our individual cultural upbringing. Much of what these previous frameworks have offered were relevant and culturally nuanced ways of examining the lives and experiences relevant to the Palauan-American community.

**Eual Saus** The previously discussed frameworks have offered reflections of indigenous experiences, in order to find tangible ways to assist in upholding indigenous epistemologies and practices. Ideally, *Eual Saus*, or ‘four cornerstones’, expresses a commonality between these frameworks, more specifically directing indigenous knowledge through a geographical lens that is interconnected with the physical, social, and spiritual processes of society. Palau is a very

structured culture, politically, economically, and socially. However, everything is all connected; the land, people, and ideologies weave harmoniously together all of which assist in how the island works collectively. The framework behind Eual Saus uses indigenous ideologies and recenters ancestral epistemologies as methods of establishing the internal and external structures of the beluu, blai, and Bai. The use of indigenous ontological foundations as a framework helps reestablish balance in cultural community and society. In doing so, I begin this framework by describing where the term ‘Eual Saus’ came from and how this central ideology has reflected itself upon many aspects within Palauan society, particularly in *beluu* (village, place, land), *bai* (traditional meeting houses), and *blai* (home).

*“Palau is a nation that is built on the foundation of ancient beluu. She has her own laws, “whispered” policies and principles (kelulau), social structure and culture. The kelulau of Palau is enriched by compassion and justice that has been preserved from the past”*  
(Palau Society of Historians., & Palau, 1997).

***Beluu:*** In Palauan legend, there was a woman named Dirrabkau. She was approached by Tekiimelab, or demigods, asking her to cook them meals of fish and taro. Dirrabkau cooked their meals, inserting the cooked fish inside the cooked taro like a sandwich, in which the Tekiimelab took their meals and left. After realizing Dirrabkau’s creation, they went back and warned her of an approaching flood, instructing her son, Ngiselacheos, to prepare a big bamboo raft for protection. When the floods came, Dirrabkau was ready. However, as the water rose, her hair caught onto a tree and she eventually drowned. Upon finding her, the Tekiimelab breathed life back into her, at which she was reborn ‘Milad’, which literally translates to “*was dead*”. Based on the legend of Milad, she bore four children: Sureor (Koror), Olekeok (Melekeok) Ngerbuns (Aimeliik), and Imeungs (Ngeremlengui). Once born, Milad had gone to the top of a hill called

Ometochel, where she threw four small islands in front of her children as their markers. Ngemolei in front of Imeungs, Ngerutoi in front of Olekeok, Okerduul in front of Ngerbuns, and Ngetmeduch in front of Sureor. These four children of Milad evidently formed the four corner posts of Palauan society and engage in particular responsibilities as the four corner posts (Besebes et al., pp. 31-32). Figure 3 shows a map of Palau and each individual state.



Figure 3: Milad's Children

The underlying theme of these corner posts emphasizes the need of structure, collaboration, and connectedness that upholds a community together. The location of these posts, in connection to the conceptual framework behind the west (ngebard) and east (ongos) is prevalent in many Palauan spaces, as we will elaborate in the *Bai* and *Blai*.

Figure 4: *Splitting of the Bai, longitudinally (Omeludel a bai)*

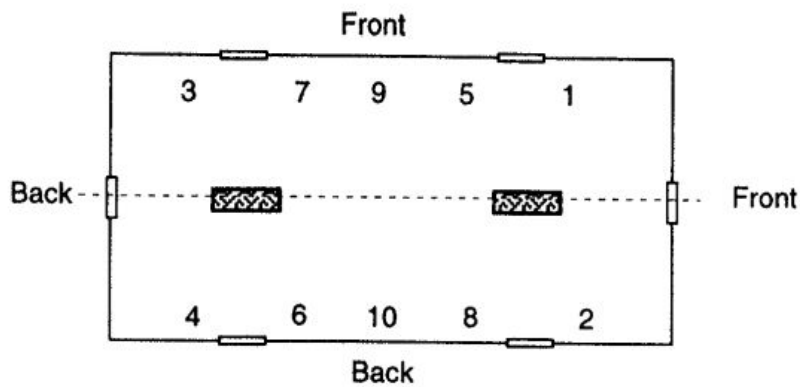
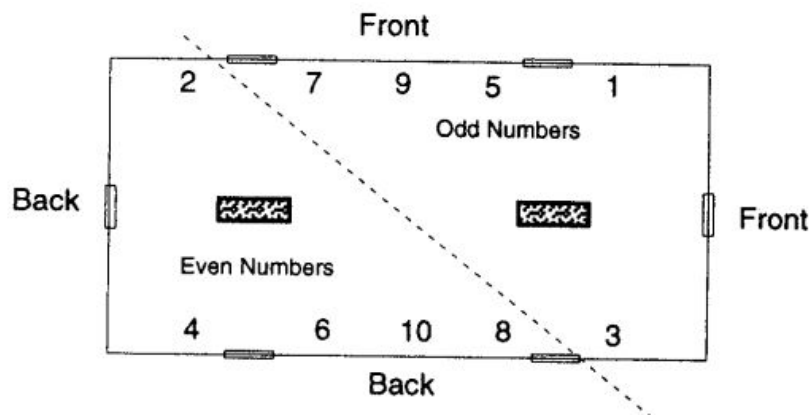


Figure 5: *Splitting of the Bai, diagonally (Olechutel a bai)*





**Bai:** The ideology behind the four corners of the *beluu* is also representative of the structure of the *Bai* and the *blai*. In both the *Bai* and *blai*, “there are certain requirements for the foundation of the bai and blai as to direction because misfortune may come to a house that faces direction forbidden under the calendar for omelasech” (Palau Society of Historians., & Palau, 1997, p. 69). From the construction of the Bai, to the internal structures, layout, seating, and processes inside, it is the nucleus of administrative power in Palau. The internal processes of the Bai are critical, as are the spiritual and cultural implications within the process of building it as well. The seating of the Bai, for example, similarly correlates with the four corner posts, as previously depicted in Milad’s story. The *klobak* of Palau are arranged in an orderly position based on their ranking within the concept of *Bitang ma Bitang el Taoch*, or “one-half of the channel and the other half of the channel” (Palau Society of Historians, 1997, p. 5). *Figures 4 and 5* outline the two ways of splitting the Bai, in which dictate the seating arrangement depending on the rank of each state. In reflection to the splitting of the Bai, the *klobak* are split into two divisions as well: the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth *rubak* are designated for the first half-channel (*bitang el taoch*) and the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth *rubak* are designated for the other half (*bitang el taoch*). The top two chiefs are responsible for heading each division accordingly (Palau Society of Historians, 1997, p. 8). The Bai is not just a physical space where decisions are discussed, but an entity that represents a cultural and spiritual sensibility of the island, as seen through structure, processes, and power it possesses in collectively bringing a community together. Mechelins Iechad (2014) *The Whispered Memories of Belau’s Bais A cherechar a lokelii* expands this entity by reflecting the Bai’s premise with larger discussions around identity and contemporary world. Iechad recognizes the,

“bai’s elaborately painted wooden structure has overtime absorbed and carried our most sacred histories and traditions, and continuously whispers them to all who are willing to listen. I would not have centered this thesis on the bai if I did not believe that it informs Belauan identities and plays a role in our contemporary world. But there are those among us who act as if the bai is not a repository of our histories and traditions and does not inform our identity... In this discussion about the bai, it is worth addressing two questions: (i) How does the bai inform Belauan identity? (ii) What role does the bai play in our contemporary world?” (Iechad, 2014, pp. 21-22).

These two questions can help others determine the similarities that the structure and responsibilities of the Bai have, in relationship with its impression on a community’s cultural identity as well.

**Blai:** In addition, the structure and organization of the *beluu* and *Bai* corresponds with the social and political structure of the homes in the villages. In Palauan customs, the *blai* (home) is the relationship between the *beluu* (village), *kebliil* (clan), and *telungalk* (family) (Useem, 1945, pp. 568). These three systems are essential in keeping the relationship of the family and home life together. As we can see from an extended perspective, *figure 6 and 7* shows how connected these relationships are. Depicted in *figure 6*, the boxed table at the top of the image are 14 of the 16 states of Palau, not including Hatohobei and Sonsorol. The states are divided into two, via the concept of *Bitang ma Bitang el Taoch*. This particular image shows the organizational breakdown from the state, to the municipality, village, clan, and eventually the *blai* (home). Within this system, responsibilities are still carried out in order for each system to remain strong and connected in society (Force, 1960, pp. 38).

Figure 6. Diagram of states, municipalities, villages, extended family, and the home

