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Proverbs of Palau

"TO MAKE A MINNOW OF A WHALE" is a Palauan comment that might be applied to the effort to compile a comprehensive collection of Palauan proverbs. With other languages in Micronesia, Palauan is rich in the use of metaphors, similes, and analogies permitting indirect approaches to oratory in the political arenas of Palauan society.[1] While Palauan proverbs are drawn from and applied to nearly every facet of life and environment, the Palauan elder asked to define the usage of *blukul a tekoi* (literally, "words that clarify") will generally couch his description in the context of political behavior.[2] Perhaps in the confines of an island environment, such as the Palau archipelago which is tucked away in the western Pacific north of the equator, one can anticipate some elaboration of institutionalized means to control and channel aggression.[3] Insofar as this is true of Palau the emphasis is upon controlled competition, channeling human energy through formalized competitive groupings toward productive enterprise.

A glimpse at Palauan social structure should provide some indication of the kinds of political arenas within which this competition takes place. Palauan social structure, at least in formal terms, is standardized for each of its village groupings. It is a common statement by Palauans that each village is composed of ten rank-ordered clans (*kebliil*), four of which are "original" historically and elite politically. Two of these "original" clans form a couplet in opposition to the other two; a balance in this opposition is often evident with the first and fourth clans (and their leaders) ranged against the second and third. Affiliations among the ten village clans are such that the two ranking "original" clans are grouped with the remaining eight to form two moiety-like "houses" (*klebliil* or *blai*) of five clans each comprehending the population of the village. The ten heads of the village clans make up the village council, with the five leaders of each opposing "house" seated across from each other when meeting in formal assembly in the community hall. The head of the first-ranking clan is the leader of his five-clan faction or house, as well as the village chief (*merreder*). However, his power as chief is qualified and balanced by that of the head of the second-ranking clan,

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who has the strength and backing of the other five village clans. Beyond the village, particularly among the four "original" clans, are inter-clan federations (also *klebliil*) or historical ties (the Palauan term is "vein," *ngurd*) that bind clan to clan throughout Palau in a complex network.

The clan itself is a group of lineages, sometimes named, which trace back matrilineally to founding mothers. The lineages within a clan are rank ordered in four named grades according to the ascribed antiquity of the lineage in the village (see idioms Nos. 191, 192, 193, and 194). Unlike the rank order of the ten clans, which is traditionally (if not historically) fixed, the ranking of lineages is viewed as fluid: based on the term of lineage residence in the village and on the individual contributions and achievements of lineage members. A high-achieving lineage will be publically acclaimed to "belong" to the village after a few generations and will increase in rank accordingly, with its members becoming eligible to higher title in the village political structure. Clan lineages are not only rank ordered but are divided into two conceptually balanced groups termed "legs" (*uach*), conforming to the image of the clan as a mother figure. The two legs compete in clan organized production and in seeking political titles for members.

Village clubs for men and women, ideally composed of a cross-section of the resident population, duplicate the dual organization of the village and provide a junior arena for political tacticians. Additional dualties pertain to the village leaders in council, organized into two *"bai"* (council houses or clubhouses). The clubs of a village belong to one or the other *"toach"* (estuary). The village is divided into two geographic parts, with the term *"beluu"* (village) used to designate each half, and the island group of Palau is divided into two loosely federated groupings of village clusters, each side designated as *"ianged"* (heaven). With each faction in a duality conceptually balanced against its opposite, the Palauan world view takes on philosophical aspects of the Chinese "yin-yang" that may be more than simply coincidental; for example, a person is not considered to be good or bad, but rather good *and bad*.

As is evident, names given to various structures in Palauan society are rich in analogy and other allusive devices; the lineages group into "legs" of the clan body, the clans group into "houses" within the village. Membership in a clan, or similar group, may be designated by the term *imolblai,* "one house." A political leader may repair dissension within his clan with the reprimand that all are *tulengalik,* which different Palauan authorities translate as "one child" (*tang ngalik*) or more commonly "children of the breast" (*tut el ongalik*). Village strong men, those respected for achievement beyond their ascribed status, may be referred to as *dekl,* the pole used to propel a raft. Principal traditional leaders, such as the heads of the four "original" clans, are "cornerposts" (*saos*). Such terms blend without precise boundary into proverbs and idioms: "Commoners are the tools of the village" (No. 195), "The leader is our cave" (No. 30), "Mr. One Hundred" (No. 10). But the true context for Palauan proverbs, as suggested by the several lines of cleavage mentioned in this barest outline of social structure, is political oration, and, accordingly, the bulk of sayings collected here may be labeled "political" in one sense or another.

The Palauan phrase here roughly translated "proverb" is *blukul a tekoi. Tekoi*

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has the immediate meaning "thing" or "spoken thing." The word *blukul* is used variously to mean "clear," "promontory," "cape," "joint," or "point of articulation." The idea of the Palauan proverb is more explicit in a second phrase that is synonymous but less commonly used: *ulengeruaol a tekoi. Ulengeruoal* means a "joint," such as the various joints of the body. Hence, Palauan proverbs are a joining of thoughts, a simile or metaphor, forming a bridge between ideas.

The functional importance of the *blukul a tekoi* is that a statement can be made obliquely; to phrase a pithy attack, veil a threat, execute a quick squelch, or couch praise with the indirection essential to oratory in the Palauan political arena. In English if one says, "Jack of all trades," and another, nodding agreement, adds, "master of none," the exchange of ideas has the structure typical of most Palauan proverbs. The majority may be divided into two parts: the simile proper and the elaboration. As in the English example, the Palauan speaker may leave the elaboration unstated, relying upon the sophistication of his audience, or some members of it, to complete the thought. "Like the man of Ngesias" (No. 105) has no meaning except for those who can complete it with the phrase, "who left his serving of food to catch a chicken." This riddle or audience-participation aspect of the proverb prompted a few elder Palauan sources to remark that there is no contemporary context within which Palauan proverbs are really useful. To get the full value of a speech well laced with proverbs, a speaker must assume for his audience a knowledge of the Palauan environment, history, and lore that is not characteristic of the contemporary adult. Since the turn of the century, Palau has been administered by the Germans until World War I, by the Japanese until World War II, and since then by the United States. To the elder historian the term *blukul a tekoi* refers to those oratorical devices that were used in the old society at the highest levels of political discourse, especially among the "corner-post" leaders of the village. With the gradual dissipation of political authority to new forms and with the increasing "westernization" of learning and behavior, the *blukul a tekoi* are respected by archaic. The elder speaker must avoid using them or, in order to be understood, he must explain them and in so doing remove the spark and zest from his speech.

On the other hand, as the pages to follow will show, many of the sayings are of recent vintage. The form, if not the traditional content and context, appears to be thriving, and, while the elders will dismiss the newer ones as "modern" and lacking in prestige, the modern speaker in Palau still relies on indirection and simile to properly couch his political oratory.

Palauan sayings, if not *blukul a tekoi* in the strictest sense, range over a wide expanse of explanations—from kinship to weather. Additionally, particular sayings may have multiple applications; this will be evident in some degree in the explanations provided. However, it should be clear that the category names for grouping the sayings are somewhat arbitrary. Used in one context a saying may refer to a young man who foolishly lost his sweetheart, in another to a political leader who pushed his clan into too many projects at once and ended with nothing completed. The use of categories, then, should not be taken to mean that the sayings subsumed are rigidly restricted. To use an old saying in a new or unusual context, so long as it fits, would appear to be excellent form.

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I. *Speech*

1. *Ngkora tengadidik el dimelekoi el suebek.*
   Like the kingfisher, chattering while taking to wing.

   The kingfisher, a restless, bullying bluebird, may be heard to chatter loudly when flying up from the ground or from a perch. The saying applies to one who suddenly spouts instructions to a group, then leaves, or to a leader at a meeting who impatiently interrupts a discussion with a burst of pronouncements, then ends the meeting.

2. *Outet a tekoi.*
   To take words to be a handbag.

   The male betelnut bag (*tet*) is used till old and worn, then discarded without sentiment. The saying refers to speech without responsibility or personal sentiment.

3. *Ouklalo a tekoi.*
   Making things out of words.

   Applied to a person who talks too much and accomplishes little. Palauan men are prone to use it with reference to women, implying that women spend most of their time in the taro gardens gossiping, producing very little.

4. *Tekoi el eliuis.*
   Words of the taro garden.

   Gossip or pointless chatter is likened, by the men, to the talk of women cultivators in the taro gardens. *Eliuis* refers mainly to the dikes and elevated places in the marshy gardens where the women gather to talk, but may also refer, like *mesei* or *dechel*, to the whole garden.

5. *Tekoi el kereker.*
   Words of the lagoon.

   Fish in the lagoon may be driven into a small circular trap (*osel*) by a huge surrounding device made of coconut fronds. During this kind of fishing the excited participants, usually men, may hurl the worst kind of insults at one another when a mistake permits some fish to escape. Insults, or bad language generally, in this context were excused even though the victim was a superior. Rough talk among men engaged in any strenuous work may be excused as "words of the lagoon."

6. *Teluo ural.*
   One tongue.

   A "straight talker"; one who sticks to what he says without reversing himself.

7. *Ngkora nguis el britengetang a ural* (or *Britengetang*).
   Like the green tree snake with a forked tongue (or simply, "Forked").

   One who reverses himself, has two tongues, or whose tongue is forked like a snake.

8. *Ngkora kaeb Chelong, el diremurt ra ngor.*
   Like a racing canoe of Ngerechelong, fast by word of mouth.

