

*Remaking Footprints: Palauan Migrants  
in Hawai'i*

*Isebong Asang*

A *omerolek* from Palau was made possible by relatives and acquaintances along the way. I would like to go home someday, but now it is my turn to help my children and others.” A *omerolek*<sup>1</sup> (my trip) is part of a story told by Serek,<sup>2</sup> a sixty-three-year-old retired Palauan man from Ngaraard State who came to Honolulu about twenty-eight years ago. With a faraway look in his lively eyes, Serek tells of a journey filled with hard work and sacrifices made possible by a tapestry of helping hands—*klaiageseu*. When he left Palau, Serek had hopes of getting a higher education. His family helped him save enough money to buy a one-way ticket to Guam, where he lived with relatives until he saved enough money to move to Honolulu a year later. In Honolulu Serek relied on his older brother’s generosity until he found gainful employment with a plumbing company. The Chinese proprietor grew to trust and rely on him, eventually offering him company housing in exchange for security duties in the evenings. He lives with his wife in the same house, although he retired from the company two years ago.

I found him sitting amid boxes of soda pop framed by a couple of storyboards in the background. Serek now operates the only Palauan mom-and-pop store in O’ahu, which he opened when he retired. He has had to work hard to prove to himself and to those who helped him along the way that it was worth all their efforts. He now employs his wife’s two nephews, who recently arrived from Palau, thus perpetuating the cycle of *klaiageseu*.

The primary purpose of this paper is to describe the sociocultural processes that influence the success of Palauan migrants<sup>3</sup> in Hawai’i. I employ Lev Vygotsky’s notion of sociocultural process, which suggests that the “internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about

behavioral transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development” (Vygotsky 1978). For Palauans, socio-cultural processes are largely embedded in the meaning of the Palauan language. Consequently, language and meaning define a person’s function, behavior, and position in relation to others. For example, Serek was motivated to leave Palau to seek a higher education, but his migration was a process supported by the collective actions of relatives, friends, and the community in both the home and the host countries. Termed *klaingeseu*, this process is shared by the other Palauans in Hawai’i who chose to share their stories with me. Palauan migration is a complex sociocultural process that is affirmed by the aggregate body of codes found in Palauan hermeneutics, and which can not be fully explained by the economic models other writers usually employ.

The research for this paper was begun in response to the policy recommendations of the Palau National Committee on Population and Children (CoPopChi), whose report on sustainable human development was released in March 1997 (CoPopChi 1997). The report noted that the rapid population growth between 1990 and 1995 was attributable to the in-migration of alien workers, who now compose 25 percent of the total population. There is a perception that the rapid growth in the number of foreign workers in Palau is due in part to the migration of large numbers of Palauans to locations such as Guam, Saipan, Hawai’i, and the continental United States in search of higher paying jobs, better education, and adventure (Endo 1997). As part of an ambitious plan to achieve “controlled growth, and cultural continuity,” the committee proposed to bring Palauans residing overseas back to Palau at an annual rate of 150–200 to meet some of the nation’s labor needs (CoPopChi 1997). This policy can only succeed if the overseas migrants are consulted to ascertain the reasons that propelled them to leave Palau, and if steps are taken to address their concerns about returning home. However, the committee failed to discuss its policy recommendation with overseas migrants and explain how the proposed reverse migration might be achieved.

The interviewees were selected on a voluntary basis. Through the Hawai’i-Palau Medical Referral Center and the Palauan Student Organization of Hawai’i I let it be known that I was interested in interviewing migrants about the CoPopChi proposal to bring Palauans home. Although none were aware of the policy recommendation, seventeen Palauan residents in Honolulu volunteered to “talk story” with me about returning home and about their experiences as migrants. As it happened I was able

to interview only twelve—seven males and five females—and I spent a total of sixty hours talking with these individuals. All interviews were conducted in both Palauan and English,<sup>4</sup> using various methods to document the stories. Three interviewees were comfortable with being audio-taped, eight allowed me to take notes, and one wanted my full attention, shying away from any form of note taking or recording. I returned to this person three times to develop a meaningful discussion, and made summary notes after each meeting.