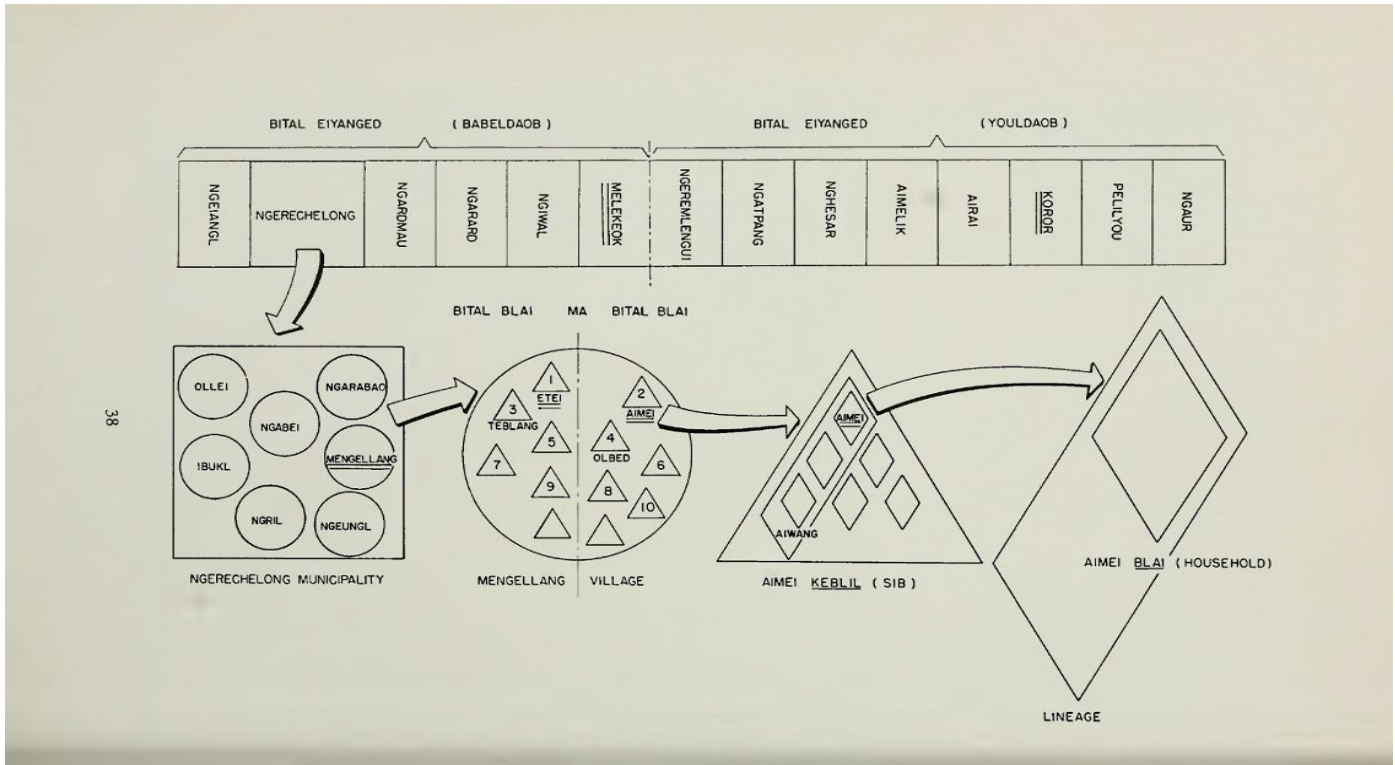


Figure 7. Diagram of integration of familial organization and relationships

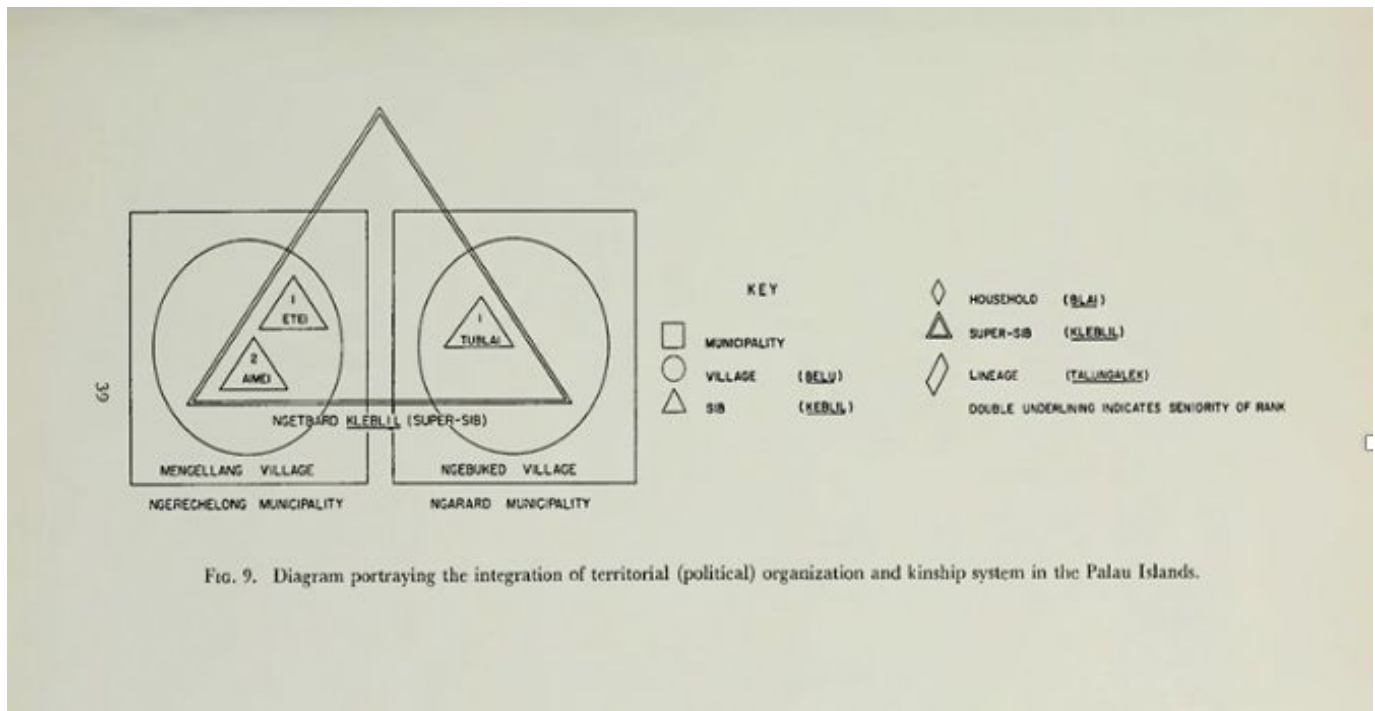


FIG. 9. Diagram portraying the integration of territorial (political) organization and kinship system in the Palau Islands.

Finally, *figure 7* looks deeper into familial clans and their connections to the broader Palauan villages and states. As *figure 6* had described the particular segregated spaces within familial networks, *figure 7* describes the actual integration between these familial networks. As depicted in *figure 7*, the village of *Mengellang* from the state of Ngarchelong holds connected kinship between those in the village of *Ngebuked* in the state of Ngaraard, specifically between the *kebliil* of *Etei*, *Aimei*, and *Tublai* (Force, 1960, pp. 39). These connections are extended beyond the household and our broader kinship between those in our *kebliil*, municipality, and *beluu*. This also depicts the fundamental importance and responsibility between the larger Pacific Island community and family. Ultimately, the *beluu* (village), *kebliil* (community), and *telungalk* (family) keep the structure of the home strong, working collectively to keep it afloat.

**Reflection:** The title behind this thesis, “*Beluu el Diak le Belumam*”, or “This village is not my village” acknowledges the dissonance that many Palauan-Americans today feel with their culture and its effects on their collective identities. While acknowledging the previously recognized indigenous frameworks, this thesis also argues that the structure of the home embodies how one’s upbringing starts from the home. More theoretically, there is a foundational relationship between *beluu*, *bai*, and *blai*. The physical directions in association to the winds and land are relatively integrated with how the *beluu*, *bai*, and *blai* are positioned. The natural foundations associated in cultural ontologies are reflected in cultural spaces, as seen in political spaces including the *bai*. These spaces have played significant purposes in upholding cultural values, epistemologies, and practices.

Dr. Isebong Maura Asang’s (2004) *Epistemological Articulations: Blebaol, Klomengelungel ma Tekoi er Belau*, similarly looks at Palauan epistemology in order to grasp

cultural priorities and ways of knowing. The establishment of these outposts should reflect how we pursue everyday life. Asang's research specifically draws on four thematic outposts of cultural knowledge including *tekoi er a Belau* (words of Palau); *deluill* (relationships); *blebaol* (gifts that bind); and, *klomengelungel* (to carry on back) (Asang, 2004, pp. 137). Woven and linked together, Asang further elaborates that by removing one *saus*, or post, would affect the whole cosmological foundation of Palauan epistemology. For example, 'tekoi er a Belau' plays as the articulated form which is coordinated through and with our *deluill* (relations and relationships). Similarly, the action of *blebaol* (male domain) forms and is informed by *klomengelungel* (female domain), and vice versa. "As two sides of the same coin of language, *blebaol* as a social institution is a metaphor for the relations people enter into in the act of being people; and, *klomengelungel* as a social institution is a metaphor for a way of doing things that is explicitly Palauan or the carrier of culture" (Asang, 2004, pp. 95). A community's upbringing and value system that is evidently reflected in society is relative to how we define our *Eual Saus* in our own lives and environments. To engage readers to be reflective in their own unique experiences and its relationship to how they define culture, I've thought of certain questions that can be posed and thought through when thinking of our *Saus*:

1. What are the *saus*, or binding cornerstones, that are significant and keep us grounded in our lives, communities, and/or environments?
2. What and/or who are the *saus* that keep us afloat and prospering in our lives?
3. More directly tied to the *blai*, who and what is keeping our own household afloat?
  - a. How are we helping our own families and communities afloat?
    2. How does this tie to our cultural tenets and/or how we perceive our cultural identity?
    3. What does 'respecting the *blai* and *beluu*' look like to you in your respective environment?

For me, it means respecting a space that has helped a lot of people along the way, providing a space that houses folks in need until they are ready to be independent, but it also means setting

boundaries so that I, too, can also find my sanctity and peace; home is my peace. However, this obviously would look differently for folks who might not share similar thoughts.

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this research is grounded in the understanding and acknowledgment of narratives and dialogue as a culturally-relevant method towards acquiring and learning cultural knowledge. Gauging in storytelling and dialogue, as we will see through testimonios and talanoa, is evident recollections of knowledge in many indigenous communities, including Palau.

Before delving into the relevance of these practices in the context of the Palauan diaspora, I will first acknowledge the importance of storytelling as a methodology, and evidently throughout this thesis, similar to the concept of '*Testimonios*', or testimonies. Testimonios, as described by Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga, and Judith Flores' (2013) *Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political* is a discourse that was intended to discuss the discrimination faced amongst women of color in the Latinx communities and discussing these issues within academia (pp. 363-371). In addition, Testimonios have been used as counter-narratives against objective narratives of womxn of color. By evidently allowing people of color to engage in testimonios, it contributes to a clearer representation of these communities within research and academia. Similarly, Dr. Epeli Hau'ofa has stated in Pacific Island studies, in order to engage and reestablish cultural knowledge in the Pacific communities, we must gauge the importance behind *talanoa*, or storytelling and narratives. Similar in the context of *testimonios*, the Pacific Island communities also reiterate the

importance of sharing knowledge and stories through discussion, hence using narratives as methods to the underlying methodology.

Talanoa, generally meaning conversation, to speak, or an exchange of ideas and thinking, is a process of engagement that allows for the enlightenment of knowledge and is an interactive exchange of ideas that is contextual and relevant information for the Pacific Island communities. Timote M. Vaioleti (2006) *Talanoa Research Methodology: A Developing Position on Pacific Research* processes the function of talanoa as “a practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations... [whereas] it is also recommended for collecting information from villages, leaders and different government agencies, with the aim of using findings to formulate national policy proposals” (Vaioleti, 2006, pp. 24). Talanoa, in both traditional and modern use, integrates these processes of discussion for both the acquisition of knowledge and how the knowledge is used and perpetuated in society. Vaioleti continues to emphasize the power and impact behind talanoa as a non-linear approach that is integral for many indigenous communities, outside of literal etymology tied to the South Pacific. Dr. David Palaita, a Samoan Pacific Island Ethnic Studies professor at the City College of San Mateo, integrates the use of *talanoa* in his dissertation (2015) *Vāsā (Ocean)—The Space that is Sacred: Pacific Islanders in Higher Education* that not only engages in the discussion of ideas, but other cultural methods of acquiring knowledge, including dance, film, and songs and chants, to name a few. “Talanoa generally means conversation or to speak. It is two words combined. “tala” meaning words or story; “noa” meaning to tie or bind. Put together it means the “stories that bind” or “stories tied together.” It’s also interesting to note that the word “noa” also means name or title. Name and tie refers to genealogy. For example, when one asks what is your name or “O ai kou i noa,” the

literal translation is “Who are your ties?” or generally, “Who are your names/genealogies?” (Palaita, 2015, pp. 36). Dr. Palaita, a former professor and friend, continues to hold these *Talanoa Series* today at City College of San Francisco. As depicted in *figure 8*, a few classmates and I attended a *Talanoa Series* event, presented by our former Pacific Islanders club advisor, Dr. Vidalino Raatior, in 2018. Dr. Raatior’s presentation discussed his upbringing and academic journey as a native Chuukese and Micronesian scholar, evidently leading him to his work today. The series has since expanded to other academic institutions including Portland, Seattle, and Utah, to name a few. Dr. Palaita’s disassemblment of the term also agrees with Vaioleti’s argument that *talanoa* possesses a nonlinear function that accesses different meanings and engagements of storytelling. In Dr. Palaita’s example of name ties and genealogies, names are stories that provide insight of who your family is, where they are from, the land they reside on, and the relationship between their names and the land, for example.



Figure 8: *Talanoa Series* hosted at City College of San Francisco by Dr. Vidalino Raatiior, 2018



From *Testimonios* to *Talanoa*, the obvious underlying premise of these methods is acknowledging the impact behind stories and narratives holding significant power to the community's upholding, in the passing of their cultural knowledge, and the wisdom it carries for future generations. For the intended purpose of reflecting these methods to the Palauan diaspora, I am using the term *Cheldech duch*, or conversation; speech; meeting; story, which holds very similar premise as that of *testimonios* and *talanoas*, but more nuanced to Palauan etymology and epistemologies.

From *chelitakl* (songs, music) to *omelasech* (carving), there are a number of examples and ways that Palauan community members have engaged and continued the passing of cultural knowledge and wisdom to and about its people. Research methods in academic spaces have tended to be more accepted, rather than informal methods including storytelling, art, and music.

However, in indigenous discourse, methods of acquiring cultural knowledge and systems of knowing were not formally accepted in research institutions. Aside from academic rhetoric, indigenous methodologies included telling stories (*cheldecheduch*); wood carvings and carpentry (*omelasech, itabori*); and songs or hymns (*chelitakl, chesols*). Similar to other indigenous methods of obtaining cultural knowledge, methods of knowing were both directly and indirectly acquired over the span of time, towards epistemological ways of knowing.

Specifically in this research, this thesis' qualitative data collection process includes in-depth interviews eliciting discussion and critique of particular aspects in Palauan culture, which resonates with the Palauan-American community. The questions are sectioned off by discussing the following topics: General Self Questions of the participant, transmission of cultural heritage, globalization, cultural identity (norms, values, modernity), migration, and decolonization. To further expand the discussion, I have chosen to interview participants who identify as 'diasporic Palauans', both Palauan-Americans and Palauans who have migrated from Palau, residing elsewhere. By engaging in interviews and discussions with Palauans throughout the diaspora, it assists in providing more insight on the understanding of how cultural practices have changed and how individuals associate and partake in these practices and ideologies differently throughout the diaspora.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Given that this study is on cultural revival for Diasporic Palauans who were born and raised outside of Palauan culture, I, myself, fall into this diaspora so to be in the midst of finding methods of cultural revival is challenging. However, I am happy to be able to engage in research that is relevant for diasporic Palauans at the same time.

In addition, while researching and having conversations with other Palauans as well, I also would like to emphasize the concept of *Mekull*. Although this isn't necessarily a hindrance, I acknowledge that in respect to the Palauan community, my faith as Modekngai, and our culture, there are certain aspects that aren't meant to be shared with the larger population outside of Palau. For a number of reasons, certain information is only to be shared within either the household, clan, or other relevant spaces. I acknowledge that there were things I did not include out of respect for my community.

Lastly, in lieu of concurrent events regarding the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the world, logistical complications included transitioning from facilitating focus groups to interviewing individual participants instead. There were participants who did not have technological access, as well as participants who merely preferred one on one discussion of certain related topics. Other than these reasons, there were no other changes or limitations of this matter.