   Apparently refers to a canoe race of the past when a club of Ngerechelong lost after having given verbal display of greatness. Refers to the bluff or braggart.

9. *Ais Belau.*
   Palauan news.

   A play on words involving a form of the Palauan word for deception, which is similar in sound to "Belau" (Palau). According to one origin legend, the name "Belau" derives from a deception by which the people of Angaur tricked and killed the giant Uab, whose fallen body became the islands. Identifies a rumor, especially news that gathers detail as it travels farther and farther from its source.

10. *Ngiradart.*
    Mr. One Hundred.

    A recent idiom referring to a man who talks too much; a chatterer, but especially one who exaggerates.

11. *Ngkora derumk, el dimerrumk erengii el diak aututelel.*
    Like lightning, a big, unnecessary noise.

    Lightning rarely strikes in such a way as to cause serious damage in Palau. May be applied to any unnecessary fuss or oratory at a meeting.

12. *Amerekos el tekoi, a mechuached a telemtemul.*
    Sweet words have a bitter taste.

    A parent wishing to punish a child may beckon him with a soft, sweet voice and, when the child comes, thrash him. May be applied where a leader secures his following with promises that he fails to keep.

13. *Ngkora osechel amengur, el di ngara milkokl el mora milkolk.*
    Like coconut water, passing from darkness to darkness.

    Water, drunk from a coconut, passes from the dark of the nut to the dark of the

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mouth. Some discussions, such as those of village leaders, are secretively passed from mouth to mouth without public discussion.

14. *Tekora kila deldalch.*
They are as though eating *deldalch.*

Deldalch is the material once used to blacken teeth in Palau. When the *deldalch* was applied it was "eaten" by keeping the mouth and lips completely immobile for several hours until the dye had set. May be applied to a meeting at which some problem is presented for discussion and no discussion takes place, all the participants sitting in stony silence; also to a person or group that receives a reprimand in silence.

15. *Ngkora dereberebel olik, el chelidobel e tellatel.*
Like a squatting bat, hanging but looking down.

Bats hang upside down from the tree and may be thought to have an inverted view of things. Refers to a comment or action that is clearly out of line; rarely said of a person who is present, since the implication is that of weak mindedness.

16. *Yasai bune.*
Vegetable boat.

The idiom is in the Japanese language. At one time during the Japanese administration of Palau a boat carried vegetables and "news" from the central island of Koror to Peleliu. Applies to unreliable news or rumor.

17. *Bekiu a ngerel.*
Fierce with mouth.

An individual who, without the authority to back his words, refutes authority; a person without traditional status talking back to one with such status.[4]

18. *Ngmechubs aikrel e mengerum emel.*
Healed on the outside, rotten inside.

Outwardly good or harmonious, but internally bad; a quarrel mended in the public eye; a statement of praise hiding criticism.

19. *Ngkora chad re Ngesias, el ngemuu ra mla mokom.*
Like the men of Ngesias, fussing about a thing lost.

The men of the Ngesias (Peleliu) village club were sitting near their clubhouse one evening when raiders broke through the brush, shouted wildly, and escaped with the head of one of them. When they recovered their senses, the men jumped to their spears and shouted threats into the darkness of the surrounding brush. Aroused by the commotion, the village chief appeared and, when appraised of the situation, admonished them to be quiet since the fuss would gain nothing. "Don't cry over spilt milk."

20. *Ngkora terib sel a daub.* (*Ngkora teriobs*)
Like the foam of the ocean. (Like sea foam.)

Some things, like sea foam, drift on without settlement. Endless discussion without reaching agreement.

21. *Ngkora cheladngikl el diak lebeldakl oltellel e dingemuu.*
Like the honey bee, celebrating without first boiling down the coconut syrup.

Once coconut syrup, dripping from the cut flower stem, is collected it is thickened by boiling. The honeybee, however, collects his nectar, puts it in the hive without boiling it, then proceeds to fly around noisily as though celebrating the completed task. Hence, to talk or boast loudly about successes and accomplishments when one has none; to make plans but never carry them out; to celebrate without cause.

22. *Ngdimlak longesimer a tekoi el chad.*
One for whom the door of words was not closed.

When the secrets of a clan or a profession were being taught by an expert, the house was completely closed and instruction took place in strict, whispered secrecy. The idiom may be applied to a person who, while having the proper status to be knowledgeable, has never learned in closed session; an important but uninformed person. Conversely, an expert or knowledgeable clan historian is one who "has had the door closed" (*mleng a simer*).

23. *Ngkora Ngiramesemong, el omilt a mlamemong.*
Like Ngiramesemong, rehashing what has been finished.

Pertains to a person who repeatedly reminds another of past favors or continually recalls the mistakes of others. (My sources no longer recalled the episode or story from which this idiom derives.)

24. *Berengelel a deleb.*
Slap of the spirit.

Good speakers are not too animated, control their emotions and gestures, and do not salivate while talking. Those who do are

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compared to the epileptic, who has been "slapped by the spirit."

25. *Ngua beab el mngard.*
Nibbling like a rat.

Activity that slowly destroys another person or institution. Generally applied to verbal actions; spreading malicious gossip; a speech loaded with subtle insults. However, it can be applied to wider behavior such as economic behavior that destroys the resources of the country: killing fish by dynamite; cutting forests without planting.

26. *Omchiib e melemedem.*
Exposing and concealing.

The grass skirt in Palau consists of a front and back panel. While being worn, the strands of the skirt may become matted and tangled. To correct this, particularly when sitting down, the woman may run her fingers under and through her skirt, lifting and combing the strands. In so doing the woman affords the spectator a brief, erotic glimpse. The idiom may be applied in answer to a severe critic, asking the critic not to reveal all of the victim's failures. In a related sense, a family member may ask another not to make all of the family problems public.

27. *Oldulb e melidl.*
To drown yet to save.

When a person has been attacked until quite defeated in a speech, he may ask his prosecutor, "Before you drown me, save me."

28. *Bon ere mii oruklel a Dachelbai.*
Taste Dachelbai's food basket.[5]

Dachelbai was a young man adopted into the household of his father's brother. In the household was another boy whose mother was the wife of the house. Naturally, the wife favored her real son, while her husband (who tried to remain neutral) rather favored Dachelbai. The wife consistently fed her real son fresh taro while she fed Dachelbai old, moldy food. One day the wife put the food servings at the wrong places and the real son complained loudly about the bad food. Eventually the father realized how badly Dachelbai had been treated and just before his death he called Dachelbai to his bedside and told him where the family money was hidden. The saying may be applied to anyone who complains unnecessarily.

29. *A mekngit el tekoi tbal, ungil tekoi uellak.*
Bad words are a curse, good words are a blessing.

May also be translated "Bad words are black magic (*tbal*) good words are helpful magic (*uellak*)."

II. *Leaders: Good and Bad*

30. *Ienged el merreder.*
The leader is our cave.

A good leader is a protective leader. The cave concept probably derived from a secret place called the village "egg-nest" where women, children, and elders would be hidden during a raid. May be applied to other situations: a good plan in battle; an indispensable custom.

31. *Emeched el bekall.*
Tacked sails. (Tacking into the wind.)

Bekall may refer either to tacked sails or tacking into the wind. The reference is to the navigator of a canoe who sails well and close into the wind; hence, a skillful leader who successfully navigates his people through difficult times.

32. *A ungil merreder aua chull el melemedem era daob.*
A good leader, like rain, stills the ocean.

Rain falling during an ocean squall often seems to wipe away the winds and still the ocean. A good leader should be able to dispel the problems facing his people.

33. *Ar sechal a reng er tir bad.*
The male heart is like stone.[6]

The true man or leader has a strong, unwavering character. His decisions are firm and unchanging.

34. *Ngmeredm er oiaol bedul ngii.*
Attaching the drain spout to oneself.

Pertains to favoritism, the adjustment of the flow of favors from the leader to oneself. It is considered unsporting and in poor taste to seek favoritism through undue support of a leader in direct anticipation of favors.

35. *Ngcheiku eomekrael era tara cheiku.*
A blind man leading another blind man.

The application is identical to that of the familiar English idiom.

36. *Oked lomiou.*
Heaped on by the commander.

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Applied to a leader who piles work upon work until the various tasks become meaningless.

37. *Mesumch e dmanges.*
To delegate, then to do.

The word *mesumch* involves the act of going on an errand or mission, hence "delegate." The phrase may be applied to a leader who asks a subordinate to do something, then does it himself.

38. *Ngkora char ra Kosiil, el lecharches eng mong malekeriik eng mei.*
Like seaweed at Kosiil, out with the tide and in with the tide.

Kosiil is a location in the lagoon where the seaweed can be seen to bend in and out with the tide. The idiom is applied to a leader who is too flexible and unreliable. In the short form (*Kora char ra Kosiil*) it may simply mean, "I'll go along with what you decide."

39. *Ngkora bukitang, el meduch el meldelodch a bedengel.*
Like the octopus, able to change the color of its body.

A leader, or any person, who is highly erratic, too adaptive; one who appears capable of taking any convenient or easy position.

40. *Ngkora besos Lechemai, el dingariou el meritch.*
Like the oar of Ngerechemai, breaking on the down stroke.