The oldest migrant was sixty-three years old, and the youngest sixteen. The length of stay in Honolulu varied from 2 to 34 years, with an average stay of 21 years. Of those interviewed, 9 have completed (some) tertiary-level education; 1 is still in high school, and 1 is a high school graduate; 7 are married to Palauans; 1 is married to an American, ex-Peace Corps volunteer; 1 is married to a local Japanese American; 2 have never been married; and 1 is a divorced single father of two.

Additional information was drawn from unstructured interviews and input from other migrants living outside O‘ahu. My understanding of Palauan migration is also informed by my own experiences—as a child of Palauan migrants raised on Guam, and as a resident of Honolulu for the past five years.

#### ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL MODELS OF MIGRANTS

Economic and structural models prevail in the literature on Palauan migration. Based on a cash dependency system, the economic model focuses on “economic institutions that serve either as sources of income or as the means of redistributing income” (Shewman 1981). The model is usually employed as part of a structural approach, which identifies capital, labor, and a product or service in demand in a host country. In this global economic framework, migrants are moved from one place to another to meet specific demands for labor, but do not necessarily possess the cultural capital to succeed in these markets—a form of aid from the Third World to the First (Chamberlain 1997).

The literature postulates that migrants leave Palau in search of better-paying jobs, better education, and adventure while also lessening the grip of cultural exchange practices often referred to as *siyukang* (Shewman 1981; Vitarelli 1981; Johanek 1984; Nero and Rehuher 1993; Smith 1996; Endo 1997). Within the global frame of analysis, Palauans are presumed to be motivated by economic necessity resulting from unemployment or

overpopulation, and lured by the promise of abundant employment elsewhere. Unemployment may have been a significant factor in the immediate postwar years, when Palau was recovering from the devastating effects of the conflict between Japan and the United States. However, as Johaneck demonstrated (1984, 19), the rate of out-migration was relatively low in the postwar years, especially compared to later periods.<sup>5</sup> Population grew steadily after the war, peaking in 1972 at approximately 13,025. But it has been declining since then, and it is not clear if there is a direct relationship between population numbers and out-migration. A mass exodus of Palauans occurred between 1973 and 1980, but this was largely due to an increase in US funding that enabled students to go abroad for education, coupled with the need of Micronesians to fill Trust Territory jobs vacated by expatriate Americans. D R Smith noted that a large proportion of these migrants returned to Palau between 1980 and 1990 to participate in the creation of their new constitution and government (1996).

Furthermore, in a global frame of analysis, conditions in the host country are important in explaining labor movement. Except for a few government reports, most of the research on Palau migration fails to discuss conditions in the host country. Research is currently being conducted to assess the impact of Micronesian migrants on host countries, but the results had not been published at the time of writing.

#### RUNNING AWAY FROM *SIYUKANG* TO SEEK *KLAINGESEU*

The arguments lodging Palauan migration within the framework of economics are seductive. But in the final analysis, motivating factors like education and better-paying jobs only successfully explain the timing of specific migratory movements of individual Palauan migrants. They may propel the Palauan migrant to go elsewhere, but, in the end, migration becomes an individual choice informed in important ways by the cultural values and social norms that encourage and enable such migration (Thomas-Hope 1992).

My father, Francisco Asang, a soft-spoken man of Palauan and Chinese descent, left Palau in 1947 when he was hired as first assistant engineer on the MS *Reliable*, a 163-ton reefer ship. As he explained in 1993, "After World War II, Palau was a war-torn and ravaged island. It was necessary for me to look for employment elsewhere, to seize the opportunity for growth, for ultimately the experience and the exposure would benefit my loved ones at home." As far back as I can remember, he believed in the

principles of *klaingeseu*, and that he should extend his home to help family members and friends to emigrate from Palau. He sought gainful employment so that he could *olengeseu* (help) his family in Palau by sending much-needed money and goods. Although we lived in an abandoned military Quonset hut on Guam, we had many Palauan migrants in our home. Like the waves that touch the shore, migrants came in a fluid movement to our home and ebbed with the tide, when opportunity knocked.