### **Significance of the Thesis**

This thesis is a reflection of the Palauan-American diaspora and navigating our position as both Palauan and American. There are those who have had culture and language present in the household, then there are those who did not. Culture is more than just historical practices and ideas of a community, but culture also is a way of connecting families and friends together. This thesis is not just for research's sake, but it is a story of people's lives and their relationships with their loved ones. Cultural and linguistic preservation, especially for the Pacific Island diasporic community is the ideal route towards a closer connection to our indigenous cultural roots. With

the growing number of diasporic Palauans and outside influences perpetuating non-traditional views, it is all contributing to the loss of cultural heritage. Palauan-Americans, specifically, are detached from the native lands, which is a significant part of cultural heritage and its association with our practices, words, and relationships with others. By recentering and emphasizing indigenous frameworks in how we revitalize our culture, it provides a hopeful outlook for future generations to continue to uphold their ties to Palau. My hopes after this thesis is to establish tangible ways that the diasporic Palauan community can uphold and practice cultural values, no matter where they are in the diaspora.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

Culture, as Langi Kavaliku (2005) defines it in *Culture and sustainable development in the Pacific* as a “complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual and emotional features that characterise society or social groups. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also different modes of life, the fundamental rights of human beings, value systems, traditions and beliefs... Furthermore, culture is a dynamic reality. It changes, either gradually or rapidly, over time” (Kavaliku, 2005, pg. 22-23). The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the many variables and characteristics that contribute to how an individual and society identify and view the world. In context with the Palauan-American diaspora alone, many contributions have affected the ways in which culture has been practiced and passed on. Race alone does not

singularly define an individual and group of people. Multiple factors including nationality, family structure, and other contributions significantly impact cultural identity.

Culture is a broad concept which involves a variety of interconnected attributes, experiences, and values that are associated with one's upbringing. Despite not having a strong connection to Palauan cultural heritage growing up, that does not remove the fact that I have already built my own sense of culture that has contributed to my identity already. The Bay Area, which has been my home outside of our native island, and the diverse communities that I have connected with, have contributed to how I see the world and view myself. Similarly, the identity that diasporic Palauans have built impacts how they self-identify themselves, culturally, socially, and emotionally. Even without any awareness or direct knowledge of Palauan culture itself, diasporic Palauans have had to find ways to build upon this identity and sense of self. As diasporic peoples find more purposeful ways to learn about Palauan culture, there is this evident need to retrace and communicate with the older generation for means of cultural revival. Our histories of colonization, emigration and globalization are a few long term reasons that have further isolated indigenous people from their culture, evidently finding the need to recenter indigeneity in discussions of finding methods of cultural revitalization.

The purpose of this literature review is to acknowledge the factors that have established the varying identities that diasporic Palauan-Americans today have. The Palauan-American community's lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge is one reason that impacts and reshapes how knowledge and culture itself is perceived and practiced. In addition, Palauan epistemology has further been isolated through key concepts including colonization, emigration, and globalization. In order to have and hold these complex and theoretical discussions on culture, I

have emphasized indigenous methodologies as the foundation of this thesis. In looking through this lens and centering indigenous Pacific methodologies, it can help for further efforts in indigenous cultural revival as well as analyzing at contemporary issues within our community such as tourism, environmental conservation, family dynamic/relationships, domestic violence, sex trafficking, and so forth. I pose the concept of Palauan cultural revitalization as a contemporary issue in response to the ways that core concepts including colonization, emigration, and globalization have impacted cultural heritage, especially for indigenous communities. The development of this literature review is to retrieve the indigenous cultural tenets and values from our ancestors, and reclaim our cultural heritage in modern society. To better understand the background of the issues to be examined in this thesis, an extensive review was taken in place around the thematic concepts around cultural identity in relation to key concepts of colonization, emigration, and globalization.

In this review of the literature, I discuss the transition from traditional Palauan cultural epistemologies, values, and practices, eventually discussing outside systematic influences and exchanges that have eventually led to our modern-day views and perspectives on cultural practices and epistemologies, especially in the Palauan-American diaspora. In addition, I discuss these changes through decolonial discourse and theory. In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the indigenous Palauan epistemology and the relationship between land, spirit, and community. By understanding these values and reestablishing them into our homes and selves, it poses a beginning to reclaim Palauan cultural heritage for the Palauan-American diaspora.

### **Traditional Palauan Values and Epistemology**

*“a place tells us who we are and who is our extended family. A place gives us our history, the history of our clan, and the history of our ancestors. We are able to look at a place and tie in*

*human events that affect us and our loved ones. A place gives us a feeling of stability and of belonging to our family--those living and those who have passed on. A place gives us a sense of well-being, and of acceptance of all who have experienced that place.”*

-Edward Kanahale

***Land and Spirituality*** Prior to colonization, Palauan epistemology inherently perceived and understood the connection between the land, spirit, and body, working together as a cohesive community while respecting the cyclical relationship among each other and the environment. Even today, native Palauans continue to respect and acknowledge the land and spiritual associations it has for the community today. Long ago, when Palau only consisted of Ngeaur (Angaur) and Belilou (Peleliu), there lived a woman named *Latmikaik*. Latmikaik gave birth to a baby named Chuab. As a young child, Chuab ate a lot of food, eventually growing as large as a giant. Because Chuab continued to eat the food on the land, the other islanders had no choice but to kill Chuab, burning him alive. As time passed on, Chuab eventually became the island of Babeldaob- their head becoming the northern state of Ngarchelong, Ngiwal becoming the stomach, and so forth (Rechebei, 1997, pp. 17). To this day, and for many other reasons, land is sacred to Palauan epistemology and way of life. As Sandra Styre’s (2018) “*Literacies of Land*” emphasizes the importance of land in relation to a community’s cultural heritage. In understanding this historical relationship between land, spirit, and body, one can find a closer relationship to their cultural heritage. “Land is an articulation of ancient knowledges grounded in the experiences of self-in-relationship to place... it is the land that holds all knowledge of life and death... Land embodies two simultaneously interconnected and interdependent conceptualizations. Land as an Indigenous philosophical construct is both space (abstract) and place/land (concrete)” (Styres, 2018, pg. 25-27). The relationship between land, culture, spirituality, and epistemology resonates with the Palauan narrative on the importance of land and

culture. Similar to Hawaiian epistemology, land possesses cultural associations and stories, which further exemplifies the relationship between land, spirit, and body. Because of the effects of colonialism and the loss of political sovereignty of the land, this also affects the connection to the physical land and nation. “Specific knowledge of places, connections with them, sustenance for them, as well as opportunities for sustained public dialogue about their traditions” (Bacchilega, 2007, pp. 43). For example, Bacchilega indicates a place called ‘Pueo’, or a mountain peak named after the chief Hi’iakaikapoliopole the goddess Pele’s younger sister, was evidently defeated there (pp. 40). This, amongst many other place names, have lost cultural associations due to colonization. Bacchilega further argues the importance that mo’olelos, or stories, play a significant role today, as methods of counter-narrating and remembering cultural memories associated with the land. This challenges settler hegemonic associations to native land and reclaims indigeneity to land and culture.

***Indigenous Cultural Tenets and Values*** Just as important to the land’s epistemological foundation to Palauan culture, the moral upbringing of the child is just as important and connected as well. How a child presents themselves in public is a reflection of their upbringing in the house. The discipline and behavior taught to children at home is a reflection of the household. The youth should be disciplined at home versus in public, as it is the duty of the home to teach these disciplines. Based on Rechuodel and other Palauan sources, there are 8 values that are significant to the upbringing of a child within the home setting, and evidently how they approach themselves in public: 1. Omengull (*Respect*), 2. Ngerachel (*Responsibility*), 3. Ureor ma Omangerker (*Work Ethic*), 4. Blekongesenges, Blekokeuii, Duchereng (*Obedience, Generosity, and Perseverance*), 5. Odingel ra Klauchad (*Visiting relatives*), 6. Osisecheklel a



Klengariou el Reng (*Humility*), 7. Klechubechub ma Ulekerreu (*Mercy and Compassion*) and 8. Chelbulel a Blai ma Beluu (*Don't forget where you came from*) (Palau Society of Historians et al., 1995, pp. 57-60). The specific explanation for each of these cultural tenets emphasizes how they are taught in the household.

1. **Omengull (*Respect*)** collectively starts at home, emphasizing the reciprocal respect between parents and their children, and evidently all familial relationships as well. From respect to elders, respect to your parents, respect to your siblings, as it collectively follows the teaching of respect towards the clan, the village, and the broader public. Within the structure of the home itself, respect for each other also emphasizes the discipline in the household. For example, it's believed that it's not really scolding or spanking that would discipline a child to learn how to be respectful, but rather the example that the parents set on their children.
2. **Ngerachel (*Responsibility*)** is one of the biggest teachings that parents would instill in their children through their actions (e.g. how to collect firewood, how to cook fish, merar, and other chores) In this sense, daughters follow their mothers to learn certain responsibilities (e.g. mesei), and sons will follow their fathers.
3. **Ureor ma Omangerker (*Work Ethic*)** is learned through clubs particularly for men and clubs particularly for women. Knowledge is shared with each other, including their respective responsibilities and work throughout the community. Respective mentors are available as well teaching different activities including fishing, carving, or mesei.
4. **Blekongesenges, Blekokeuui, Ducherrenng (*Obedience, Generosity, and Perseverance*)** similarly starts from the home upbringing, but a lot of it is learned from "clubs", or individual groups of men or women that assist life lessons to the younger generation. Blekokeuui (*generosity*), for example, is learned within these clubs from serving food and drinks, to having everyone prepare and bring a dish to a home/celebration/etc, as a reminder that everyone always generously provide their fair share to the collective; Ducherrenng (*perseverance*) can be shown through club members working together as a good reflection of their attitude which is reflected to the village.
5. **Odingel ra Klauchad (*Visiting relatives*)** is the most important thing your parents can teach their children about love and relationships between them and their relatives. It is also very important between families and their relationships with their clans.
6. **Osisecheklel a Klengariou el Reng (*Humility*)** teaches you to be humble and to remember where you come from. It eliminates boastfulness and disrespectfulness of being boastful. It also implies that just because you are rich or of a high clan, you should be respectful, regardless.
7. **Klechubechub ma Ulekerreu (*Mercy and Compassion*)** teaches the younger generation to learn how to care for each other (e.g. siblings, cousins, clans, extended family, etc). This also teaches them to care and help anybody who has fallen on hard times (*ebuul*), from there it stems to the clan then eventually to the broader village, especially the old, weak, and disabled. Evidently, take the burden from someone else.

8. **Chelbulel a Blai ma Beluu** (*Don't forget where you came from*) is a reminder that you need to acknowledge and remember the home you stepped out of. Remember where you came from, no matter how successful or wealthy you become. Reminder yourself to keep a good reputation, as it is always a reflection of where you came from and how your parents disciplined you. Your behavior carries out wherever you go.

The values that are upheld from the household impact the ways in which you observe and react to your environment. Relative to the principles of the Kaupapa Maori framework, the ideology behind Whakapapa (*genealogy*) and Tikanga Maori (*customary practices*) both similarly encapsulate the ways in which indigenous knowledge and practices, integrates indigenous epistemological forms of thinking and behaving. These forms of thinking also assist in the decolonial process of thinking and behaving imposed by Western Europe methodologies.

#### **Transmission of Palauan Cultural Heritage:**

Traditionally, Palauan cultural knowledge, practices, and values are passed down through one's parents within the household. Santy Asanuma, Mindszenty High School teacher, had written a post titled, "*Blekerdelel A Chad er a Belau (Palau's Character)*" In his post, Asanuma not only describes the importance of one's upbringing in the household, but states that an individual's character is a concept built on discipline, respect, and social qualities that make them a good person in Palauan society. "*Sel uchei er omtobed el mo ra buai e ke mo ra rael e chisengekl mesa olbed er a blim* (when you reach the pathway before you depart from home to community, turn around and assess (*debedebii*) the platform of your home)" (Asanuma, facebook). Asanuma is aware that these unresolved behaviors is a social phenomenon in Palau that resonates with an unclear value system between the home and public. Aside from basic social skills and beliefs, the value system also includes cultural values of the community and culture as well. Asanuma continues, "*Kau a ngalek er a blai er a buai* (you are a child of your

*home and child of the community*)” (Asanuma, facebook). As an extended family-based community, Palauan culture also reconciles that if the home fails to raise a child to teach them of important skills and values in the house, the school and community should pick up the task of setting people right. As previously mentioned in eual saus, how an individual is brought up in the *blai* is based on the relationship between the *beluu*, *kebliil*, and *telungalk* (Useem, 1945, pp. 568). This transmission of cultural heritage, values, and knowledge are still passed down through generations within the household, in addition to the community. However, over time, the introduction of colonization and globalization have evidently contributed to what cultural knowledge and values have been passed down, stripped from our culture, and consolidated. These interactions and what Palau has evidently come to believe and practice today is a product of both cultural exchange and cultural assimilation. I look at a few key concepts including colonization, self-determination, emigration, and globalization, all of which have impacted how Palauan culture is being produced, practiced and transmitted. Since Palau’s very first interaction with foreigners, this cultural exchange, whether unintentional or forced upon, has impacted Native Palauan culture and how it has been passed down throughout generations. There is a term in Palau called *Cheldebel*, which means club, society, or association. In Palauan customs, when an individual has reached a certain age that shows they are able to provide for the households, they are able to be a part of their designated *cheldebel*. In these clubs, they are taught numerous responsibilities (e.g. *tekoi er a beluu*, *tekoi er a blai*, etc.) that were significant for the structure of the family, clan, household, and community. Because Palau has a structured way of life, *cheldebel* was critical for how individuals were taught these designated responsibilities per setting. However, as we will see throughout Palau’s history and social and political relationship

under colonization, these responsibilities and respects have evidently changed and affected both the Palauan community on the island and the Palauan diaspora as well.