A rapid stroke technique in rowing, originated at Ngerechemai in northern Palau, consists of dipping the paddle deep with a strong, rapid stroke and bringing it forward with a smooth flip. The technique gives the appearance of considerable ease, while the canoe obtains great speed. The coxswain desiring more speed of his men may shout at them: "Besos Lechemai!" ("Oars Ngerechemai!"). The secret of the success of Ngerechemai racing canoes was not known until observers noted that the oarsmen frequently broke their paddles on the swift downstroke. Thus, when the secret of a successful leader—the leadership technique or magic that he uses—is revealed, this idiom may be applied.

III. *Reciprocity, Generosity, Cooperation, Food, and Wealth*

Palauan society is composed of larger and smaller chiefdoms with reciprocity in the lateral movement of goods and services and redistributive cycles among the lower and higher tiers of social structure. The system depends on the matching of food and services with gifts or payments of wealth (generally in the form of ceramic trade beads and quarters of ceramic bracelets) based on exchanges that take place between cooperating or competing (but equally ranked) groups or between clans via marriage links. At the base of the system food and service are, generally, provided by the wife and her clansmen; money and gifts derive from the husband's clan. When functioning properly the reciprocity cycles move wealth upward in coordination with leadership obligations in the redistributive cycles, enabling the elite to display opulence, generosity in feasts, and to make payments for various services rendered to the community.

This rather wide-ranging group of proverbs pertains to aspects of this reciprocative and redistributive system, its use and abuse.

41. *A mesei a delal a telid.*
The taro field is the mother of our life.

Not only is taro an important staple in the Palauan diet, but a serving of taro is essential at any feast and taro is the essential food in a food-money exchange. Its importance is recognized in this idiom.

42. *Ngkora Beriber ma Chemaredong.*
Like Beriber and Chemaredong.

Cooperative reciprocity among equals should be patterned on that exemplified by these two men. Beriber, who harvested coconut syrup, and Chemaredong, who was an expert fish trapper, lived in two small caves near the village of Oikuul in Airai (central Palau). These caves are side by side, separated by a natural wall about one foot thick. However, for a long time the neighbors did not know that the other existed. Finally, they discovered one another, and from that time

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on they engaged in mutually profiitable exchange of their surpluses in fish and syrup. An elder source said that this is more than a proverb (*blukul a tekoi*) and referred to it as *ollach idnger*, the "law of neighborliness."

43. *Ngdingemelel a Ititong a mult a dechel.*
From the taro shoots at Ititong a new garden was planted.

Applied generally to the benefit of cooperative endeavor: small favors multiply, great results may have small beginnings.

44. *Ngkora mur re Ngchesar.*
Like the feast at Ngchesar.

Presumably, in the past the village of Ngchesar in central Palau tried and tried again to schedule a *mur*, the largest, village-wide feast conducted in Palau. But for various reasons the feast was forever postponed. The saying applies to the risk of procrastination.

45. *Ngkora ilotel a melenges era Ngesebei, el melecheseb ra teobch el omekeek ra mui.*
Like the man who made coconut syrup in Ngesebei, dipping from half-filled containers to keep one overflowing.[7]

Pertains to a situation which may have occurred in Ngesebei, a small hamlet in Ngardmau (northern Palau): a coconut-syrup specialist always kept one coconut-shell container full and in sight of guests, who, thus, would think that all of his containers were full. The idiom applies to any pointed display of opulence.

46. *Ngkora cherabrukl el diblsiochel e reborb.*
Like the lobster, just sitting bedecked with weapons.

Applicable to a person who prides himself on great wealth but does not put it to work; or to one who dresses to the hilt, then stays home. It may once have been applied to villages that were well armed, but peaceful.

47. *Ngkora Beachedarsai el ditelkib, e diak bolak.*
Like Beachedarsai's food, only a little but it does not disappear.[8]

Beachedarsai and a friend, one day, went to heaven. On arrival they were very hungry, so they visited one of the gods who provided food for them. The "food" was one tiny piece of taro and a bit of fish. Beachedarsai thought to himself that this would hardly suffice, but he picked up the taro and ate it. As he did so another piece appeared on the plate. He ate the piece of fish and another piece of fish appeared. His friend also ate and on his plate as well a new piece of taro or fish appeared as each was consumed. When they were satisfied, there remained on their plates a piece of taro and fish. The idiom is applied to any small blessing, such as a small but steady income, or Western meals that, in contrast with the Palauan tray full of food, are served in small portions, and so on.

48. *Omengal dechedacham.*
Munching-eating.

A small fly-like pest, *nguk*, occasionally will destroy the taro plants in Palau. To rid the gardens of the pest the women of the village conduct a particular ritual: During an entire night the women, assembled at the village community hall, "munch" on a variety of chewy foods—not eating very much but chewing a great deal. This ritual imitation of the fly is to gain his trust and friendship, since the fly is a great eater. Having attracted the spirit of the *nguk*, the women proceed to the gardens early in the morning. Dressed in minimal clothing, abbreviated grass skirts, they perform a provocative dance by which the *nguk* is seduced. The women dance out of the gardens to the beach and into the water where the raptured *nguk* follows and is drowned. The idiom may be applied to a feast with abundant food, or to an individual who may be seen to nibble at food for a prolonged time.

49. *Kemngal osenged.*
A long inspection.

No one tells another that his Palauan money (*udoud*) is fake. However, fake ceramic money is not unheard of in Palau. The implication that money is fake must be disguised, if stated at all. When the clan taps its financial resources, as when payment is made for the new house of a clan member, factions of the clan present their contribution to the clan chief on a turtle-shell tray. If the money is not regarded as sufficient, the intermediary carrying the tray is so advised and the money is returned, usually with some light quip to ease the tension that such occasions arouse. If, however, the money is presumed by the intended receiver to be fake, the intermediary is asked to return the money to its owner and bring another piece that "does not require such a lengthy inspection."

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The idiom, then, may apply directly to a fake piece of money or to any suspected fraud.

50. *Ngkora ngklel a bai re Ngerekabesang: a Telkakl.*
Like the name of the community house at Ngerekabesang: "Buttressed."

At Ngerekabesang in Koror (central Palau) there is a community house (*bai*) called Telkakl, which means "to buttress" or "to be buttressed." Some of the older *bai* in Palau were thus supported with beams from the ground to the eaves, and the implication has been added that a *bai* so supported must be very full of important possessions. This idiom is used of a person who is wealthy, or of one's self, meaning that one has cash on hand.

51. *Ngkora ngklel a bai ra Chol: a Medederiik.*
Like the name of the *bai* at Chol: "Empty."

A *bai* in the northern community of Chol is (or once was) called *Medederiik*, meaning "deserted" or "empty." The idiom may apply to a person without possessions, a poor man.

52. *Ogai.*
Eighty.

Probably a modern play on "OK," meaning abundance; there is plenty.

53. *A bodechebuul e a kedeiuul oltoir.*
A poor man, but chased by beggars.

Creditors seldom ask a rich man to repay a debt. Only when a man has lost all his money do they come asking.

54. *Melem e menga ra ngaraucharm.*
To eat and drink by the mast tip.

The *ucharm* (bird) is the hardwood tip at the top of the canoe mast. The person to whom the idiom is applied is accused of thriving on gifts from other places. Particularly it may be applied to persons of a high-ranking village who rather expect that visitors in canoes from other villages will come provisioned with gifts—thus, those who watch for the canoes. Sometimes the idiom goes: *Ngkora chad ra Oreor*, "Like the man of Koror," with reference to the high ranking community of Koror in central Palau.

55. *Ngkora chad re Ngecheangel, el dime chemed re Ngkesol.*
Like the man of Kayangel, who procured his gifts from Kesol.

The saying refers to a man from the atoll of Kayangel, some twenty miles north of the main islands of Palau, who, on his way south to visit friends, stopped at an intermediate reef, Kesol, to fish for a present for his host. Refers to a person who, en route to a visit, tries to borrow a present from another guest; any person who suddenly wants to borrow money.

56. *Kedimedochii e rouar; kemam a mekerang?*
You pluck the fruit and pick it up; what of us?

Usually one person climbs the tree or uses a long stick to knock down the fruit while an assistant shares the task and rewards by catching the falling fruit or picking it up. The saying may be applied to a person who prepares something to eat by himself, then eats it without sharing. It can apply also to a person who laughs at his own joke, leaving his audience unmoved.

57. *Ngokouik me ngobached, e a lokeuim eng diak lobached.*
If it is my lunch it can be divided, if it is yours then it cannot.

Two men habitually trapped fish in the same region of the lagoon. One would occasionally ask the other to join him at lunch, the other would always refuse. One day the man who refused arrived with no lunch. When the usual invitation was extended the man refused, saying that, anyway, he had no lunch. The invitation was insistently pressed until the reluctant one gave in. As they split the taro between them the one who shared made the above statement. The idiom is a mild rebuke of a retentive person.

58. *Ngkora omengal Rraus, el sosokod e dikeang.*
Like they eat at Ngerraus, appetized when nothing is left.

Ngerraus is a small village in Ngchesar (central Palau). The idiom suggests a person who begins to feel hungry just as the food runs out. The reference is to the meager food resources of a small village. In contemporary Palau the idiom may be applied to some popular import that soon disappears from the shelves of the stores.

59. *A chimad el dodersii a chimal a chad elodersii.*
Put out your arm and a man's hand will reach back.

The proper spirit of cooperation and mutual aid.

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60. *Kemangel a chimal.*
Long of arm.

A person with a "long arm" gives gifts far and wide; he is well liked for his generosity.

61. *Kedeb a chimal.*
Short of arm.

A man with a "short arm" is miserly.