*Klaigneseu* is the thread woven through the fiber of the Palauan culture that lends itself to migration. It is the support, both in the home country and in the host country, to ensure the success of migration. It is the basket of food that is given to an old lady as she embarks on a *klechedaol*,<sup>6</sup> it is the envelope of cash given to a young man as he boards the plane to a foreign land, and it is the free rent from a non-Palauan for a job well done. *Klaigneseu* is the mother agonizing over a child's decision to leave home for some foreign destination, knowing how deeply she will miss her, yet knowing also that she has to support her in her endeavors. This is the Palauan migration ethos.

The social tapestry on which Palau stands, *klaigneseu* is rooted in the phrase *delibuk lului el mimokl e kmes* (the harder you pull, the tighter it gets).<sup>7</sup> It is showing up in a home to lend a helping hand to the needy; it is sending much-needed funds to an *ocheraol* (money-raising event); it is going to the *kemeldiil* (funeral) of a relative or friend; it is watching grandchildren while daughters tend the taro patch; more important, it is being there for someone in need.

A strong sense of *klaigneseu* may provide a reason for migrants to stay overseas. As Uchelas, a young Palauan male, stated,

I graduated last year with my master's in bilingual education. But, I am not ready to go back to Palau. When I left Palau for my undergraduate degree at the University of Guam, my parents helped me leave and supported my decision to go to school. However, I knew my parents and my brothers and sisters had to make their lives in Palau. So to help them I never asked for money or any kind of help from them. Right now I am employed by a private company that is federally funded. I make three to four times more than Palau will ever hope to pay me. And I also work a second job, not because I need to. I work two jobs to retain the humbleness that I learned from my parents, and to also *olengeseu* my family.

It is not the Palauan sense of *klaigneseu* that motivates Palauan out-migration as Endo (1997) and others have theorized. Rather, what may encour-

age people to leave, and discourage migrants from returning even more, are the practices that have come to be known by the foreign word *siyukang*. Unlike traditional forms of customary exchange in *klaingeseu*, *siyukang* is derogatorily associated with money-making activities for profit, rather than need. A Japanese term, *siyukang* literally means “custom” in the sense of “habit” or “idiosyncrasy” (Josephs 1990). In other words, *klaingeseu* is a form of aid in which there is meaning, and it fulfills a need; *siyukang*, on the other hand, does not necessarily fulfill a need, but rather is done for public show or profit. For example, Kelsong, a fifty-year-old Palauan-Japanese female, who has lived in Hawai‘i for twenty-six years, noted her impressions on her last trip to Palau.

When I arrived in Palau, all my relatives came. Some of them I didn’t even recognize. When I left Palau, they were still very young. They knew me, but I didn’t know them. *Mlo siyukang er tir el me omengur ra blimam ra bekl sils* [it became a habit for them to eat at our house every day]. I ended up buying food every day, because they would just come in and eat any food they wanted. . . . Then there is the president’s daughter’s *ngasech* [rising; ceremony for mother and newborn child]. Would you believe they collected \$30,000, 100 *toluk* [Palauan turtle shell money], and 4 *udoud* [Palauan bead money]? *Tia diak el klaingeseu, mla mo siyukang* [this is not mutual assistance, it is a money-making venture.]