***Colonization and Imperialism*** Foreigner interaction and intervention over the course of Palau's history, was the first of many volatile endurances that evidently impacted and influenced indigenous ideologies, cultures, land, and bodies. Interactions with countries such as Spain, England, Germany, Japan, and evidently the United States encompassed different reasons and intentions, eventually forcing Palau under colonial rule and subjugation. With the Spanish establishing control over the Marianas, Britain and Germany challenged them by attempting to establish control over Palau and the rest of the Micronesian region in the mid-1850's. Eventually through this tension, Palau was officially a part of the Spanish empire, and as of February 19, 1886, Queen Maria Cristina signed a decree establishing a Spanish government in Palau (Palauan Society of Historians, 1995, pp.118). For the twelve year period that the Spanish administered Palau, Catholicism was introduced and was one of the first outside influences that challenged traditional Palauan culture and spirituality. While the Spanish established itself in Palau, it underwent tension between other nations in the Spanish-American War. As a result, Spain lost and evidently transferred Palau to the German Administration on December 10, 1898, now controlling all of the Micronesian region, including Palau (p.122). Evidently on August 23, 1914, Japan had declared war on Germany, alongside British and French allies. The end of the "Great War" resulted in the loss of German administration over the Micronesian islands, transferring power to the Japanese (Palauan Society of Historians, 1995, pp. 144). While occupied under the Japanese administration for 30 years, eventually leading up to the Second World War, Palau had endured physical and cultural abuse during this timespan. Under colonial policy, Japan sought to

modernize Palau's economic system, immigrate more Japanese colonists on the island, acculturate Micronesian natives to Japanese culture through indoctrination and training, and establish military bases with means to expand their power throughout the Pacific (Palauan Society of Historians, 1995, pg. 148). This political agenda and the everyday impact it caused upon native Palauans is still remembered in present time. Mita Maki (2009) conducted a number of interviews with Palauans living during the World War II era. From cultural assimilation to physical abuse, many native Palauans endured abuse of many kinds. Singeo Techong, rubak (elder man) who is identified as half Palauan and half Japanese, recollecting getting beaten by Japanese soldiers.

“I saw my friends getting beaten and kicked by Japanese soldiers, who belonged to the Adachi troop of Ogino party. I was also kicked and seriously beaten, and after that, I could not even walk by myself. But I did not know why this had happened, and I asked my friends, but nobody knew why. In this incident twenty-nine Palauans were injured, especially the chief of Meyuns who was tied up and beaten so seriously that he lost his hearing. I still wonder why the Japanese soldiers were so violent with us. This is one of the worst things that the Japanese did in Palau. I think that I must make allowances for that episode because it happened in wartime .... Wars brutalize people whenever they happen. It was a bitter experience, and I have not told others this story until today (Maki, 2009, pp. 37).

Colonial abuse and assimilation, driven through Japanese political and economic policies, was also carried out through everyday life, impacting native islanders to an intense degree.

***Self-Determination*** The road towards self-determination has been different for every island nation, most of whom are still struggling and fighting for their rights towards independence today. In the context of Palau, since the end of World War II and the secession of the Micronesian islands from the Japanese administration, the United States had adopted these islands until self-sustainability. In 1947, the United Nations had approved the administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) under the United States administration. From 1947 to 1978, the United States administration provided these forms of assistance to the Palauan islands (Hinck, 1990, p. 916) However, while being under TTPI, this did not mean Palau ceased their collective action towards independence. Evidently, Palau ceded from TTPI, choosing to become a sovereign country in 1994 as the Republic of Palau. “On February 6, 1990, the citizens of Palau, an island chain in the western Pacific, voted for the seventh time in a decade on whether to approve an agreement with the United States known as the Compact of Free Association” (Hinck, 1990, p. 915). Haunani Kay-Trask (1999) elaborates on imperialist countries having coerced island nations into seeking economic means of dependence. In Palau’s context,

“any material aid to the colonies is an extension of exploitation, given to strengthen the economic dependency that binds colonized to colonizer, just as teaching Natives to speak English, watch television, and consume alcohol creates a clever web of psychological dependency from which the colonized find it nearly impossible to disentangle.

Generations become addicted to the worst cultural habits of the colonial society, which increases both ignorance of, and alienation from, the Native culture. Indeed, cultural hegemony is the cutting edge of the imperial enterprise, which explains why cultural

nationalism becomes such a crucial Native strategy in the battle for decolonization”

(Trask, 1999, pp. 42).

The evident effects that colonization and imperialism have imposed on and around the Pacific region is also reflected on the political transition towards self-determination. Opposition against the American administration for complete independence was overlooked and resisted. American officials persistently opposed Palau’s negotiations of a nuclear-free constitution, arguing that these negotiations will “change in its relationship with Palau that would restrict the transit of U.S. nuclear-powered vessels or threaten the status of military bases... claiming that they jeopardize its security interests. From the inception of the U.N. trusteeship, the United States has expressed its strategic interest in the islands. In fact, the Trusteeship Agreement between the United States and the U.N. Security Council recognized and affirmed a strategic U.S. role in the maintenance of international peace and security” in the Pacific (Hinck, 1990, pp. 916).

***Emigration*** In the midst of seeking sovereignty, Palauans in the Pacific have also opted to take advantage of the opportunity to travel abroad and seek opportunities elsewhere through their rights in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI). Although this may not be the only reason for emigrating outside of Palau, Hezel (2013) reviews the 30 year-long history of migration that he argues has become an evolving epidemic. As Hezel and colleague Michael Levin have argued, future emigration had been once seen as a taboo to the Micronesian community, however, it has been counted upon as an essential strategy to access economic, educational, and political opportunities that may not be available on their native island (Hezel, 2013, pp. 3). Hezel and Levin saw that Palau was the first island group in Micronesia to emigrate elsewhere in the 1980’s first arriving in Guam. Over the 20 year period from 1953 to 1972, a

jump in the number of Palauans emigrating to Guam went from 50-60 people a year, to roughly 240 a year (p. 5). The continuous emigration of communities since the TTPI era had offered new opportunities, however, had in turn, impacted the structure of families and cultural upbringing as well. Gershon (2007) argues that the physical separation between community and land disrupts transnational diasporas, provoking “ruptures and reconstructions” that obstacles in which many diasporic islanders face. “In the Pacific, it is families and their transnational connections that sustain diasporas, making them both durable and visible. Without families and familial knowledge transmission, how would diasporas remain compelling concepts for interpreting differences as cultural or ethnic? By pointing out that families are the culturally specific, integral units that constitute diasporas... to understand the Pacific, one is better served by attending to people’s daily experiences of interconnected webs of exchanges and kinship than by focusing on the disconnections and isolations integral to a Western colonial perspective” (Gershon, 2007, p. 474). Gershon’s argument states that family is the focus of how diasporas will prosper and uphold their cultural connections, despite physical distance separating the diaspora and their homeland. Familial connections, as seen through everyday exchanges, is a key principle that are vital to not just the connection with the homeland, but interrelated themes of family, community, and culture. Kristen McGavin (2017) elaborates in *(Be)Longings: Diasporic Pacific Islanders and the meaning of home* on the emotional endurance of detaching oneself from ‘home’ and everything else that home signifies for the Pacific Island diaspora. “A central quality of Micronesian identity is the strong cultural attachment to home and land, as it is among many Pacific Islanders and other traditional peoples throughout the world” (McGavin, 2017, p. 126). McGavin argues that ‘home’ is also not strictly a physical entity, but an ever-changing concept



that is relative and nuanced to each individual's identities, belongings, and all concepts that are intimate to them specifically. "Home might be found in multiple locations... especially salient point for people in diaspora who, to various degrees and under certain circumstances, may perceive both the diasporic 'home' and the ancestral 'homeland' as equal in the levels of personal belonging that the places generate for them" (McGavin, 2017, pp. 130). How individuals evidently define 'home' is up to their relationship to their homeland(s) and their thoughts and experiences that contribute to this relationship with home. This construction of home is an extension of their cultural identity and a collective notion of 'homeland' that resonates with both how they perceive homeland based on their experiences, in addition to "the 'valorization of certain aspects of the past, as well as amnesia about other aspects'. This process is one via which the romantic, and not always accurate, idea of the homeland... Often, diasporic people's notions of the homeland also include ideas about homeland-based people" (McGavin, 2017, pp. 130-131).

**Globalization** For the purpose of this thesis, Robyn M Rodriguez defines Globalization as, "changes in economic, political, and cultural life due to accelerated flows of capital, goods, media, and people across borders" (Schlund-Vials et al, 2015, pp. 119). These global changes manifest in many facets of society, affecting the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects. In the context of the Palauan diaspora, globalization has gradually impacted society since the realm of colonization. As argued, Spain and Germany's possession of Palau and the other Micronesian islands, was for both political and economic gain that individually served the administration in power. For Germany, specifically, "The Germans were particularly interested in making a profit from their colonies. The Marshalls and Yap were turned into major copra

plantations. The other island supplemented their Cobra production with sales of wood, oranges, Ivory nuts, trepang, tortoise shell and mother-of-pearl” (Rechebei et al., 1997, pp. 125). Much of these imports and exports were not native to the land, resulting in the introduction of nonnative imports including tobacco, Manila hemp, and coffee. The continuous labor, interaction with new foreigners, and the introduction of new diseases impacted the Palauan community, as well as the German’s economy on the island. This also resulted in the “introduction of a money economy and the western commercial sense [which] altered the way Palauans lived and interacted. For many Palauans, the 'good old days' were those days before the arrival of the foreigners. Things were orderly, everyone knew his or her position in the society and while the land was fertile, there was food for all. With the arrival of foreigners, new diseases were introduced. New concepts of wealth and competition directly challenged the old customs. foreign government systems upset the traditional balance of power. New religions altered the people's perceptions of their relations with their traditional gods and spirits. Although no mention is made of them in most historical references, there were endemic diseases, even before the foreigners arrived (Rechebei et al., 1997, pp. 127). This economic relationship continued well after the German administration and continues to be the subject in Palauan news today with tourism, what self-sufficiency looks like under the United States’ Compact of Free Association (COFA), and Palau’s relationship with the Chinese administration via the 99 year lease. Aside from the political and economic changes in Palauan society, this had also affected the cultural ways of life, through means of intermingling with Japanese soldiers, and cultural instances in Palauan society including language and religion, to name a few.

*Development* With all contributions impacting society, the concern evidently comes down to how these island nations have moved forward, despite these impacts. The question of development has preceded since Spanish, German, and Japanese colonization by how they have individually set precedence in changing the Palauan societal atmosphere. Moreso, how development is defined is a signifier for what intentions and motives these particular institutions have for “third world nations”. Previously mentioned, factors including colonization and political mobilization, to name a few, are haunted by underlying effects that are carried out in Palauan society. Sarah White’s (2002) *Thinking Race, Thinking Development* discusses how the idea behind ‘development’ for communities of color have tended to be interpreted through a colour-blind lense, not completely nuanced to the needs of the community. Discussing race is critical when discussing development, as White argues that “race [is] a socio-historical construct, which operates simultaneously as an aspect of identity and as an organising principle in forging social structure” (White, 2002, pp. 408). Development under-prioritizes the consideration of race within society’s patriarchal and hegemonic framework. White (2002) also extends Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s discussion about racial formation theory and racial projects, in relevance to development (Omi et al., 1986, as cited in White, 2002). Omi and Winant define ‘racial formations’ as the process by which social, economic, and political factors determine the content of these racial categories, hence shaping the racial meanings. ‘Racial projects’, also defined by Omi and Winant, are actions or decisions taken into consideration and followed through based on these racial formations, in order to reorganize the racial and hegemonic structure of a community and further subordinate people of color. White (2002) continues to argue that development is an example of a racial project because of the colorblind lense that does not

consider the needs of a community, rather chooses the needs for them. By incorporating race, it includes factors such as a community's historical and colonial context, political and economic relationships with other countries, and the community's internal processes that play a factor in how 'development' should be carried out in society. By recognizing these diverse identities and lived experiences, it less becomes a racial project that generalizes the needs for a whole community, and more so serves as a counter-narrative against problematic racial projects imposed by the dominant hegemonic collective. In current events, and as previously mentioned, the broader Pacific region, including Palau, are currently being subjected by Chinese business relations including the 99 year lease and the building of the casino in Saipan, to name some examples. How one defines 'development' is up to the community and whether these means of development are acceptable and fit the particular needs of the community it serves.