62. *Ngkmes a usekerel el chad.*
A man whose breechcloth is closed.

A well-organized man, particularly one who uses his money carefully; hence, sometimes, a stingy person.

63. *Ngmimokl a usekerel el chad.*
A person whose breechcloth is loose.

A poorly organized man, naive, open-minded, generous, but not manly.

64. *Ngak a ngit me kau a ngoi?*
I receive it and you ask for it?

A man asks for and receives that which he needs from a second party. A third party, learning of this, asks the first party for it. Used as implied or generally about any unreasonable request.

65. *Ngkora chongit Irrai.*
Like receiving in Airai.

According to this saying, the people of Airai (central Palau) are likely to ask for those things they have in abundance. A wealthy man asking for financial help; a person asking for a cigarette when he has a pack in his pocket.

66. *Oltengkou.*
Bulldozing (or "to push into a pile").

"To push into a pile" is the literal meaning of *oltengkou,* now applied to a bulldozer. Idiomatically, the act of piling on expensive and unwanted gifts. The recipient knows that he will be asked to reciprocate in kind at some future time. Also a persistent rejected sweetheart. Some moderns simply use the English term.

67. *Ngai bebudel.*
Taking skin.

The act of reclaiming a gift.

68. *Mesachel oruikl.*
Looking in the food basket.

At some Palauan feasts food is served in a closed basket or on a large tray covered with a cloth; peeking is not in the best of taste. The idiom, however, is generally applied to a sponger, a person with a reputation for living off of others.

69. *Banged re Kemais.*
Clinging at Ngerekemais.

Long ago, when a canoe would approach the dock at Ngerekemais in Koror, the villagers are said to have run to the boat, clinging to it while searching for any small gift the visitors may have brought. The idiom may be applied to anyone groping too apparently for a gift.

70. *Ngkora bechars re Ngerdobotar, el dikiei meng chelengang.*
Like the cockroach of Ngerdobotar, staying on till it became white.

Presumably if a cockroach remains in the darkness for a long time, as one at Ngerdobotar (in Aimeliik) apparently did, it will turn white. Application pertains to a visitor who stays on and on, especially one who is not helpful in the household. Such behavior is not properly human; the person is somehow different, like a white cockroach.

71. *Omeka cheremel a Rebabch.*
Feeding Rebabch's pet.

A pet (unspecified) owned by Rebabch was gluttonous and bady behaved. Neighbors often fed the animal, but it always demanded more and never returned the favors with friendliness. Applied, usually by a third party, to someone who has done many favors for another only to be repaid with unkindness.

72. *Ngkora meas re Ngetmeduch, el dingii loltak rengii re derau.*
Like the *meas* [a popular reef fish] of Ngetmeduch, jumping into the net of their own free will.

At one point in their life cycle the *meas,* a tasty, black reef fish, school close to the surface in the shallow lagoon near Ngetmeduch (Koror) and may be easily caught with the *derau,* a two-part net consisting of two scoop nets, one held in each hand (hence sometimes "butterfly net"). The idiom is applied to a person who habitually appears without invitation at parties or feasts.

73. *Ngeuaol ra busch.*
Collecting feathers.

From the folktale about the origin of kite-flying in Palau: the inventor, Mesubed Dingal, while out fishing, lost his wife to kidnappers; he fashioned a kite in the shape of a frigate bird (*kedam*) using feathers collected from all the birds of Palau, then used this to go in search of his wife. The idiom applies to one who borrows freely.[9]

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74. *Aisenged a dikmeed, e diak dengetemii.*
The nose is right there, but it can't be licked.

The nose is very close to the mouth, but, no matter how reassuringly available, it cannot be licked by the tongue. The idiom cautions those who are careless with their possessions to be less assured about wealth.

75. *Ngtalsuk meng diilut re Meduu.*
A full basket was dropped in Ngeremeduu bay.

From the folk tale about Obak era Kedesau on his way to a feast being given in honor of his wife by her adoptive father. While crossing Ngeremeduu Bay between Ngatpang and Ngeremlengui, Obak dropped a basket of Palauan money overboard. Despite this terrible loss, he still had the courage and sufficient cash to carry off his visit in high style. The saying may be used to reassure someone, following a loss, reminding them that Obak era Kedesau recovered from an even greater loss.

76. *Ngkora ibuchel ere Ngemai, el dikiei ma dekedebekel.*
Like the spiny sea urchin of Ngemai, just sitting and getting covered.

The sea urchin can be seen lying quietly on the lagoon floor, occasionally with a leaf like a hat covering its head. Applied to a man who acquires a wife or great wealth without working for it.

77. *Ngkora dechil Ngiraidechiel el direkebengel.*
Like Ngiraidechiel's first, small drop of feces.

Ngiraidechiel had just assembled his fishing gear when he felt the urge to relieve himself. In the bush he started to do so when, with the first small drop of feces, a rat scooted under him and made off with it. He looked at the scurrying animal and called: "Wait, you, that was just the first drop, more and bigger ones will follow!" The resulting saying has to do with desirability of delayed rewards. It was used, for example, with reference to the first rations received from the military following World War II. Conversely, it may be applied to disaster in the sense that "the worst is yet to come."

78. *Akmeruul me kau ra terudel?*
I build it and you destroy it?

May be applied to a person who feels his aims or projects are being destroyed by the actions of another.

79. *Lak mol toech ra todem.*
Don't stick your fork in![10]
Stay out of my affairs.

80. *Mengesakl a ulaol.*
The opening of the floor.

The occurrence of a feud between nominally friendly factions; for example, two legs of a clan, two houses of a village. A scrap among friends.

81. *Orellel a ulaol.*
The repairing of the floor.

The act of making amends before a grudge develops into open hostility.

IV. *Organization of Work*

Far from exemplifying the South Pacific image of idle laxity beneath the coconut palm, the ethic of work is well developed in Palau. Competition across the many dual organizations of the social structure provided a socially rewarding context for the exercise of energy, and at the same time, vertical structures within the clan were such that individual achievement could be recognized through status improvement. A woman's work was largely in the taro gardens, which were located in natural swamps that had been widened and provided with water control systems, but during her mature years the woman also belonged to a village club with assigned tasks related to the upkeep of village paths, preparation of village feasts, and entertainment.

The men, mainly fishermen and warriors, played a part in garden construction and maintenance, devising and repairing intricate systems of irrigation, and, on a limited scale, terracing the slopes bordering natural swamps for additional gardens. The customs of the land demanded that major village paths be cobbled with

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large boulders, sometimes brought from considerable distance, and the platforms before the home, the club house, and the community hall were similarly paved. Stone sea walls, docks, and piers were built. If community energy permitted, beautification projects, landscaping, rest platforms on paths leading from the village and near the docks, stone paved bathing pools, and many other work projects were accomplished, often at a fiercely competitive pace, team against team, by men's clubs.

Occasionally a Palauan today, musing on the accomplishments of yesterday, will hazard that the men of old Palau were giants or gods. Much of the old structure remains, but the political capability to manipulate the structural units—the men's clubs, the factions of the clans—is considerably diminished; local authority has been lost to central administration and the zest of achievement in the traditonal economic and political arenas has been replaced by new pathways in western education, commerce, and government service.

Admiration for the hard worker and for efficiency, and respect for endurance and tenacity of purpose persist in Palau, as does a propensity to compete formally in team sports (baseball) or informally whenever the situation is such that competing groups can emerge.

82. *Olbed, e kall.*
A stone platform, yet food.

A man of Airai in central Palau, apparently during a period of hostilities, brought to his home from the lagoon all manner of shell food still attached to coral boulders. In the security of his own yard, he removed the shell foods and eventually with the stones he was able to construct a stone platform for his home. A lot in Airai, supposedly where this platform stood bears the name, Olbed-e-kall.

83. *Ngkora chelid re Ngebukd, el dirirekir ere bab.*
Like the gods of Ngebukd, completed up above.

As part of the festivities of a village feast or in celebration of some event, such as the completion of a community hall, Palauan young people produce a variety of named dances. One type of dance, called *ruk,* was never conducted in Ngebukd (in Ngaraard, northern Palau). It was said that the gods of the village had done their dancing in heaven before coming to earth and thus it was not necessary for the people of Ngebukd to dance. The saying pertains to a completed task, indicating to another that the work need not be repeated.

84. *Ngmelebisch ra chutem e imiit?*
Aiming at the ground and missing?

From a folk tale in which the hero rebukingly challenges another to aim his spear at the ground to see if he can hit it. The saying may be applied to a situation where a person of ability is expected to succeed at a task with ease, whereas others have failed.

85. *Ngkora rurut rubak.*
Like the running elder.

Elders do not run fast, but they can run for great distances. Young men can sprint, but have little endurance. Hence, a person with enduring persistence.

86. *Ngkora beremel a chelechelui.*
Like the *chelechelui* [fish].

The *chelechelui* fish reputedly resists rotting when cooked, remaining firm long after other fish would be soft and rotten. The saying implies mature persistence.

87. *Omkokl el sechou a medinges.*
The heron that rises early is filled.

The man who rises early gets wealthy; the woman who goes to the taro garden early keeps her family well fed.

88. *Ngkekerei e sechal.*
Small, but a man.

One physically small, or a child, who does the work of a strong man.[11]

89. *A telekangel a dilu meng beluu Ngersuul.*
With persistence the village of Ngersuul was maintained.