It is events such as these that intimidate the less-advantaged populace of Palau, they set a precedent and everyone has to follow suit. Another standard of living is set. More often than not it can’t be met, but Palauans will try, competitive as they are. It scares me just to think that I would have to live in such an environment. Competition is good in that you continually try to better yourself. However, I think you need to balance that with the resources that you have, not just in terms of money and material wealth, but also what the community can afford. We have to ask ourselves, what can I do to continually maintain the resources that the environment of Palau has today for our future generations? We are competitive people, but we knew where we stood with our natural environment. When we feared our resources would become extinct a *bul* [restriction] was instituted. For example, fishing for certain types of reef fish was stopped when the supply dwindled to give them time to propagate, or you couldn’t pick *buuch* [betelnut] at certain times of the year, so that the supply could be extended throughout the dry season.

But now it seems that Palauans are driven by wanting more and more. We used to *omngar* [gather firewood] for cooking, then we went to the kerosene stove, then we went to the electric stove, and still that was not enough, so now we have maids even though sometimes we eat sardines out of a can. What

next? We have acquired the Americans' way of competition that does not respect our natural environment. And naturally to use a kerosene stove or an electric stove you have to have money to pay for the kerosene, the electricity, the stove, and now the maid to operate the stove. So, that means you have to go out and work to earn money to pay for these things. And there is nothing wrong with that; however, we are too obsessed with the dollar that we have forgotten to *mengereoml* [preserve, conserve]. We need, as Palauans, to set our own pace, our own footprints, not one that has been made for us by outsiders who do not appreciate our islands, our culture, and our way of life. Until we can say when is enough, I don't think I can make it down there.

The context and standards by which Palauan culture and worldview are being interpreted and practiced are becoming foreign, as this woman illustrated. Consequently, while *klaingeseu* is an integral social safety net that has existed for centuries in the Palauan culture, *siyukang*, as a foreign anomaly of *klaingeseu*, has far-reaching implications that endanger Palau's natural resources, especially its human resources through out-migration.

#### PALAUAN MIGRANTS IN HAWAI'I

According to a report prepared by the Office of Insular Affairs for the US Department of the Interior, approximately 4,036 Palauan migrants were living in Guam, Saipan, and Hawai'i in 1997, with 320 of them in Hawai'i (Levin 1998). The report was part of an ongoing effort to determine the impact of migration from the freely associated states, including Palau, on these host locales. This is necessary under the terms of the compacts of free association, which allow citizens of these countries free entry to the United States but require the federal government to cover "the cost, if any, incurred by the State of Hawai'i, the territories of Guam and American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands resulting from any increased demands placed on educational and social services" (Levin 1998).

This provision implicitly categorizes Palauan migrants in Hawai'i as a burden on the state, putting them in an invidious position not only with the state government but with the government of Palau. In 1997, Hawai'i spent over \$6 million to fund the enrollment of about eleven hundred children from the freely associated states, including Palau, in the public school system (Cayetano 1998). Other services, such as medical and social ser-

vices, are also affected by these migrants. In his letter to the Office of Insular Affairs, the governor of Hawai'i cited the criminal justice system as another area affected. In a ten-year period (1987–1997) 86 Palauans were arrested and 21 convicted in the State of Hawai'i.

The government of Palau has made it explicitly clear that Palauan migrants living in Hawai'i are wards of the US government. In a letter to the Office of Insular Affairs about Palauan migrants in Hawai'i, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands the president of Palau stated that “although the Republic of Palau appreciates that the residence of its citizens in Hawai'i, Guam, and CNMI both benefits and burdens the economies of those entities, the Republic is confident that United States can address any adverse impacts by means other than limiting the guarantees that the Compact makes to the Republic of Palau and its citizens” (Nakamura 1998).

For the most part, Palauan migrants in Hawai'i succeed in establishing themselves because of friends, families, and personal wealth. For a few, life in Hawai'i has proven different from what they expected. A year after I made the initial interviews for this paper, I had the opportunity to visit a Palauan family in Kalihi (Honolulu). Kedung and Ebil have six elementary-school-age children. They live in a rundown one-bedroom house they call home. The kitchen and eating area is a makeshift tarp canopy fronting the house. Ebil shared with me that, as Palauan citizens, they are not eligible for any state assistance. However, Kedung has made many friends and through them he has the ability to fish on their boats, supplementing his income while Ebil stays home with the young children. A second family that I had the opportunity to visit lives in Waikīkī. After twenty years of marriage and four children, although both parents work, they live in the same one-bedroom apartment they rented when they were first married.