### **Decolonizing and Reclaiming Palauan Cultural Heritage and Identity**

Ultimately, these impacts in cultural practices and ideologies are further contested for diasporic Pacific Islanders living outside their homeland. Relative questions arise asking, 'Who is indigenous?' and 'How does this affect our construction of identity?' Jeff J Corntassel's (2003) *Who is Indigenous? 'Peoplehood' and Ethnonationalist Approaches to Rearticulating Indigenous Identity* discusses the global debate on particular characteristics that are incorporated to define indigeneity. Over time, the issue has been heavily politicized, creating a less nuanced understanding of indigeneity. Three broad themes that many academics have argued as critical for indigenous identity included: Communities who are descendents from aboriginal inhabitants of the area, they want to continue to live in terms of their cultural traditions, and are currently subjected to cultural hegemony opposed against them by outside force (Corntassel, 2003, pp.

78). Many indigenous communities today may agree upon these notions, however, Cornthassel and others have also generally agreed that it is also up to the indigenous communities themselves to define what makes someone considered ‘indigenous’. Furthermore, Kirsten McGavin’s (2014) *Being “Nesian”: Pacific Islander Identity in Australia* discusses the broader transnational relationship between Pacific Islanders and their location outside of their native island. McGavin delves into what persists as ‘authentic’ Pacific Islander behavior, in context with diasporic islanders and their relationship with land, race, and identity. Culturally speaking, being an islander should inevitably mean that our connection to our ‘homeland’ should be unaffected, even with distance. McGavin expands on a larger thematic construct of racial ties between diasporic Pacific Islanders and their homelands, like sending remittances to home islands, adhering to cultural practices outside of one’s homeland, and keeping cultural ideologies and social constructs in the home (McGavin, 2014, p. 136). Even with distance, McGavin has argued that diasporic Pacific Islanders strengthen their ties to their homeland through strictly following certain sets of behaviors in order to stay connected to their culture (p. 136). Evidently, reclaiming cultural heritage can take upon many forms, in which each individual holds their own sets of priorities that all depend on the context of their lived experiences with their homeland.

***Cultural Revitalization*** The thesis has served as an argument towards recentering indigenous values for Palauans in the diaspora today. In addition to the previously mentioned reasons that have contributed to how cultural heritage is passed down, ‘transnationalism’, which refers to individuals or groups who migrate and reside in another nation, face the challenges of integration between both nations and their social, political, and economic rules and regulations. ‘Transnationalism’ as Godinet and Vakalahi define, is “the existence of major social networks

and strong linkages between communities in both the new location and the homeland” (Godinet et al, 11). The diasporic Palauans outside of Palau are not only disconnected physically from the land, but all other cultural, social, and political aspects the land is tied to. One method of revitalization that centering indigeneity can offer, as Godinet and Vakalahi have found, is through the stories and histories of Pacific Islanders themselves. “Unlike their ancestors, the children of Oceania today face a duality or multiplicity of cultural identity because of migration, travel, and interaction with other cultures” (p. 10). It is important to understand transcultural adaptation, or the stress and anxiety in adapting and adjusting to cultural differences and environments. Inadequately adjusting to a new environment can hinder generations and the upholding of cultural heritage with new cultural expectations. This ultimately affects the ways in which individuals throughout the diaspora also perceive their idea of ‘home’ and sense of belonging, as Vilisoni Hereniko elaborates in *“Representations of Cultural Identities”*. Hereniko discusses the lingering challenges behind the concept of ‘national identities’ and how contemporary articulations of identity affect the concept of culture for diasporic Pacific Islanders. Contemporary Pacific identities acknowledge how diasporic Pacific Islanders are readily able to code-switch from their ‘pakeha (white)’ behavior to the localized Pacific behavior, depending on their location and community (Hereniko, 1999, pp. 421). But what more can identity encompass? Hereniko continues by expanding on the sense that identity is more than pride and representation. He argues that diasporic Pacific Islanders today are confident in how they represent their culture, however “they pay lip-service to a Pacific identity, [which] they have only a vague idea of how such an identity translates into concrete actions. Everyday behaviour and responses to questions of identity are therefore misleading-- they claim to be islanders and

deny their colonial heritage” (Hereniko, 1999, pg. 421). What culture and identity entail can be ambiguous. Aside from being racially pacific islander, Hereniko also expands on the community’s calling to not be docile and react to issues and current events that are troubling our communities. Representing one’s cultural identity is both pride and praxis.

***Decolonizing Palauan Cultural Heritage*** In the words of Dr. Epeli Hau’ofa (1993), “Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean” (Hau’ofa, 1993, pg 16). Oceania is a vast entity of water, inhabiting the island nations of our Pacific Island communities. Hau’ofa’s rhetoric served as a narrative for the empowerment that our communities are capable of, from being scholars and activists, to sailing thousands of miles in open seas. Hau’ofa argued that oceania was more than a large body of ocean which has fruitfully provided for our ancestors. But it was also a collective reminder that we are not defined by the smallness of our islands, as the physical entity of our islands does not define what our communities are capable of accomplishing. Hau’ofa’s argument served as a counterargument against hegemonic narratives outlining and belittling our islands to the physicality and boundaries imposed onto them. Rather, the histories and great feats Pacific communities have endured argues that

Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* discusses the impact that language can serve as a decolonizing tool effective towards decolonizing culture, history and identity. Thiong’o outlines “language [as] the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (Thiong’o,

1986 p. 9). Language, a vehicle for communication, can thus reflect how we act upon ideologies based on the words or phrases that. Thiong'o continued to argue that language served two purposes: a means of communication and a carrier of culture (pp. 13). With colonization and the culture that has been imposed onto indigenous communication, words and phrases are adopted into the culture as well. These words and phrases are indicative of larger and broader connotations and imply governing concepts that dictate what is right and wrong, good or bad, and ugly and beautiful (pp. 14). Culture, reflective in the language, may also indicate characteristics and epistemologies either native or enforced into a community from colonization. In essence, Thiong'o argues that decolonizing the language is inevitably decolonizing the culture as well.

Finally, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies* portrayed the chronology from how research has predominantly been around studies by heteronormative patriarchal men as the foundation of research, to now where we are discussing decolonization and recentering the narratives of people of color at the forefront. Everyone's process of how they decide to reclaim their indigenous culture depends on their stories. Specifically for Palauan-Americans, reclaiming our cultural heritage would include reevaluating our matrilineal culture and the respect we are supposed to have for our women, relearn our language because it's tied to so many aspects of our culture, and recognizing our past colonial histories and realize how they continue to affect us today. Ignorance is detrimental to communities' cultural survival. As Tuhiwai-Smith proclaimed, in order to move towards a more '*indigenous experience*', one must discuss imperialism through economic expansion, the subjugation of others, an idea or spirit with many forms of realization, and as a discursive field of knowledge (Tuhiwai-Smith,



2012, p. 22). Tuhiwai-Smith further rearticulates and recenters indigenous narratives and experiences as “a purposeful dream has been conceptualized partially around key cultural concepts such as tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty), whanau (family), hapu (clan/tribal subdivision), iwi (extended family, sub-tribal groupings and tribe), te reo (Maori language), and tikanga Maori (Maori cultural customs)” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, pp. 113). These core concepts are embedded in not just the Maori language, but their worldwide view on how they express themselves and see the world. Resonating with the Palauan-American diaspora, in order to reclaim our cultural heritage, we must also reframe the way we associate family, clan, and language in relation to empowerment and sovereignty. Cultural heritage is the epistemological relationship between the land, spirituality, language, and customs.

***Reclamation of Palauan Cultural Heritage*** Palauan culture is profound and unique. It encompasses so much and is highly structured in a way that may be complicated to adhere to, especially in the context of the Palauan-American diaspora who are not physically or culturally attached to the land. Socialization begins in the home, in addition to outside influences from three major moments in time including colonization, emigration, and globalization. These systematic impacts that have, and continue, to affect our cultural heritage, involuntarily changing the ways in which Palauan cultural identity is practiced and enforced throughout the diaspora. Culture is interconnected, sporadic, and encompasses a variety of subjects, and with colonial repercussions, underlying concerns include ‘What is culture in a contemporary format?’, ‘How do our parents and ancestors’ cultural upbringing differentiate or compare to our own experiences?’, and ‘How have colonization, emigration, and globalization affected the process of reclaiming cultural heritage for diasporic islanders today?’ The variety of experiences that have

occurred throughout Palau's history are not only important to acknowledge when discussing our history and past, but the underlying lessons from these instances provide us ways to empower and reestablish our indigenous values and practices for the sake of our community's well-being and culture. Through methods of *cheldecheduch* that assist in framing cultural knowledge in academic curriculum, there are various ways to feel and be reconnected to one's own heritage today.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

I aimed to interview the broader 'Diasporic Palauan' community, including Palauan Americans and Palauans living, or have lived, outside of Palau. By interviewing a larger sample size of Palauans with a variety of unique lived experiences, it opens up a larger discussion of underlying themes relative to cultural heritage. These discussions can be adaptive towards seeking culturally-relevant methods of acquiring knowledge through *cheldecheduch*. The stories of these interviewees are ways that give back to the larger discussion and can perpetuate the continuation of its practices, despite living abroad and throughout the diaspora. With this and many other significant factors, the aim of these interviews was to grasp a more diverse range of narratives that can help assist in understanding and decolonizing current ideologies in order to further revitalize cultural heritage amongst Palauan American throughout the diaspora.

#### **Review of Data Collection**

I have interviewed a sample size of 11 participants, from states including Hawaii, Oregon, California, and Utah. I had initiated a series of interviews discussing Palauan cultural heritage, cultural transmission, historical influences, and generational differences that have, and currently still, impact Palauan cultural epistemologies today. The sets of questions directed towards these participants included the following topics: 1. general questions on the individual and their cultural upbringing, 2. cultural identity and values, 3. views on globalization in Palau, 4. decolonization of topics including gender, race, sexuality, religion, actions, and language, and 5. how certain traditional practices and values may have changed over time through modernization. Historical events throughout Palau's history and how these effects have contributed to the larger Palauan community is not a singular occurrence, but rather multiple moments in time that have gradually impacted how we view the world and evidently behave in society.

The interviews may also allow for how we may further elaborate on a Palauan American-based framework around cultural preservation, while being surrounded by diverse ideologies and communities that can affect the ways in which we view our culture. In addition, these interviews can assist in curating a nuanced framework to assist in acknowledging and understanding how the diaspora navigate their cultural identities today. My hopes for the outcome of this thesis will assist in better understanding the changing values, throughout the range of perspectives and lived experiences each interviewee has provided. In light of Palau's momental impacts over time, this thesis serves to elaborate on these impacts with the community members themselves, serving a purpose to provide collective insight and potential action moving forward. In addition, how do Palauan Americans best create community and a sense of belonging

between the land, culture, people, and how to move forward in today's society, while keeping in mind the indigenous values that our ancestors have practiced. The development of this thesis will use stories and narratives as a source of knowledge and critique around topics on cultural heritage and its effects on how individuals in the Palauan diaspora self-identify.

## **Findings**

Underlying themes from these interviews have agreed upon the argument that changing dynamics amongst the Palauan diaspora are impacting the structure of cultural practices and epistemologies. From how certain responsibilities are carried out, to the fear behind the loss of these practices over time, these interviews have also brought additional concerns that my research has not delved into. In addition to my previous concern regarding the loss of cultural heritage and how Palauan Americans can revitalize these practices today, the results of these interviews have raised more concerns, some of which have not been included in the previous literature and further argue the importance behind recentring indigeneity in the home. I have organized my results based on the following three themes: Cultural responsibilities, internalized mental and emotional implications, and bridging indigeneity and modernity.

### ***Cultural Responsibilities***

One particular question that offered valuable discussion was regarding upholding certain responsibilities in and outside of the household, whether that be culturally relevant or not. Each participant shared their own household responsibilities, in which they have prioritized over others. This section discusses two types of responsibilities: generational responsibilities and

transnational responsibilities. Generational responsibilities have been a recurring theme amongst interviewees, particularly the dissonance between their own generation and their parents' generation. One interviewee who was born and raised in Palau, "Lia", brought up the subject of 'Ocheraol', or a gathering dedicated to raising money for the homeowners to pay off their new home. This gathering has been a way for family members and the community to collectively help each other in order to raise money to pay off a house. If everyone contributes and the amounts are calculated, but the total price is not reached, there will be another round of money contributed until the total value is reached. Lia regarded these cultural events as "being over the top these days". Despite the cultural and communal implications behind holding these events, over time it seemed almost like a 'popularity contest'. "I think there are some house parties done right. There are a lot of things that have changed to match these times. Homes are more expensive and I think being able to take loans doing house parties are just more of a way to let relatives know that they built a home." The extent that many households behind these events will go to, are extending away from the underlying cultural implications and in which these events are driven for. Today, with the higher costs of homes with an additional cost for music, preparation for food, and setup, ocherauls and omengats are becoming way more expensive than initially entailed to be.