When the men's clubs of Koror could not proceed as far as Melekeiok, a major village to the north that stood in political balance with Koror, the clubs would often

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stop over at Ngersuul and sack the small village. Yet the people of Ngersuul, over and over defeated, clung to their village and persisted through history. (Sometimes the village of Angaur is used, with a similar meaning, in place of Ngersuul.) The saying may be applied to the harried individual who is about to give up a task because of repeated failure.

90. *Kora mekebud, el betok e ditelechem.*
Like sardines, lots of them but one small bunch.

Fish are properly wrapped individually in a leaf for cooking, but sardines are so small that a bunch of them may be wrapped together to make up a small bundle. The idiom may be applied to a numerous but weak enemy or to a clan that is large but ineffective, as in raising money for its members.

91. *Ngdi sengsongd e mrechorch a kauang.*
Even a small twig can bring the pot to boil.

From small contributions, great accomplishments; a lot of small twigs can make a hot fire; the virtue of cooperation.

92. *Areched a ioud.*
Fast and late.

Hasty work can result in inadequate results and delays.

93. *Ngkora killii a derudm el medel a betok el tekoi.*
Like one who has eaten the thorny puffer fish, full of many things.

The thorny puffer fish is sometimes gulped by the wide-mouthed grouper fish. The puffer, expanding and extending its thorns in the grouper's mouth, renders the latter rather "full of things" and completely helpless. Groupers in this predicament are occasionally caught by fishermen. The idiom is applied to anyone who faces more problems, more work, or more sweethearts than he can cope with.

94. *Ngkora Ngirekolik.*
Like Ngirekolik.

Ngirekolik never completed a task before he ran off to do another. The name can be translated "Mr. Fruitbat," apparently in reference to the animal's eating habits.

95. *Dings e deel.*
Filled to overflowing.

While directly applicable to overeating, the idiom is often applied to a person with too much work or too many projects. It can also refer to a person, or village, hopelessly oppressed by competitors.

96. *Ngkora mengang era beritengetang el kakau.*
Like eating a forked taro corm.

Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) generally grows like a single fat carrot. Some corms, however, develop one or more points or forks. The image conveyed by this idiom is that of a man beset by many tasks, trying to decide among them.

97. *Ngkora Tangerekoi.*
Like Tangerekoi.

The *tangerekoi* is a portion of the rafters of a club or community hall that serves as a shelf (*rekoi*). It is also the name of a demigod ranking with several figures who are mentioned in the origin legends. The idiom refers to the multiple functions of the *tangerekoi* (even as rafters, or shelf), as resembling the work of a woman's world. When a person is already busy and is asked to take on another task, he may say: "Who do you think I am, Tangerekoi?"

98. *Ngkora btil a Titingai.*
Like the buttock of Titingai.[12]

Titingai had a disease which left his buttock covered with old sores and pock marks. Therefore, when Titingai called on a young woman at night, he always left the house before it became light in order to avoid being seen. Once, however, when he awoke it was already light and he was observed to dash from bush to bush in his desperate attempt to run through the village with minimum exposure. A person who seems to be rushing madly about in the conduct of several tasks may be compared with Titingai.

99. *Ngikal chad a kora debar.*
That man is like a duck.

The native duck, *debar,* doesn't fly very well, or high like other birds, it doesn't walk or run like some animals, it can't sing well, and it doesn't swim as well as a fish. But it can do all these things. Applied to a person who seemingly can do many different things, none of them expertly. "Jack of all trades."

100. *Ngkora rengul a bolobel el dimelemalt.*
Like the heart of the halfbeak, straight.

The halfbeak, a small fish (*bolobel*), is regarded as one who follows his fancy or heart, doing as he pleases. The idiom is ap-

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plied to persons who are easy-going, sleeping when the mood calls for it, undisturbed by the behavior or opinion of others.

101. *Ngkora uek, el suebk e mekebekabs ochil.*
Like the purple swamp hen, flying off with its legs hanging down.

The purple swamp hen (*uek*; other sources name another bird, *sechou* [heron]) is careless about its legs when it flies, letting them dangle in flight instead of neatly tucking them up like other, more trim flyers. The saying applies to persons who do sloppy work or carelessly leave a task half finished.

102. *Oba tet e luut.*
To take a handbag and return.

Applied to a person who "never gets anywhere," a low achiever.

103. *Ngkora meikue Tmel, el dimengereel elolsiu erengii ra ngau.*
Like the blind man of Ngetmel, twisting twine into the fire.

The image is that of a blind elder, warming his frail body beside the fire while twisting strands of fiber into twine against his thigh. Only as he pulls the finished twine away, he pushes it into the flames. The saying may be applied to any utterly pointless activity or dissipation of wealth.

104. *Ngdiak kobetik rengii recheroid e me douchi ra rebai.*
Without looking afield, it was cut down behind the house.

From the folk tale concerning Mesubed Dingal, the inventor of the Palauan kite (see also No. 73). After his wife had been kidnapped, he constructed a kite using feathers from all the birds of Palau and he needed also wood from an *Edebsungel* tree to fashion the body of the bird-kite. After looking all over Palau and being on the point of giving up, he found the tree he needed behind his own house. The saying may be applied to anyone who does things the hard way, or who goes far afield to find something which is close at hand.

105. *Ngkora chad re Ngesias, el dongerechii a kall elotoir a kerruk.*
Like the man of Ngesias, who left his serving of food to chase a chicken.

Refers to a young man of Ngesias who was with a girl in the bush and was on the brink of persuading her to make love when he saw and gave chase to a chicken. Of course, he lost both the girl and the chicken. One may leave one task unfinished and initiate another, failing at both.

106. *Ngkora chad re Ngerechemai, el metom ra uel el metom ra mlai.*
Like the man of Ngerechemai, who lost his turtle and lost his canoe.

Relates to a fisherman who jumped from his canoe to catch a turtle only to find that his canoe had drifted beyond recovery. Applies to any situation where a person fails at a task, or, aptly, to a situation where a man, through his own foolishness, loses both his wife and his mistress.

107. *Ngkora Chelebesoi re Ngriel, el mad ra diak lechebngelel.*
Like Chelebesoi of Ngriel, dead in a fish trap not his own.

A man named Chelebesoi (also the name of a fish) was robbing another man's fish trap when a head-hunting party came by and removed his head. He lost both his head and his reputation. The idiom may apply to one who gets hurt while trying to do someone else's job.

108. *Ngkora ades a Rebodl.*
Like the street at Ngerebodl.

There was once, in the hamlet of Ngerebodl (in Koror, central Palau), reputedly a very fine boulder path which began and ended nowhere in particular. The idiom may describe a person who seems to be working hard toward no apparent objective.

109. *Outet a delengcholk.*
To take a house to be a handbag.

The male betelnut handbag (*tet*), is used till old and worn, then discarded. The idiom applies to a person who lives in his home as though he might move out tomorrow, making no effort to keep the house and yard neat.

110. *Ngkora debar re Ngechur, el klungang e me ngal modekriker.*
Like the duck of Ngechur, he became industrious after growing old.

The idiom is applied to a person who has more or less vegetated into maturity and old age and who, already far past his prime, suddenly tries without success to do all the things he might have done when younger. It may be used with reference to an elder who tries to be a dandy.

111. *Ngkora melechong el terriid.*
Like the bathing of the *terriid*.

The *terriid*, a bird, takes a quick splash bath, hardly a complete bathing. The

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idiom applies to a ducking one may get when a boat swamps, or to a wetting with spray. More generally, it is applied to a task done with haste rather than with care. It can be applied also to a brief acquaintance.

112. *Ngkora terriid el teloi ra klab edimengerem.*
Like the *terriid,* in the taro garden but hungry.
The *terriid,* a bird, is often seen in the taro garden but, unlike the purple swamp hen which eats taro corms, the *terriid* seems to eat nothing. The idiom may apply to anyone who works hard without recognition, or to a man frequently in the company of women but with no success as a lover.

113. *Ngralm el tekoi.*
A thing of water.
Soft or easy, like water. "It is easy."

V. *Decision Making*

A sizable category of sayings applies generally to the art of decision making or, perhaps more to the point, to the art of suggesting that another is remiss or amiss in his decision-making faculty. Action occurs when there is a public consensus among the decision makers; thus various more or less subtle means of feeling out a particular decision—or suggesting the need for one—are indeed important.

114. *A rengud me chodab.*
The heart and assessment.
This might better be translated, "Assessment with knowledge." The mind or head is thought to be the locus of knowledge in Palau, but such knowledge is made useful or is measured with the heart (*reng*). *Chodab,* in this context, would appear to mean "to take stock of" or "to measure." In essence, then, the phrase cautions one who seems on the point of making a rash decision to temper his thoughts with his heart.

115. *Ngkora remechas el kerekikl era klukl ma rames.*
Like an old woman who is cautious about coughing and breaking wind.
Among elderly women, it seems, coughing sometimes produces the unwanted effect of breaking wind. The idiom may be applied to any action that might produce an undesirable side effect, such as a hasty decision at a political meeting. As a caution, it suggests the need for leaders to consider all the consequences.

116. *Ngkora bekerurt el chebis el diruebet e melalm.*
Like a fast top that is planted as soon as it is dropped.
In Palau the top is spun in the air and dropped to the ground where it usually wobbles for a spell before it becomes "planted" or stable. The better the top, the less the wobble. A statement that is right to the point, or a decisive and good decision, is like a good top. The idiom may be applied to a person who is quick to get the point or learn a new skill.