Hawai'i is not a nirvana for adventure-seeking Palauan migrants. The cost of living is high compared to Palau. As Dildoseb, a young professional woman, stated, “I left Palau at a very young age. My mother passed away when I was only nine years old, so I went to live with my sister in Guam. After Typhoon Karen, she and her husband moved the whole family to Hawai'i in 1963. I am married now and have two children of my own. My husband manages an apartment complex and I work, but I have a *sers* [garden] in the northern part of O'ahu. The *sers* is for emergency.” Although this woman left Palau at an early age, she possesses the sociocultural values of survival, a measure by which Palauan women are valued.

## NARRATIVES ON RETURNING TO PALAU

For Palauans, a *klechad er Belau* or “Palauanness” essentially means belonging to the families or clans that are the foundations of their society. As Endo and others have noted, there is a strong connection between clan or title and land. However, it is misleading to conclude, as Endo did, that “clan-title holders must live in Palau and those who are going to succeed the titles have to return to Palau implicating the strong connection between clan or title and land” (1997, 26). Clan-titles are inherited at birth, and cannot be taken away, as evident in the phrase *a remeteet a kora redechel a bngaol el di ruebt e ngarngii a lkungel* (those born into a high-ranking family are analogous to the *bngaol* tree—*Rhizophora apiculata*—which falls with its leafy cap upright; the *meteet* [of high family or rank] are born with the crown of their rank). For example, the current high chief of Koror, Ibedul Yutaka Gibbons, was summoned back from active duty with the US military when the time came for him to assume his role as Ibedul.

Although a clan title may be held outside Palau, it carries no weight unless the holder earns the respect of the *telungalk* (family), the *kebliil* (clan), and the *buai* (community). What migrants most risk losing when they leave Palau is not access to titles or land, but their relationship with the community. Thus, Palauan migrants in Hawai‘i are constantly wondering what people back home think of them, and this has an important impact on their plans to return. As Ebiochel stated, “When I go back to Palau, I feel out of place. Just because I have lived away for so long, they treat me like an outsider. It is as if I almost have to prove to them that I am Palauan. I just don’t know. When I go there, I feel obligated to stay with my relatives, because if I live in a hotel they will think that I am too good for them. Yet, when I am there I feel invisible.”

For this particular woman, the uneasiness of not being seen for who she is as a Palauan woman has motivated her to stay away.

During my interviews, one word that kept surfacing was *footprints*. Traditionally an oral society, Palau’s life stories and culture depend on narratives and the hermeneutics of these narratives. The meaning of every narrative rests on the context in which it is told, the history of the speakers, and the time the events took place.<sup>8</sup> In the context of Palauan migration, the word *footprints* can either be translated literally, *util a oach* (past tense), or it can imply something in the future, *sel momaks e momes a util a chochim* (when you walk watch where your foot leaves a print).

The underlying message is that you must choose your path cautiously, for you can never go back and undo the past. While the future is elusive, it is moldable. As Sisang, a young Palauan man, stated with regard to the CoPopChi recommendations, "We are losing our footprints, because we are now using shoes." Asked to expand on this comment, he explained, "Palau is not the same Palau anymore. For those of us who live on the outside, we can't retrace our steps back. We can't stop progress and development, but what we can do is set the direction, we can revise policies to enable equal opportunity for all Palauans. Especially those that are living there now. For if I see that you are valued for who you are and not who you know, then maybe I will return. But, for now I would rather stay in Hawai'i."