In regards to transnational responsibilities, these have shown another facet that alludes to the variety of priorities less discussed upon in the Palauan American context. After reading the list of Palauan values to "Grace", a native of Portland, Oregon, the value of 'responsibility' had caught her attention. She responded, "Wow, 'responsibility', that's a good one. See, that's so interesting...like [one of our cousins], who was like, born [in Palau] but she grew up here [in the

U.S]... because of how she was raised and what her parents expected from her, is different from what my parents expect of me... so like for both for us... education, for example, was important. But... for her, although education was important... taking care of her aunts and uncles, her nieces and nephews were important too. Then for me, my responsibilities were [more towards] school and chores around the house and stuff like that. What [your] responsibilities are, depends on like... I wanna say because I was born [in the U.S] and my parents couldn't put those expectations on me because it was hard to explain... but for like [cousins born in Palau], it's what they did [in Palau], like that's why they do it here [too] because they were accustomed to those responsibilities. So like, it depends on, how you were raised and what your responsibilities look like”

### ***Analysis of Data***

Evidently, cultural practices are not upheld the same in every household. Despite the general values that are to be upheld in Palauan society, it is interesting to see how each household practices them to their own extent. In Lia’s argument regarding the ‘ocheraol’, there are particular individuals who see the financial burden in upholding these events today. Whereas there are others who still uphold these cultural events, despite the financial concern it may be on families. Nonetheless, ocheraol’s are cultural practices with the common collective of helping one another. In today’s society and certain changes due to modernization, each household holds their own views on how ocheraols are practiced, for example. Similar to Grace’s narrative pertaining to transnational responsibilities, she had noticed the differences of responsibilities due to how her and her cousin were raised. In a larger scope, the prioritization of responsibilities depends on each household and what they deem as a higher priority over others.

### ***Internalized Mental and Emotional Implications***

The establishment of the home and its values is important for the social dynamic of the household and the relationship among the family. The relationship with your family and how it is reflected within your upbringing also plays a significant role in how your actions and values are reflected in your household. However, aside from upholding these holistic values such as respect or responsibility, in reference to the values indicated in *Rechuodel*, some may argue that upholding cultural values are more prioritized than the love for the family. Virginia's story about relationships with kids and valorizing others, while belittling your own was something that grew to bother her. Growing up, Virginia lived in more than one location, including Palau, Guam, Saipan, and eventually the United States. Certain locations, Virginia stayed with her mother, while at other times, she lived without her. Having extended family, she wasn't necessarily worried about being alone, however, Virginia claimed that not having her mother around as often and being raised amongst other families bothered her. She was always criticized and constantly compared to others. There were other times she was belittled in front of family, at a point, questioning her relationship with those particular relatives and their love towards her. Virginia's story about family prioritizing cultural responsibilities over family resonated with both Virginia, living amongst older relatives, and the next interviewee, "James". This may also act as a generational difference, but may possibly reflect households today for all we are aware of.

"James", who was born in the late 1950's, was raised in Palau until he moved to the United States in the early 1980's. Prior to living in the United States, James described having a rough and abusive relationship with his father. James spoke of multiple stories, reminiscing his childhood and the pain he endured growing up. "There was a time [my uncle] scolded me. I

cussed back at him and walked away. Little did I know, my brother snitched on me to my dad. My dad took me to [my uncle's] house... and when we went over there, I remember my friends, my classmates, and some more people standing over there. And [my dad] told [my uncle] to hit me. In front of everyone" I paused. James continued. "[My uncle] said 'No that's ok, that's ok.' But my dad repeated himself and was like, 'No I want you to [hit him]'. So [my uncle] hit me, in front of all these people. Until this day, I still think, 'All that for your kid? Especially for your kid?' Another time, my dad hit me and I ran away. He hit me once and I ran away. He said 'I'm gonna catch you' and I think 'you will never catch me.' I ran... and I hid myself. [My dad] looked up, and just returned [to the house]. And that's when I make my tent... and I sleep in the jungle until the next day. Then the next day I came, [looked around]... [but my dad] never [said] anything [to me]... Sometimes [I go to] [where] my grandma [lives] and stay there. One time I was there, and my dad came over and picked me up... He took me... [but] as soon as we go through that, you know, past the banana plants. He starts hitting me. One time, he hit me with a... you know, the skobang? Instead of using the [broom] end of it, he used the hard [top] and he hit me. He knocked me out. He knocked me out. And then, and then, he hit me twice, number three I feel.. I kinda woke up..." James went on other times he was hit by his father. However, despite reminiscing on painful moments from his past, James had also described that over time and through constant reflection, it had taken a while for him to finally find forgiveness in his father. "I realized that I cannot blame it on my dad. Because my dad and his upbringing... I think, because he was bouncing back and forth between his mom and his older brother, it was hard for him. In fact, when I went to Palau... my last trip, finally [my dad] told me that [his brother] used to hit him really hard. So you cannot blame my dad so much"



“Maria”, a Palauan-American born and raised in Portland, Oregon, opened up about emphasizing the need to prioritize mental health in the Palauan community. “Sometimes [topics like] gaslighting or mental abuse [are] never brought up because of cultural differences in child rearing. I think we should decolonize our minds to believe that not talking about our feelings is strength.” Maria continued to discuss her relationship with her family in the household, especially after her parent’s divorce. “My parents [split] up when I was in high school. I thought my world had come apart, but a few years later I am really glad it happened. I don’t have to see two people be toxic to each other anymore” From issues within the home such as divorce, to larger discussions around mental health, both topics are significant with underlying themes around upholding a family structure.

### ***Analysis of Data***

The extent in which hegemonic ideologies and practices have imposed on family structure, including child rearing within the home, is reflective of Western influences subconsciously directing how Pacific Island households hold relationships with family and the evident mental repercussions it causes for future generations. As previously explained based on the core values within a Palauan household listed in *Rechuodel*, the act of discipline and child rearing did not include scolding or spanking, but rather the example that the parents actions set for their children (Palau Society of Historians et al., 1997). This also brings about the concept of Intergenerational Trauma, or the transmission of historical oppression and its negative consequences across generations (Urban Society of Aboriginal Youth, 2012, p. 4). The mental and emotional repercussions ultimately impact the individual, their children, household, and future generations. Despite not heavily discussing the mental and emotional impacts that abuse

can do on a child, brings two discussions in light. First, it shows how colonial impact does not only affect the cultural heritage of a community or the western influence impacting cultural epistemologies, but it also impacts the community on an emotional level that can be detrimental to the mental health and emotional wellbeing of an individual and the community they surround themselves with. What these problematic colonial influences can do to an individual can affect and impact the people around them, in Palauan context, affecting their *telungalk*, their *kebliil*, their *blai*, and as we have seen in the *Eual Saus* framework, it may possibly shift to the *Bai* and *Beluu* as more colonial influences feed their way around society. It may or may not be the case, but as we expand our thinking of how colonization and western influences have already impacted Palauan society today, it is not completely false. Secondly, also evident in the concept of *Eual Saus*, sometimes removing a part of you is for the best that suits for better cohesion for the individual and/or within the household. “Maria” discussed her parent’s divorce and how their constant disagreements leading to their divorce was evidently what Maria believed to be best for her household. If we are to generalize the idea of one person’s *Eual Suas* within the household as a reflection of all households, then we are dismissing all other unique situations from other Palauan households. The divorce between her parents created better cohesion in the household, hence a more stable relationship with her and her family today. This may also touch upon broader topics in Palauan society such as adoption, the meaning of extended family, and divorce. No matter the situation, it all evidently depends on each individual household, how they prioritize their responsibilities, and how familial relationships are upheld to fulfill these responsibilities cohesively.

### ***Bridging Indigeneity and Modernity***

Finally, part of which is one of many important factors for the Palauan-American community is the cohesion between our indigenous values and systems within the context of Palauan-American culture. Is there a cohesive way of bridging the two together? Is it possible to uphold indigenous views in Palauan-American society, and if so how? One significant theme which resonated amongst many interviewees was regarding humanizing our shared experiences through empathy. Particularly on the discussion of immigration, Maria commented on the collective racist views derived from elder Palauans. Maria exclaimed, “Immigrants do the jobs the developed countries refuse to do and bring a lot of perspective to this country. Most immigrants coming from holistic cultures challenge the individualistic idea of how to work as humans on this planet” Immigration also offers diverse ideologies that can be beneficial to a community’s individualistic ego, in which may offer ways to decolonize these individualistic mentalities as Palau, and many Pacific Island nations, are culturally communal societies.

Another interviewee, “Katy”, describes the current relations of Palauan politics and its use of ‘democracy’ hindering traditional governance today. Katy explains, “Let’s look at land. In today’s time, if two individuals or fractions of a clan are fighting over land, the issue must be taken to land court in front of a judge and the judge will make the final decision. A judge, who has no knowledge and history of the said land, must now make a decision between the two parties. But before democracy came to Palau, issues were brought to the high chiefs of the village, who had the knowledge of that village, and their evident decision was based on their knowledge and history of that village and clan. In some cases, our customs shouldn’t change to a different system, but they should adjust to the times”. Katy, who is a Palauan-American born and raised in California, is currently living and working in Palau for almost four years. She had

described that living in Palau and growing accustomed to the everyday way of life has shown her clear examples of how certain aspects of modernity may hinder and impose the loss of traditional and indigenous practices today.

Grace, who was asked about a moment in time that played significant to her experience as a Palauan American, pointed out the similar sense of ignorance during her time at the Palauan American Heritage Summit in Portland, Oregon. Grace recalled, “That [event] was a disaster... During the event was a panel discussion and one of the questions was ‘What would you want to see?’ and [another cousin] said they’d want a museum of Palauan culture. The [following] panelists also agreed, so it was nice how everyone agreed on that idea. But the comments [in the livestream video on Facebook] were not nice... people were saying, ‘they don't know what they're talking about?’ and ‘what do you need a museum for?’ That just goes to show like, what people were agreeing with and criticizing us on, rather than the whole picture... So it just sucked because we really tried so hard to present ourselves in a way that we actually cared about our culture, but the way people interpreted it was like we didn't care and we just wanted some kinda museum or some kinda service to like educate us, rather than ‘doing the work’” Grace continued to explain that because of the turn of events, the negative feedback, and no support made her feel defeated. “The whole event... taught me about culture... and the relationship between Palauans and Palauan-Americans. I talk about why people don't really value American-born Palauans, like that's the perfect example of that 'cause... why would you not be open-minded to anything. It was an eye-opening experience that showed me our evident generational difference between each other.” Similar to Maria, Grace felt a lack of empathy from Palauans in her community.

### ***Analysis of Data***

Prior to collective cohesion between Palauans and diasporic Palauans is the acknowledging differences amongst both communities. This lack of empathy between Palauans and Palauan-Americans, resonating in Grace's narrative, seems to be a collective concern for many Palauans throughout the diaspora. Disagreement is evident, but despite these differences, how does the community come to a consensus in order to find resolution? The evident matter of these findings was classifying how both communities can bridge indigenous knowledge in modern society. Through Katy's narrative regarding Palauan politics today, there are current ways that this bridging of traditional and modernity is occurring in society. The concern is the extent in which the bridging occurs that loss of cultural practices and ideologies are not lost or subordinated in the process. This brings about another concern relative to western influences portrayed from American politics. From the political sphere to other cultural concerns such as the financial burden from *ocheraol* in Lia's narrative, the basis of knowing how to find balance and prioritize is evidently needed in these cases. These examples are also ways that western influences have impacted traditional knowledge and epistemologies today.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Discussions**

These broader themes compiled based on the discussions from my interviewees have offered knowledge that have both agreed upon the need for bridging indigeneity with the Palauan-American diaspora, but also recognizing the particular limitations that

Palauan-Americans have in order to address their cultural disparities. From mental health to capitalist constructions undermining cultural practices today, the lack of these discussions may be of many reasons it can be difficult to bridge the Palauan-American community to their older community members, and eventually the larger diaspora. In relationship to the literature from Chapter II, these impacts in cultural practices and ideologies are contested for diasporic Pacific Islanders living outside their homeland. But despite the distance, diasporic Palauans have attempted to strengthen their ties to their homeland in order to stay connected to their culture, as discussed with my interviewees. Evidently, in respects to the framework of *eual saus*, reclaiming cultural heritage can take upon many forms, in which each individual holds their own sets of priorities that all depend on the context of their lived experiences with their *blai*, *beluu*, and *telungalk*.

Hereniko's argument from "*Representations of Cultural Identities*" directly discusses the sense that identity is more than pride and representation, but "how such an identity translates into concrete actions" (pg. 421). It is the action that needs to accompany the intention. Representing one's cultural identity is both pride and praxis. From a decolonial perspective, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies* discusses decolonization and recentering the narratives of people of color at the forefront is important, which resonates with the importance of *talanoa* and *cheldech duch*. Everyone's process of how they decide to reclaim their indigenous culture depends on their stories. Specifically for Palauan-Americans, reclaiming our cultural heritage would include acknowledging our colonial histories and realize how they continue to affect us today.