117. *A kilt a udach.*
Quick to hit a nerve center.
Udach is a technical term in Palauan "judo" pertaining to the action of hitting a sensitive nerve point on the body of an opponent. A person described by this idiom is quick to grasp any point and take advantage of it in fighting, political decision making, business, and the like.

118. *Delebusols.*
Half boiled down.
That which is only half boiled to hardness, especially in making coconut candy. Hence, anything that is undetermined, undecided, or only partially resolves a problem.

119. *Ralm toach.*
Estuary water.
Water of the estuary (*toach*) is mixed sea and fresh water, therefore neither. Hence a person who is indecisive or who never really accepts responsibility.

120. *Ngkora Ngerechebal, el kal singd era Aimeliik, ma kal singd era Ngerekabesang.*
Like Ngerechebal Island, neither a part of Aimeliik, nor a part of Arakabesang.
A person who is "on the fence," changeable and indecisive. The saying may also be applied to a partly westernized Palauan.

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121. *Ngmla merekakl a tekingel.*
He swallowed his words.

An inconsistent person, especially one who has stated that he would never do something, then does it.[13]

122. *Ngkora olengechel a yolt era Saipan.*
Like the weathervane at Saipan.

This is a new idiom, probably coming into the language as a result of changes in policy whereby Saipan, in the past couple of decades, has been in and out of the Trust Territory as administered by the Department of the Interior. Application is to the indecisive or changeable leader.

123. *Ngkora omelkesel Ngirakerisil, el didiak lecheldereder a mlil.*
Like Kerosene, poling his canoe with no obvious destination.

Under the German administrator Winkler before World War I, a Palauan named Ngirakerisil (Mr. Kerosene) was employed as a canoe operator. Daily he would take the tireless administrator to a different part of Palau to inspect the various economic programs (largely coconut planting) instituted by the now legendary Winkler. The operator, least of all, could predict where they would be going next. The idiom is applied to any aimless person or action; indecision; a changeable person.

124. *Ngkora kaldos, el choitii a telemall e omkar era mechubs.*
Like *kaldos,* putting medicine on a well place, rather than the injury.

Kaldos is a medical treatment, said by some to have been learned from the Germans, in which medicine is applied to a parallel member of an injured part in a way that is supposed to transfer pain to an uninjured place. The idiom is applied to a decision or action that completely misses the point or problem.

125. *Ngkora biul el chad el ngesonges re buld.*
Like a man circumcised, insufficient skin.

Circumcision seems to have been known in Palau prior to contact, perhaps through contact with the Philippines, but was not widely practiced. As in this context, it usually draws attention in the form of ridicule. The idiom applies to any circumstance in which there has been insufficient preparation or planning; a premature decision.

126. *Ngkora mekemedil a Ulong, eldoba ra kebesengei.*
Like the raid at Ulong, doing it in the evening.

Pertains to a battle between the people of the once-inhabited islands of Ulong and Ngemelis in which the leader of the Ngemelis forces successfully defeated those of Ulong by attacking in the evening with the setting sun directly at his back, blinding the Ulong forces. Application is to a meeting or task, which might better have been started earlier, postponed until evening.

127. *Ngkora uul, el teleu a blil e oleker ra chull.*
Like the *uul* [*Cettria cantans?*] with its house open, calling for rain.

The *uul* may be heard to call out usually just before it rains; some say that it is calling for rain. This seems foolish, since the bird constructs its house with an opening at the top that will let rain in. A person who makes a decision or starts some action without adequate preparation is likened to the *uul.*

128. *A chrechar a lokelii.*
The distant eras reveal.

"Distant eras" refers to the past as well as the future; hence, the distant past reveals the distant future. A person's behavior in the past will tell how he will behave in the future.

129. *Kedilotkii Chelechang, e diak mletkii a Chrechar.*
You think only of Present, not of Future.

Chelechang (Present) and Chrechar (Future) were brothers. Present was the favorite of his mother. These are the words of Future reprimanding his mother. The idiom is used of those who inadequately plan for the future.

130. *Ngkora omengelel a Laib, el mengang e melakl.*
Eating like *laib*—while eating, burying.

The *laib,* a bird with a long, white tail, according to lore eats ripe fruit in season, as other birds do, but also gathers scraps dropped by other birds and buries them. When other birds are hungry, the *laib* will dig up the scraps and eat them. Hence, one should plan ahead for lean times.

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131. *Mokes okesongel.*
Close that which is to be closed.

Derived from the command given by a canoe navigator to close the deck boards of a canoe and otherwise prepare it when entering rough water. "Be prepared."

132. *Ngkora belochel, el mesengei otelochel e suebk.*
Like a pigeon—seeing the danger, yet it flies from cover.

The pigeon sits quietly concealed until some threat appears, then it flies out, revealing itself. The idiom applies to a person who unnecessarily exposes himself to danger, leaves the house in the rain, or takes a boat out in a storm.

133. *Ngkora chad ere Ngerechemai, el omtab a bengel ra iabed.*
Like the man of Ngerechemai, who marked his fish traps with a cloud.

Refers to a man who tried to remember the location of his fish traps by their relationship to cloud formations. Any one who plans poorly, such as one who decides to buy a boat before he has the financial means to do so.

134. *Ngkora based era Ngiraeuekelebid.*
Like the blowgun of Ngiraeuekelebid.

Derived from a humorous and (in Palauan) phonetically funny verse:

Evening approaches, the women return from the gardens.
The *koranges* tree is swaying and the women, looking up, see Ngiraeuekelebid.
Confused and embarrassed, he climbs down and picks up his blow gun. His plan foiled.
"All the men of the village use the blowgun in the mountains.
Only Ngiraeuekelebid uses his in the gardens.
Surely, if he uses it in the gardens, he will hit the bull's eye in the crotch."

Men are permitted in the taro gardens but only for some special purpose and by leave of the women who may be working there in the deep mud in minimal attire, sometimes with their grass skirts put aside. (Today they work in very old clothes.) Ngiraeuekelebid, leaving the village with his blowgun as though going hunting, climbed a *koranges* tree overlooking the gardens to spy on the women and was caught. A poor decision or plan that in the end proves embarrassing.

135. *Ngkora beab ere Ngaraard, el kma lisiu e kma lisam.*
Like the rat of Ngaraard, eating your coconuts, then mine.

A pet rat owned by Mad, chief of Ngaraard, ate the coconuts of most of the chief's neighbors, then, still hungry, ate the chief's own coconuts. A decision that backfires.

136. *Bisch rebai el tekoi.*
Backyard taro stuff.

Bisch (*Alocasia macrorhiza*), a taro, can often be found growing near the garbage heap behind the traditional Palauan house. Because of this contamination, taro growing in this location was not eaten, nor were the leaves used as food wrappers. Hence, any valueless decision, action or object; a useless idea.

137. *Ngoba tebedel a chulad.*
Like the coming out of the earthworm.

Once an earthworm comes out of the ground, so the saying suggests, it can never return. An irreversible decision or action.

138. *Ngkora mud ra Bngei, el di melecheb ra rrengor.*
Like the *mud* fish of the Bngei lagoon, drawn to the passing wind.

The reef fish *mud* seldom leaves a given rock or cleft in the reef, but according to this saying the *mud* of Bngei lagoon, near Airai, may be attracted away from their locus by the dust raised by a passing school of fish. The latter portion of this proverb is difficult to translate. The word *melecheb* may be applied to a person drawn forward by a current of water. *Rrengor* refers to a movement of air caused by one body passing another. The idiom is applied to a changeable person, a faddist, or a joiner.

VI. *Difficult Situations, Fate, and Luck*

139. *Ngkora chebedel a Mengellakl el dimochu meleketk.*
Like the clouds of Mengellakl that just pile up.

High points like Mengellakl in Palau sometimes create clouds as the moisture-laden air is lifted by the wind to higher, cooler altitudes. This saying applies to a situation or a fad that spreads; drinking to excess.

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140. *A Chemeled a didobang eng medul.*
Even though we have our own betelnut, to be burned.

Chemeled is a "betelnut package" consisting of the seeded nut, the mint-like leaf (*kebui*), and lime. By applying too much lime to a "package" it is possible to burn one's mouth. This is sometimes done among young people to signal another secretly of sexual attraction. However, carelessly or accidentally, a person will sometimes put too much lime in a "package" he is preparing for himself. The idiom implies that everyone makes mistakes; it can't be helped.

141. *Ngkora chelebd ra Utaor, el dita temetemir.*
Like the blow at Utaor, one stroke for all.

A person or perhaps a club of the hamlet of Utaor (a hamlet of either Koror or Chol) offended a major village and, in consequence, the village retaliated by attacking the whole hamlet. The idiom applies to any general statement or punishment that might better be directed toward a particular group or individual.

142. *Ngua lemechebiso tolekngel a Modelab.*
Like making a whirlpool in Modelab's water tub.

Probably having reference to a folk tale, this saying is applied to any state of general social confusion. Some worldly Palauans used it with reference to the state of world affairs.

143. *Ngkora cherellel a beab, el dikot e kerokr.*
Like the bearing of a rat, once and that is the end.

According to this saying, the rat bears but one litter. Hence the application "once is enough" about an act that bears no repeating.

144. *Ngkora eberdord el dingii el melul erengii ra ngau.*
Like the bug that is attracted to the lamp and burns itself.

Eberdord is the name of a small bug that can often be seen flitting about a light at night. When oil lamps were used in Palau, these bugs would often be found in the ceramic oil-filled bowl. Application is similar to the "moth attracted to the flame" in English; one who brings on his own downfall by disregarding the dangers of the pleasures that he seeks.