Like Ebiochel's concern earlier, Sisang's measurement of Palauanness lay in how Palauans are treated in Palau, and inevitably affected his attitude to returning home. Laborers hired outside Palau are granted certain concessions denied indigenous Palauans. For example, Filipino domestic helpers are not only afforded a round-trip ticket home plus room and board, but they also have access to all the social services, such as education, on top of their monthly salary. A Palauan hired in Palau must make the necessary arrangements for a living space, food, and paying taxes for the social services that support alien migrant laborers, despite only a slight difference in salary.

What Endo identified as the Palauans' preference for white-collar work may be a factor here (Endo 1997). Most alien workers are hired for menial jobs such as houseboys, housemaids, and baby-sitters. Private sector employers feel that migrant workers are more reliable and work longer hours than Palauan youths, who tend to be late or take days off for *siyukang*. However, migrant Palauans are inclined to blame the attitude and policies of the government. As Uchelas, the recent university graduate lamented,

I do not understand the priorities of the government of Palau. I had applied for grants from them for my education with the intent that I will go back when I am done, but I never heard from them. I didn't even receive a letter telling me that I did not qualify for the grant . . . nothing! How can they expect graduate students to return, when they don't even acknowledge their existence? Right now I am employed by a private company that is federally funded. . . . Palau is not being run by Palauans anymore, it is run by outsiders who advise them on the best way to live their lives. Why do we have outsiders come in with their standards and tell us what it is we should buy, who we

should borrow money from, and how we should dress? Of course, Palauans are going to say I don't know what I am talking about—after all I am *only* a graduate student who does not live in Palau, so what do I know, right? But, when you build a house that sits on a hill the size of a castle, that is not a Palauan value. First of all, it is embedded in individualism based on materialism that is not a Palauan way of life. Secondly, although the property it is being built on is on private property and rightfully belongs to that person, the erosion and runoff from the clearing of the property will create an imbalance in the surrounding ecosystem that can never be recovered, thereby a loss not only to that person, but to the nation as a whole. And lastly, although that person may have the resources to pay her/his utility bills—as one of many examples—it just means that the overall consumption of the entire nation skyrockets. This translates to a larger fuel bill, increasing our national debt because our utility companies are nationally owned. So in reality, my parents in their simple way would have to indirectly pay for and carry the burden of those more affluent citizens in our community both in the natural resources and the increasing debt roll that is being incurred by the nation. So you see, I don't understand the standard of living that is being continuously defined by Palauans. But, being the son of my parents, I feel the best way to contribute to my Palauanness is to help my parents by living elsewhere and when necessary help them. For now, until I can understand Palau and the choices they make, I don't think I can return home, not just yet anyway.

#### LOCATING PALAUAN MIGRATION

Palauans *melboteb* or migrate to different geographic locations as a means of always seeking better lives for themselves; however, their Palauanness is preserved through their *klaingeseu*. *Melboteb* is based on an old Palauan metaphor—*kekora bekai el mo ikri a ongiong e mengiis* (like a megapode you turn your back on your nest and dig). Figuratively speaking, like megapodes, Palauan migrants turn their backs on their island or leave their nest. But from where they stand or live, they continuously nurture bonds with those at home by sending money or goods as *klaingeseu*, and keep abreast of the latest family activities, including making periodic visits home (Y K Rengiil, personal communication, 15 June 1999).

Despite CoPopChi's efforts to lure Palauan migrants home, it is doubtful that the nation will see any significant reverse migration in the near future. Promises to improve the quality of employment in Palau through "improved management, higher remuneration, improved benefits, better conditions, and satisfying work" (CoPopChi 1997, 20) do not appear to

be of primary concern to Palauan migrants in Hawai'i. As demonstrated by many of the statements quoted in this paper, migrants readily talked about sacrifices, hard work, and sociocultural obligations in relation to the concept of *klaingeseu*. As was shown in Serek's story, *klaingeseu* is the social tapestry of Palau, which both encourages and regulates migration. Migration is an individual choice regulated by cultural values and social norms that are not only ageless but cyclical as well.