## **Recommendations**

Empathetically learning new things from and about my interviewees experiences put more into perspective of what many diasporic Palauans are facing. Narratives are a powerful tool that can proactively open opportunities to learn and grow from. Narratives are also segues towards more practical and representative culturally-relevant methods of learning for many indigenous communities, especially in the context of the Palauan-Americans who have not been brought up in their cultural heritage. My hopes moving forward are for more Palauan-Americans to extend themselves and elaborate on their own detailed realities and challenges as diasporic Palauans in an ever-changing society, surrounded by diverse communities today. Saying that, this section offers the following recommendations: Establish community spaces! Whether in the academic or non-academic setting, holding community spaces where diasporic Palauans can speak of their experiences is powerful. Whether through workshops, lectures, and/or offering culturally-relevant curriculums, for example, these spaces can establish methods of cultural reclamation and revitalization in their contemporary contexts and environments. Particularly in the academic perspective, culturally-relevant methods of learning can expand these experiences in the classroom, establishing an environment that emphasizes cultural wealth and offers a more holistic environment by bridging their lived-experiences. In addition to offering these pedagogies that serve students' experiences, it also decolonizes internalized hegemonic spaces and classroom pedagogy in order to better serve and provide nuanced methods of learning. I fall back to Dr. Palaita's 'Talanoa Series' and the power it has and offers Pacific Island students. These spaces not only bring community together, but engage in discussions and critiques of relevant current events in our communities and the larger diaspora. These spaces can decolonize problematic epistemologies and hegemonic power structures imposing our communities today. In my

interview with “Grace”, she insightfully mentioned the impact that schools and non-academic settings can have on individuals within their own respective communities. Grace commented on the number of community spaces that may not directly facilitate workshops or classes regarding cultural revival, but spaces that simply bring community members together, including “church and sports”. Grace continues, “Like, we might not be having fellowships for Modekngai [in the states], but we're having fellowships for like whoever's Christian. The other [option] is softball. You find a community through that, for sure. I think eventually it was a matter of normalizing cultural practices and language in these spaces, if possible like, ngasech's and stuff.” Ultimately, ‘community’ looks differently to different people. However, holding these spaces in which can create efforts towards meaningful dialogue is both resistance and empowerment on its own.

Secondly, I also recommend falling back to the framework of *eual saus* and the following reflective questions to help guide internal thoughts regarding an individual’s personal experiences and thoughts on their home setting, environments, and communities:

1. What are the *saus*, or binding cornerstones, that are significant and keep us grounded in our lives, communities, and/or environments?
2. What and/or who are the *saus* that keep us afloat and prospering in our lives?
3. More directly tied to the *blai*, who and what is keeping our own household afloat?
  - a) How are we helping our own families and communities afloat?
  1. How does this tie to our cultural tenets and/or how we perceive our cultural identity?
  2. What does ‘respecting the *blai* and *beluu*’ look like to you in your respective environment?

In addition to the above questions, and more specifically aligning with the concern of cultural identity and the experiences of Palauan-American’s throughout the diaspora today:

1. How do Palauan-American’s define and construct their identity?
2. In what ways do they center indigeneity and their cultural and linguistic practices?
3. How do they navigate and/or resist elements of Palauan and/or American identity?



4. What does cultural revitalization mean for the Palauan-American diaspora?

Practically speaking, there are many distinct and nuanced ways that community members throughout the diaspora can allude to cultural reclamation in today's society. Throughout the course of this thesis, I have recognized that it takes a community to engage, unlearn and decolonize particular behaviors and ideologies, and build together moving forward. From an indigenous perspective, our communities within our *blai, Bai, telungalk, kebliil, and beluu* are all connected and woven together harmoniously in order to prosper and keep each other grounded. In any direction our community chooses to go moving forward, I stress the importance of recentering and realigning our indigenous epistemologies today. From culturally-relevant pedagogies of learning within academic spaces, to simply creating informal community spaces through sports events or church, constructive dialogue that proactively promotes transformative change is a start.

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## APPENDIXES

### I. Appendix A: Interviewee Protocol (includes Interview Questions)

Date:

Time:

Location:

Name of person interviewed:

Informed consent form signed:

Participant rights form signed:

#### **Pre-Interview Protocol for Researcher:**

- Recruitment: Set up a time that is convenient for prospective participant to speak about the project. Be mindful and accessible. Be present and build a relationship with the individuals asked to be participants of the project. Talk about the project and be transparent about my interest in learning more from them and ask if they would be willing to be a part of the project. Share more of my background and motive in doing the project.
- Arrive at location for interview on time
- Bring audio recorder and interview protocol.

#### **Script:**

- Set up a time that is convenient with the prospective participant to speak in-person, preferably. Provide consent form and participants rights form to participant(s). Be mindful and accessible.
- Go over consent form and participants rights form. Make sure all forms are signed and approved by the department beforehand.

*Thank you again for your interest in participating to be interviewed! The purpose of the research is to understand the unique and diverse ideas of Palauan-Americans and how they*

*both construct and claim their cultural identity by hearing their stories and narratives. The purpose of this interview is to gain further insight from the Diasporic Palauan community.*

*Before we begin, I would like to go over important information regarding consent and your right as a participant in this project. The forms will tell you about what the study entails and how you will be protected. Please take a moment to look over both forms and confirm that you would like to participate and that your consent to be recorded for the purpose of this project. Please remember, that you are allowed to withdraw from this project at any time with no negative consequences to you. Do I have your permission to move forward?*

Give the participant a signed copy of the consent form and the participant rights form.

### **Interview questions:**

#### **GENERAL SELF QUESTIONS:**

1. What is your name?
2. Where were you born?
3. Where are you currently residing?
4. Who are your parents?
  - Do you live in a single-family home? Yes or No
  - Are your parents currently married? Yes or No
5. What is your first language?
  - Can you speak more than one language? If so, what?
6. Where were you raised?
  - *If participant states in more than one location: what locations are those?*
    - How was it like, living in multiple locations/moving back and forth?
    - When people ask where were you raised, what would you tell them?
    - How long were you in each location(s)?
  - *If participant states raised in Palau/Guam/other than the U.S:*
    - How was it like living there?
    - When people ask where you are from, what would you tell them?
    - How long have you lived in that location?
7. How can you compare living in that location versus living in the U.S?
8. Have you ever been to Palau?
  - If so, when was the last time you went?
  - How often do you go to Palau, if you have gone?



9. Being born in the [U.S/Guam/CNMI], how was life compared to living in Palau?
10. Do you speak Palauan?
  - If so, how did you learn how to speak Palauan?
  - Did you learn Palauan formally / informally / both? (Describe the ways you learned Palauan?)
  - *What ways or methods helped you learn Palauan?*
  - If not, do you want to learn to speak Palauan?
  - If so, why do you want to learn?
  - If not, why?
  - On a scale of 1-10, how important do you think it is for you to learn how to speak it?
11. What is your education status? (e.g. Are you/were you a student?)
  - Where did/are you currently attending your studies?
  - What are you/did you study?
12. What is your current occupation? (e.g. Are you/were you previously working?)
13. Where are you working at the moment?
14. Are you working more than one job?
15. How is life in [residing location]?
  - What is the demographic like in that location?
  - Are there other Pacific Islanders in that location?
  - Is it predominantly white?
  - Are there other people of color there?

#### **TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE:**

1. Did you learn about Palauan culture growing up?
2. How did you learn about Palauan culture growing up?
  - Who were the people who taught you about Palauan culture growing up?
3. If you did not learn about it growing up, what is the extent of the information you know?
4. What sorts of topics did you learn about?
  - How did you learn about it? (e.g. Internet, word of mouth/discussion, organizations?)
5. Do you wish you could have learned more?
6. Are there certain things that you wish you could have learned, or are in the process of learning?

#### **GLOBALIZATION QUESTIONS:**

1. What are your thoughts on Palau and their relationship with Bangladesh? The Philippines?
2. What are your thoughts on Palau and their relationship with Chinese? Taiwan?

3. Are there certain things you could see Palau improve on (e.g. education, jobs, etc)?
4. Culturally speaking, do you see any influences that play a role in Palauan society from these different cultures?
5. Can you think of other outside influences that may also affect Palauan culture (e.g. social media, military, etc)?
6. If you identify as Palauan American, or as a Palau in living in another country, what are your views and thoughts on immigrants?
7. If you identify as a Palauan (born and raised), what were your thoughts on the economic infrastructure of Palau versus [the country you reside in]?

### **CULTURAL IDENTITY QUESTIONS:**

1. Say a random stranger were to ask you, “*Where are you from?*” - What do you say?
  - Do you include race, nationality, gender, *what?*
  - Are there certain identities that you think you associate more towards?
  - Are these identities context-specific? If so, how? Is there an identity that you prioritize more/associate more towards?
2. When you think of the idea of culture, what do you think it entails?
3. What does being ‘Palauan’ mean to you?
4. What does being ‘American’ mean to you?
5. What does being from [your city/area] mean to you?
6. How do you define ‘*community*’?
  - How would you describe people in your community? (E.g. Hardworking, funny, supportive, what sorts of attributes would you want your community to have?)
7. Now, how do you define ‘*family*’?
  - Are these attributes the same as the attributes within your family?
  - Are the folks in your community also folks in your family?
8. If you would change one thing about the way you were raised, is there something you would change?
  - If so, what would it be and why?
9. Is there a particular memory/moment in your life that you think has affected and made an impact on you today?
10. Do you think this can relate to the way you approach things in life?
11. Do you feel that language is related to culture?
  - If so, how?
  - If not, why?

### ***Cultural Norms and Values:***

1. Growing up, what are some values or words of wisdom that you’ve held onto and kept with you growing up?

2. When you think of cultural norms/values in the Palauan community, what are a few that come to mind?
3. Here is a list of cultural values from Rechuodel:
  - Omengull (Respect)
  - Ngerachel (Responsibility)
  - Ureor ma Omangerker (Work Ethic)
  - Blekongesenges, Blekokeuii, Ducherrenge (Obedience, Generosity, and Perseverance)
  - Odingel ra Klauchad (Visiting relatives)
  - Osisecheklel a Klengariou el Reng (Humility)
  - [Palauan] (Mercy and Compassion)
  - [Palauan] (Don't forget where you came from)
4. What are your thoughts on these 'values'?
5. Do you think Palauans today still practice these values?
6. Do you think Palauans in the United States/any other country outside of Palau continue to practice these values?
  - If yes, what are some reasons for why Palauans might not uphold these values?
7. When you think of other cultural norms either in the American community/[your local] community/etc., do you see any differences or similarities with the Palauan community?
  - Palauan culture is a Collectivist culture vs American culture is very individualistic
8. Do you feel like there are topics/subjects that are avoided in your family? Palauan households in general? (e.g. *Mekull*)
9. Were there ever times you were misunderstood by your family? People in your community? Both?
10. What are some things you learned from your family/parents/etc that you disagree with? Decolonize?
11. If you have children, what are some important values/ideas that you want them to learn and keep?

***Contemporary vs. Traditional:***

1. Do you feel like there are some cultural practices that we don't practice today?
  - If so, what?
2. Why do you feel like we do not practice these today?
  - If no, then why not?
3. To what extent do you believe we should balance between the modern and traditional cultural practices/ideologies/etc?
  - Some examples that came to mind:
    - Decolonizing religion?
    - Decolonizing food?
4. What are the ways in which you try to keep in touch with your Palauan identity?
  - Do you feel like there is a disconnect?

5. What are the ways in which you try to keep in touch with your Palauan culture?
  - How is the process for you? Is it easy, difficult, in between?
6. What are your thoughts on the younger generation today?
7. Do you think there are certain things this generation lacks in? (E.g Culturally? Socially?)
8. What do you think of kids today not knowing how to speak their language?
9. Do you have any advice for these kids/this generation on how to learn about culture/language?
10. If you have lived in Palau and living elsewhere: Do you feel like living in different locations changes your concerns/priorities?
  - Living in the United States, what are your concerns for you and your family now?
  - Living in Palau, what were your concerns back then?

### **MIGRATION QUESTIONS:**

#### ***Questions for folks who have recently migrated themselves:***

1. What motivated you to come to a new country?
2. Did you have family, friends, or others who influenced you?
  - Did these people have similar motivations as you to come to a new country?
3. How was your experience coming to a new country?
4. What expectations did you have before coming to a new country?
5. Were there certain things that shocked or surprised you when you first came here/to that new location? \*Culture Shock\*
6. Do you think living abroad from Palau has affected your Palauan identity? (E.g. Subtracted, added, etc)
  - Are there any experiences or new ideas that have shifted the way you think/do things today? (e.g. Learning how to grow up independently, pay bills/etc)
7. Coming to a new location, do you feel like you've changed in order to fit into a new environment?