145. *Ngkora ngkelel aiusch el dimengel a medad rengii.*
Like a fish in deep, clear water, eaten only with the eyes.

Fish are not easily caught in clear water. The idiom applies to that which may be admired but not obtained, like an expensive item or another man's beautiful sweetheart.

146. *Ngkora kim ra Murael, el di dengarch e oker a chais.*
Like the clams of Murael, face up, mouth open, listening to the news.

Murael is a reef near Ngerechelong where, as elsewhere in Palau, the various kinds of tradacna shell bask, open and feeding, in the shallow lagoon. The saying applies to gullibility combined with high curiosity for news and to persons who simply sit at home, letting the happenings of the community come to them via passing persons.

147. *Ngdingai a llechul ra rael.*
He gets his law from the streets.

Rael (or *rolel*) has the general meaning "way," applicable both to method and to a street. The implication is that if a child will not learn from his parents, he will learn the hard way from experience. It may be used in the positive sense of someone who is quick to learn from experience.

148. *A uek el kukmeremang el meomeklatk meng mouchul a klingit ereng.*
When the purple swamp hen appears, it brings remembrance.

There is a song (*Oumachas*) from which this saying derives: Once there was a young couple who made love in a secluded spot in the taro garden. While they were lying together a purple swamp hen darted out of the brush startling the couple. Eventually love cooled, but thereafter whenever the girl saw a purple swamp hen while she worked in the gardens, she recalled her lover. Hence any occurrence that brings back fond memories.

149. *Ngdichelled e mekemad?*
Though an ally, yet hostile?

A fellow clan member, or an employee, who should be loyal, but is not.

150. *Ngkora chellel ongos el dimengeleu e tmat a deluus.*
Like eastern showers from white

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clouds, still the raincoat is ripped.

During the months of the east wind, roughly January through June, rain often comes from innocent-looking white clouds and is accompanied by brief gusts of wind strong enough to tear the traditional betel-nut-spathe raincoat; hence, an opponent whose strength is greater than anticipated.

151. *Msisichau e a tutau akmedang.*
Be strong, morning is nigh.

Encouragement to the depressed to take heart.

152. *Msisichau engdi kmed a meched.*
Be strong, shallows are close.

Crossing the lagoon, a canoe is poled in shallow water, paddled in deep. The phrase refers to canoeists tiring after a long paddle over deep water. Applied when someone is about to give up, though better times are ahead.

153. *Ngtilobd a delebngek.*
My spirit took leave.

Similar to "Frightened out of my wits."

154. *Ngkora chebiei el Cheiangle, el ditang, e churtur a talsuk.*
Like the breadfruit of Kayangel, a single rotten one ruined the basket.

It is said of the *Chebiei* variety of breadfruit found at Kayangel atoll that one rotten one will spoil others packaged with it. Similar to "One bad apple spoiled the bushel."

VII. *Circumlocution and Reserve*

A direct statement does not carry the same prestige and, therefore, force or effect as does a well-expressed hint or circumlocution. Similarly, a person, in his deportment, is not ideally direct, boastful, or prideful. In the competitive setting of Palauan social relations, however, both respectful reserve and tactful circumlocution may be discarded during a heated or prideful moment. There are ways of letting a person know that his directness or pride is offensive—ideally, of course, using the indirect medium of proverbs.

155. *Ngkora chad er ker el melchong e ngak a mekerasm.*
Like a person somewhere taking a bath, but I'm cold.

Applies to any embarrassing act, such as boasting or gossiping, on the part of a friend.

156. *A sebiil e kau aimong.*
I am sick with *sebiil,* but what about you?

When frambesia (yaws; Palauan: *kerrdik*) was common in Palau almost everyone had the disease as a child, and commonly the entire body was covered with painful sores. When the infection covered the anal region it was known as *sebiil.* The saying implies that everyone has had *sebiil,* a painful and disgusting disease. Hence, "What makes you feel you're so good?"

157. *Aika chedengal a matukeiol.*
This liver is shark.

A blind man lived with his wife and son at Ngetmel (in Ngerechelong, northern Palau). Since he was blind, his wife and son would often fool him. For one thing, she would leave him in charge of their prize piece of money, indicating its hiding place, when she left for work in the gardens. But before she left she would hide it in another place. One day when he was alone, his brother came to visit and to help around the house. The blind man asked him to gather some wood for a fire so he could warm himself. The brother did so and left. While the man warmed himself, he found, to his surprise, that he could see a little.

The following day, with his improved sight, he found out about the money deception and located the real hiding place of the money. Once more his brother visited, and the blind man asked what wood he had used in the fire. The wood was driftwood and he had his brother build another fire. Again his sight improved and he was so pleased that he invited his brother to stay and help himself to some ray-fish liver. The brother looked at the liver and told the man that it was not ray-fish but shark liver. With this the man realized that he had really been deceived, for shark's liver is hardly considered worth eating. Hurt and angered, he told his brother to find the piece of money, pointing out its actual location, and gave it

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to his brother, saying his wife and son deserved nothing.

When the wife came home she at once looked for the money. Unable to find it, she asked her supposedly blind husband about it and, of course, he insisted that she would find it in the place she had pointed out to him, since he had not touched it. Finally she gave up the search and exclaimed: "It simply isn't here." To this he replied: "This liver is shark."

The saying may be used when one has discovered another's deception or when a person faces a very frustrating or defeating situation.

158. *Ngkora rrull eldi mededeod el mengang el merail.*
Like a ray-fish, eating while walking.

The ray-fish does not stop swimming while chewing food it has gathered while weaving along the ocean floor. The saying may be applied to any rude behavior or particularly to the act of walking and eating, which is considered impolite. It can also be applied to a person who is trying to hurry through a job without giving it careful attention.

159. *Ngua kukau elomertort a ditel e chemoes.*
Like taro, though the leaves are tall, still immature.

Taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) is mature only when the leaves produced by the plant are small. When the plant produces its largest leaves the tuber in the ground is still quite small. The saying may be applied to a person who, while yet young and inexperienced, is proud and boastful.

160. *Ngkora kobesos.*
Like the sea-horse worm.

The *kobesos* is a small eel-like creature with the head of a sea horse. It never faces another fish directly but always shies away sideways. The saying is applied to a person who is too bashful or backward in a public situation.

161. *Ngkora blsuus el telebudel.*
Puffed out like a puffer fish.

A boastful person is like a puffer fish, full of air and not edible, hence not worthy of note.

162. *Ngkora kedarm, eldi metirm e metord.*
Like the chambered nautilus, just a touch and injured.

The Palauan believes that the chambered nautilus lives in the sea at great depth and, at the slightest touch against a rock, its shell is broken and it drifts to the surface where it dies. The saying may be applied to a poor sport, one who angers easily or who reacts badly when the victim of a prank.

VIII. *Kin and the Character of Family*

A child is born and belongs naturally, as the Palauan puts it, to his mother's clan. In some compensation the child's personal name is usually that of a respected member of his father's clan, and frequent mention is made of the resemblance of the male child to its father. Direct reference to a person's mother is generally avoided. Membership in one's father's clan is more nearly an achievement. A person is *ochel,* signifying natural belonging, to his mother's clan; *ulechel* to his father's clan. For the *ulechel* membership to be significant it must be reinforced through assistance in various ways to the father's clan. Occasionally in small clans, lacking capable *ochel* candidates, *ulechel* or "in-law" clan members receive high clan titles.

Married partners form a bridge between two clans, with food and service provided by the wife and her clansmen throughout the marriage, and gifts or payments in money returning across the bridge, as occasion demands, from the husband and his clan. Some boundaries for incest are defined by the proverbs; economic loss rather than moral guilt is the expressed sanction.

A few of the proverbs define the character of intra-family relations; others suggest ideal behavioral models.

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163. *Kid a rechad a milechell ra kosokodel.*
Narrow was our birth as humans.

The saying defines life as a confined, perilous journey, symbolized by the painful narrowness of the birth canal. Generally applied to the trials of life, or sometimes by a parent to a child that does not want to do his chores.

164. *Bital tuangel.*
Sides of the doorway.

A husband and wife sitting on opposite sides of the doorway to their home, hence "spouse"; sometimes, sweetheart.

165. *A redil a desemelel a sechal.*
The woman is the outrigger for the male.

An unmarried man has no outrigger; taking a wife is a stabilizing process for a man in the sense that the outrigger stabilizes the canoe. One source, a Palauan woman, has suggested the meaning that a man is as capable as the woman who backs him up.

166. *Beches a desomel.*
A new outrigger.
A newly married woman, a bride.

167. *Ngkora menga bleiekl.*
Like eating warmed-over taro.

Cooked taro will spoil in time, unless it is reboiled (*bleiekl*). Among other applications the saying may pertain to a man who marries, separates, then returns to the same woman; also a man who returns to a former job.

168. *Bkul a kesol.*
Elbows of turmeric.

Turmeric (*kesol*) was an important source of yellow and red dye, used as a cosmetic and sometimes traded as a valuable. Strands of turmeric were highly valued and carefully tended. The turmeric plant multiplies by forming new tubers more or less detached from the original plant. The idiom refers to tubers that are close to the original and refers to "children of the same mother."

169. *Ebedel a kesol.*
Close to the turmeric plant.