What concerns the migrants in Hawai'i, beyond broad sweeping policies, are the sociocultural changes that presumably affect Palauans at home. Alternatively such changes influence how migrants believe they are perceived and modulate their visits home, whether as transients or returnees. Two examples are that of Kelsong addressing the transition from wooden stoves to housemaids, and Uchelas pointing out his concerns about elaborate homes that drain the natural resources. While some Palauans may see these as individual rights due them, individualism is a foreign ideology built on a highly competitive cash economy manifested as an ever-rising "standard of living." Like a runaway train, it sets a precedent that dwarfs the means of most Palauans, including migrants, especially as denoted in the foreign term *siyukang*.

Remaking footprints reclaims the past, assembles the present, and anticipates the future. Migrants in Hawai'i have nostalgic memories of Palau, but they have a vision that has incorporated other worldviews that they believe are crucial in bringing the island into the twenty-first century as a world community. Although they adhere to the critical practices of the past such as *klaingeseu*, they are aware that cultural values and social norms are part of a process that evolves with time, molded by experiences and narratives. It is apparent in the migrants' narratives that there is hope, if policymakers and citizens of Palau navigate carefully, of building a nation on the basis of centuries of wisdom, sustainability, and justice for all members of Palauan society.

### Notes

1 *Omerolek* is the Palauan word for "traveling," "trip," "journey," "process," "a group of travelers," "parade," or "procession." However, Palauans also use the word *melboteb* to symbolize migrants or Palauans who travel from one country to another. *Melboteb* is based on the belief that while Palauans seek better

lives for themselves, they still retain their “Palauanness” by perpetuating the cycle of *klaingeseu*.

2 Although I used pseudonyms for the Palauan migrants referred to in this paper, complete anonymity cannot be achieved due to the smallness of the Palauan community in Hawai‘i.

3 I use the term *migrant* in this paper to refer to Palauans who have migrated to Hawai‘i and the children of those migrants, whether brought from Palau or born in Hawai‘i.

4 As a Palauan, I am trilingual in that I speak Palauan, Chamorro, and English fluently. Notes and tape recordings are in both Palauan and English. This code switching was necessary during the interviews to understand the Palauan migrants’ stories and the sociocultural meanings and nuances inherent in them.

5 The low rate of out-migration during the postwar years may be attributable to what Nero and Rehuher described as the United States’ administrative practice of keeping Micronesia a “closed community to the outside world” in the guise of US security requirements. However, as these authors illustrated, the Palauans “were among the first to obtain employment and establish communities outside the stagnating home island economies” (1993, 244). Palau was part of the United Nations mandated Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administered by the United States from 1947 until 1994, when the Compact of Free Association was passed by the US Congress.

6 *Klechedaol* implies a trip by a homogeneous group of people representing a village, an island, or a community as invited guests, travelers, or tour groups.

7 I find it extremely problematic to literally translate some Palauan phrases into English so that they may be comprehensible to readers. Palauans optimize on metaphors to convey meanings and ideas. Consequently, translating a phrase without some explanation would miss the intent of the speaker. *Kora delibuk lului el mimokl e kmes* is such a phrase, which is centered on the word *lului*—a vine found only in Palau that is used to pull logs. Because the vine is usually one-to-two inches in diameter, it cannot be tied tightly. Therefore, it is tied loosely around the logs, but when it is pulled it tightens with the weight of the logs, which it can withstand because it is so durable. Symbolically the phrase means that Palauans have relatives who are dispersed all over Palau and elsewhere, implying that they are “loose.” But when *klaingeseu* calls, they all come together in a tightly knit fashion to help “pull that heavy burden on our relative’s shoulders by our *klaingeseu*.”

8 Based on L S Vygotsky’s concept of “mediation in human development . . . internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioral transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development” (1978, 7). Thus, for Vygotsky, the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture.

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