#### ***Questions for folks who have parents/grandparents who have migrated:***

1. Describe what you know about your parent's immigration story. [Tell me about your parent's immigration story; about life in [your location] before they immigrated; motivations for immigration; challenges/dreams? social connections?]
  - How did you learn about this story?
  - What did you learn from this story? How did this story inform the way you understand yourself, your family and society?
2. What comes to mind when you consider your cultural identity? What term/s do you use to self-identify your cultural identity?

3. If you identify as multicultural/bicultural, are these identities context-specific? Is there an identity that you prioritize?
4. Are there certain values or beliefs that you attribute to these identities?

### **DECOLONIZATION QUESTIONS:**

#### 1. Decolonization of **IDEOLOGY**

##### ○ **Gender:**

- Do you feel like Palauans today still practice matrilineality?
- Do you feel like women are treated respectfully today? In the U.S?
- If living abroad, do you feel like you are mistreated/treated differently in your location based on your gender?

##### ○ **Sexuality:**

- Do you feel that you are treated differently/mistreated based on your sexuality?
  1. If yes, what are your current thoughts on how you were treated?
  2. Is there anything you would do to react to the way you were treated?

##### ○ **Race:**

- If bi/multi-racial, how do you navigate your identity? Are there stereotypes, misunderstandings, etc that you receive about yourself based on race?
- If identified as a non-Palauan raised in culture, how has this affected your identity?
- What do you think of the dynamic of folks who are not racially Palauan and how they are treated in Palau? (e.g. Bangladesh, Filipinos, etc)
- If living abroad, do you feel like you are mistreated/treated differently in your location based on race?

##### ○ **Religion:**

- Do you identify as religious?
  1. If so, what religion do you identify as?
  2. Are there things within your own religion that you disagree with? Would like to see differently?
    - If so, in what ways would you change those ideas/actions?
    - Does your religious association relate to your culture? If so, how?

#### 2. Decolonization of **ACTIONS**

- How do you feel about politics in Palau? Has there been any changes since you were last there? Are there things you would like to see differently?

- What are your thoughts on *ocheraul*?
  - Do you see any differences in cultural practices, including *ocheraul*, from before and today?
3. Decolonization of **LANGUAGE**
- What are some non-native words in your language?
  - Are there any problematic words/phrases/terms that you disagree with used in the Palauan vernacular/every day use?

## II. Appendix B: Eual Saus Methodology Framework Slides

A large, hand-painted orange circle with a textured, brushstroke-like edge is centered on a light beige background. The text "Eual Saus" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font across the middle of the circle.

**Eual Saus**

**Eual Saus, or *four cornerstones*, is a theological and epistemological framework evident in our geographic landscape and the structure of our cultural spaces**

**Eual Saus can also collectively argue that the structure of the land is reflective of the structure of the Bai (traditional meeting houses) and the blai (our homes).**

**This framework symbolizes the indigenous ideologies that are significant to how we move forward in society today, starting from the home.**



## MILAD

One day, Tekiimelab (demigods) came upon a woman, Dirrabkau, who was boiling taro, and asked her to cook their fish for their evening meal. With her ingenuity, Dirrabkau cooked the fish and inserted them in the cooked taro, thus making taro fish sandwiches. The Tekiimelab took their food and left.

Upon finding out the ingenuity of Dirrabkau's taro fish, they went back and told her of a great flood that would be coming and instructed her to tell her son, Ngiselacheos, to create a big bamboo raft in preparation. When the floods came, she was prepared, but, as the water rose, her hair caught on a tree and she drowned. The Tekiimelab found her body and breathed life into her nostrils, at which point she became Milad, meaning "was dead."

The goddess Milad gave birth to four children: Imeungs, the oldest son; Olekeok, the second son; Ngerbuns, the third child and only daughter; and Sureor, the youngest son. After giving birth, she went to the top of a hill called Ometochel and threw four small islands in front of her children as their markers. These four children of Milad form the four corner posts of Palauan society

**EUAL SAUS (FOUR CORNERS) STEMMED FROM THE COLLECTIVE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT EVERYTHING STARTS FROM THE 'HOME'. FROM THE LAND (BELUU), THE BAI (MEETING HOUSE), AND THE BLAI (HOUSE). THE LAND AND OUR HOME IS MORE THAN JUST A PHYSICAL ENTITY, BUT A SPIRITUAL AND VITAL TENET TO THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE PALAUAN COMMUNITY.**



**BELUU**



**BAI**



**BLAI**

**BELUU (N.): PLACE, LAND, AND  
VILLAGE**

**MILAD'S CHILDREN:**

**SUREOR (KOROR)**

**OLEKEOK (MELEKEOK)**

**IMEUNGS (NGEREMLENGUI)**

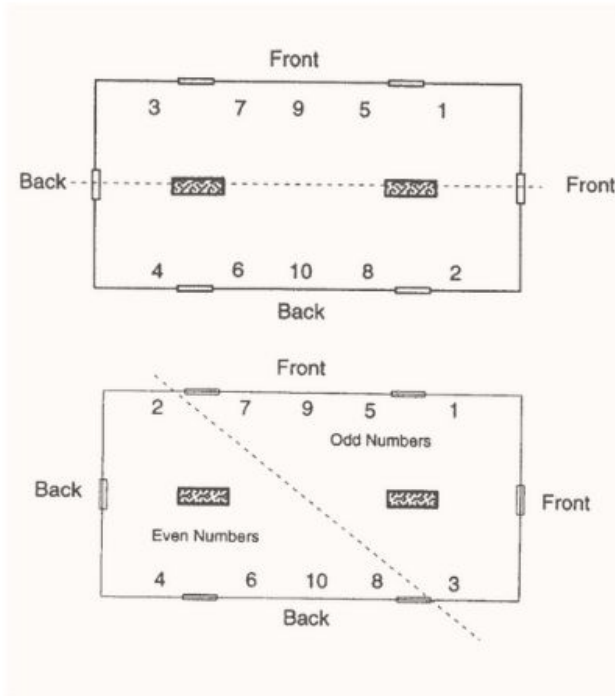
**NGERBUNS (AIMELIIK)**



**THE STRUCTURE OF THE POSTS SIGNIFIED  
EACH STATE'S RESPECTIVE ROLES AND  
RESPONSIBILITIES HELD IN ORDER TO KEEP  
PALAUAN CULTURAL AND SOCIAL  
STRUCTURE IN PLACE.**

**BAI (N.): TRADITIONAL MEN'S  
MEETING HOUSE**

## Village and Community Councils



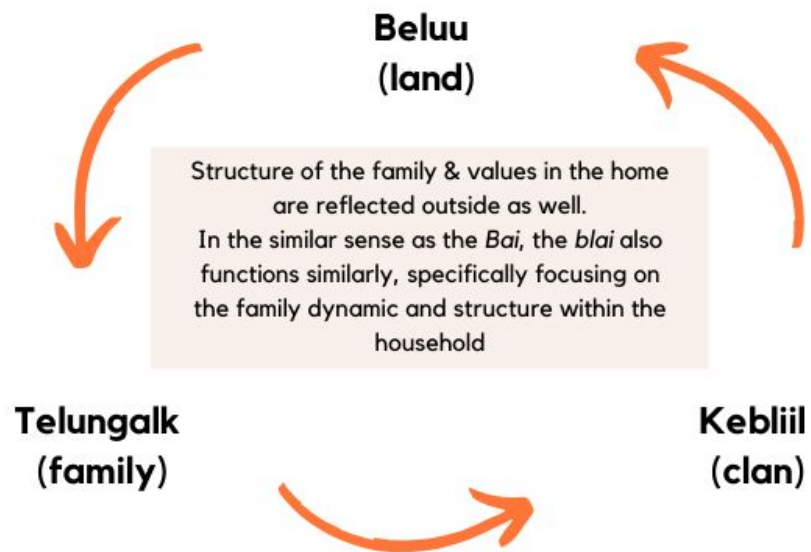
Based on the legend of 'Milad', the four districts of **Ngeremlengui**, **Melekeok**, **Koror**, and **Aimeliik** have been called *eual saus* (four corners), the four main posts that support a building. Thus, these four districts are the four corners that support Belau" (Machiko, p. 14).

From the *saus* of our *beluu*, these political and social aspects of our society are also carried out within the *Bai*, or the chief meeting house. The seating arrangement within the *bai*, was based on the ranking of the chief.

In a similar fashion, Palauan society have designated 'clubs', or *cheldebechel*, in which cultural practices, formalities, and advice are taught to the younger generation

**BLAI (N.): HOUSE**





# what are your *Saus*?

**To engage readers to be reflective in their own unique experiences and its relationship to how they define culture, I've offered general questions that can be posed and thought through when thinking of our *Saus*:**

1. What are the *saus*, or binding cornerstones, that are significant and keep us grounded in our lives, communities, and/or environments?
2. What and/or who are the *saus* that keep us afloat and prospering in our lives?
3. More directly tied to the *blai*, who and what is keeping our own household afloat? How are we helping our families and communities?
4. How does this tie to our cultural tenets and/or how we perceive our cultural identity?
5. What does 'respecting the *blai* and *beluu* look like to you in your respective environment?

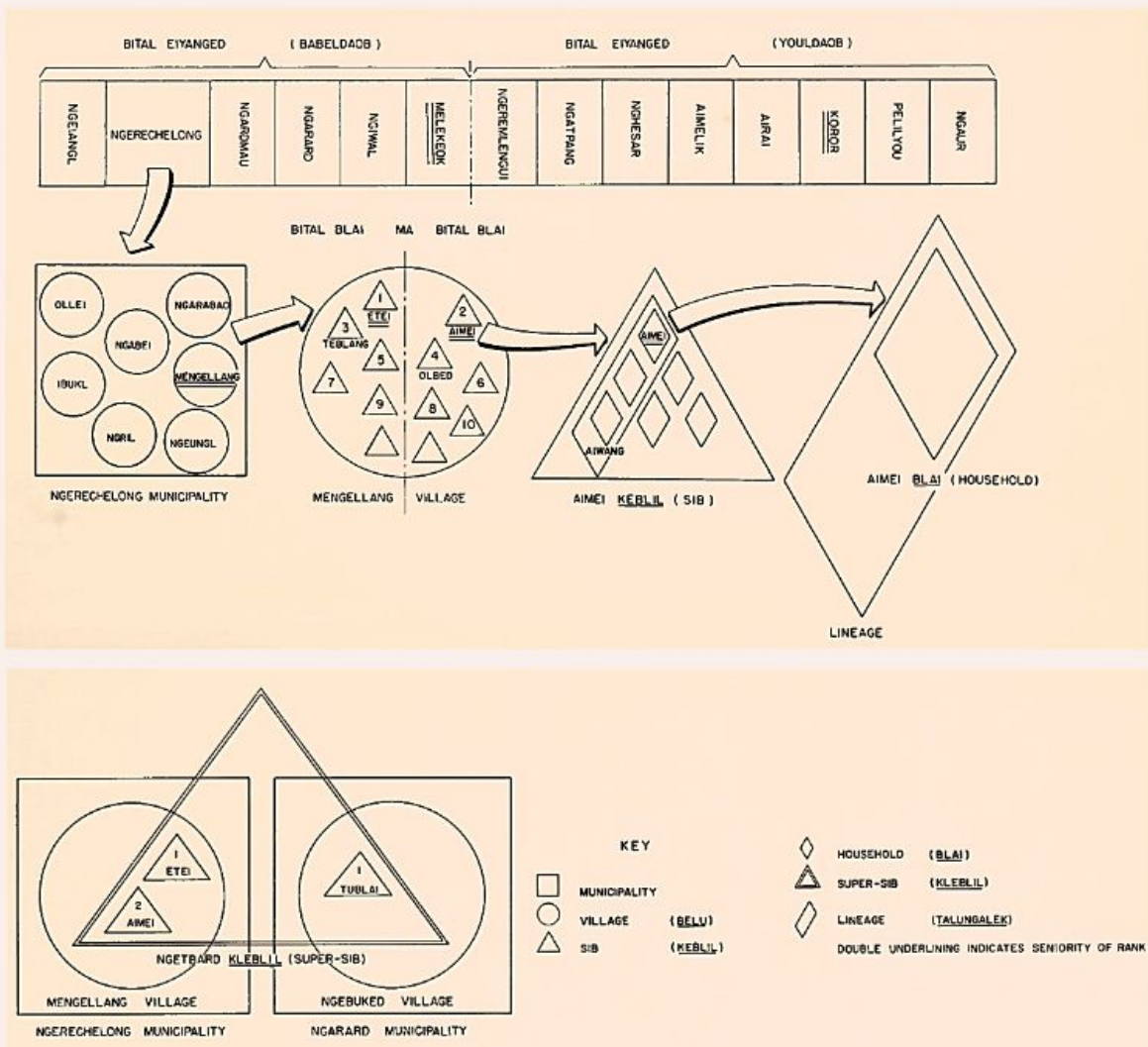


FIG. 9. Diagram portraying the integration of territorial (political) organization and kinship system in the Palau Islands.