Tubers more than once removed from the original turmeric root are referred to as *ebedel* ("beside" or "close to"). The reference is to ego's sister's children. More distant offspring of a single maternal line may be simply termed *"kesol."* A more detailed discussion of these "turmeric-kinship" terms is provided by the Force article, as follows: "A man calls his sister's children by the same term which is used to designate the proximal tuber, *ebedel a kesol* (literally, 'close to the turmeric plant'), whereas a sister's female child's children are called by the name for the next nearest tuber, *pkul a kesol* (literally, 'projection of the turmeric plant'). Offspring of the next descending generation in the maternal line are called *kedkengel a kesol.* The term *kedkengel* means 'a new shoot' and is customarily used to designate a new shoot of taro."[14]

170. *Ngmla mkelii a tual.*
He cut down his own banana.

A man supplies fertilizer (money) for a banana tree that, eventually, provides fruit (gifts of food). The cycle, in this saying, is compared with that of the food-money cycle of a marriage in which the wife's clan provides food and service, while the husband's clan provides occasional payments of money. If a banana tree is cut down before it bears fruit, the cycle is interrupted. Hence, a man who marries incestuously within his own clan and thereby inhibits the food-money cycle.

171. *Mengii a ududel.*
Destroying his money.

Marriage within the clan, generally considered incestuous, limits the value of the food-money exchange, since the materials simply change hands within the same clan group. A man so married is criticized as having destroyed his source of wealth.

172. *Ngkora ilaot Itkib el dingii el romur.*
Like the *ilaot* [coconut juice] of Ngetkib, mixing itself.

Probably of folk-tale derivation, the idiom may be applied to a man who has married too close to his own clan, thus not gaining the assistance of the wife's clan in food and services, since this would amount to the clan giving to itself. Also applied to a situation where a person expects to have some service performed for him but ends up doing it himself.

173. *Ngkolia a ngelekel.*
He ate his child.

Reference is made again to a form of food-money cycle. When a man marries, his wife's younger brothers and sisters are "children" (*ngelekel*: his child). The husband and wife strive to engage them in

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good marriages in order to maximize returns from this particular food-money cycle:

Father to daughter (wife's younger sister)—food

Daughter to father—money

Father to son (wife's younger brother)—money

Son to father—food and service.

The saying may be applied to a man who marries or has sexual relations with his wife's sister, thus interrupting or jeopardizing this food-money cycle. With less strength, the sanction is applied to a man marrying any member of his wife's immediate clan (*kebliil*).

174. *Ngkolia a delal.*
He ate his mother.

To marry or have intercourse with the wife of one's brother. There is a potential reciprocation in which money may go from an elder brother in return for food and service from a younger brother. Once established, particularly where the younger couple have children, a cycle of this type may continue after the younger husband has died. Marrying the wife of a deceased younger brother, then, will interrupt such a cycle. Similarly, sexual relations with this woman may jeopardize the cycle.

175. *Ngkora ameyu.*
Like coconut syrup.

A general reference to incestuous relations. That this is a recent idiom, probably first used during the period of Japanese administration, is suggested by the Japanese word *"ameyu,"* used in Palau to mean coconut syrup. The incident from which the idiom derives is said to be one in which a Palauan coconut-syrup maker had relations with his wife's sister.

176. *Ngdi rengud e ngused.*
But our heart is our sister-in-law.

A husband's sister is said to spy on her brother's wife during his absence from home. Reference is to a young wife who refused the advances of a young man, even though it was obvious that no sister-in-law was present to spy. Asked about her relationship with the young suitor, the wife replied: "But my heart is my sister-in-law." The saying may be applied more widely to any circumstance where a person is entrusted with a task without supervision.

177. *A ukal a diak bol titiml.*
The *ukal* tree will not become a *titiml* tree.

The *ukal,* a lumber tree, resembles the *titiml,* a fruit bearing tree, at least to the extent that both are trees and become quite large. Both have assets but are quite different. The idiom is applied in the sense that a child resembles its father—will become what its father was. It may also be used to mean "human nature can't be changed."

178. *Ngara eseos e olengimch el mera dalm.*
From the mature tree the sapling dribbles.

Eseos is a mature tree, *dalm* is a sapling; *olengimch* means to drip, drizzle, or dribble. Application is to the similarity of the child to its parents, generally its father.

179. *Mlenga telochel a demal manguai ngii.*
Like his father, for he ate his father's premasticated food.

Applied to a child by adoption, with the implication that the adopted child resembles his adoptive father.

180. *Ngalk a uloul.*
Child of the floor.

Generally any child of a near relative; the child of a wife's sister; any child that may be adopted without changing its clan identity.

181. *Ngalk a bai.*
Child of the clubhouse.

In former times, when Palauan women would sometimes serve as companions to the men of clubs in villages other than their own, a woman occasionally became pregnant. While pregnancy during this service, or as a result of it, was considered bad form, a child so conceived was not considered "illegitimate" but was differentiated in degree by this idiom.

182. *Ngalk a riomel. Ngalk a ked.*
Child of the woods. Child of the bush.
A child born out of wedlock.

183. *A rengalk el sechal a dimekekerei e kora mersaod el mel bard er ter ra btil a ralm.*
A male child, though small, is yet like a small barracuda that braces against the flowing stream.

The small barracuda (*mersaod,* a small *ai*) can be seen bracing, without apparent motion, against the stream, usually

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where fresh water flows into the lagoon, or where tide water runs off the reef, until suddenly it dashes into the stream to grab a small fish. Then it retreats once more to its place of watchfulness. This watchful, quiet, reserved, almost crafty approach to life is much admired, and parents will encourage their male children with this saying.[15]

184. *Turturk medeomel.*
Calm but misbehaving.
A child who gives the appearance of being withdrawn and quiet, but who, on occasion, is very wild.

185. *Kemeral ngelek el ulled.*
Really a child of the back.
A child (sometimes an adult) that behaves well whether its parents are present or not; a child that is good when one's back is turned.

186. *Ngelek el medad.*
Child of the front.
A child (or adult) who performs well when being supervised, but who shirks duty otherwise.

187. *Eldochel a klekekered chad a ilkolk.*
The light of youth is darkness.[16]
A young person may display pride or may be showy in dress habits; youth may shine, but the brilliance does not mean enlightenment.

188. *Sel obutk a medak.*
When my eyes are closed.
When one dies the eyes are "closed"; hence, to be dead. The term for "death" is *mad* as is the term for "eye," (*mad; madak*: "my eye"). Some sources suggest that the term for death refers to the closed eyes of a dead person.

IX. *Social Status*

In a formal sense there are some forty degrees of status differentiation in Palauan social structure—ten ranked clans and four degrees of belongingness, as named in the proverbs to follow (Nos. 191, 192, 193, and 194). Beyond these interpersonal rankings each village, in a cluster dominated by one, is ranked, and in turn the clusters themselves are ranked, with four or five "cornerstone" clusters (Koror, Melekeiok, Aimeliik, Ngeremlengui and sometimes Ngaraard), ranking the others. Throughout the ranking system, history and tradition tend to contradict one another: most status positioning is accepted as "traditional" but behind all such positionings are folk histories of defeats for the low-ranking and success for the elite. Assassination, war, alliance, and wealth determine the rankings through conflicts which are, the Palauan will say, caused by women and money. Ideally, conflicts occur between matched pairs; for example, raids between Koror and Melekeiok were looked upon as conventional and approached a form of gaming in the head-hunting era. However, political theory and practice are two different things; subordinate villages and low-ranking persons frequently suffered the whims and punishment that their weak and unprotected position encouraged.

189. *Kemam armeteet a kora ardechel a bngoal el diruebt eulkoou.*
Our elite, like the seed pods of the mangrove tree, when they fall (are born) they are upright with hats on.
The *bngaol,* a mangrove tree, bears a long pod which is sharply pointed on one end and has a leafy "cap" on the other. When it falls from the tree it generally lands standing in the mud with "cap" end up. Hence, the quality of being socially elite (*meteet*) is gained naturally at birth. One is born in good standing with a cap or insignia of high rank. It follows, then, that the elite need not display their high standing, everyone knows they are elite when they are born. Going a step further, the elite may display proper humility and refer to a group including themselves as *kid aremechebuuch*, "we commoners."

190. *Ilad el dui.*
Title pride.
A title (*dui*, also "coconut leaf," which is sometimes used as the receptacle for a title pending the selection of a successor)

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is to be worn in humility, but a person who has just received a new title may sometimes be oppressively haughty or prideful.

191. *Techel a miich.*
Core of the tropical almond.

A lineage that has resided in a particular village for a long time, so long in fact that the origin of the lineage and the origin of the clan to which it belongs are considered coeval, is likened to the core or, perhaps, true spirit or essence of the tropical almond, a food once reserved for the elite. Members of such lineages are considered to have first right to clan titles. The following three idioms express lesser degrees of belonging.

192. *Muchut el yars.*
Old sails.

Lineages so named can be traced, by clan historians, to origins outside of the village of residence, but they have been around long enough for their "sails" (of the hypothetical canoe that brought them) to have become old. Generally speaking, members of such lineages will be able to obtain some titles in the clan to which they belong, but not if persons of equal ability are available in the *techel a miich* ranking.

193. *Beches el yars.*
New sails.

Lineages so classed are of widely known recent origin in the village. Members are not considered eligible for clan title, though in recent decades of general depopulation many title holders are called *"beches el yars"* behind their backs.

194. *Ultechakl.*
Driftwood.

Members of lineages only a generation or so removed from arrival in the village may be referred to with this term. A rather more frequently applied term is "omengdakl," which probably derives from the word *omengd*, "to lean against." Whether emphasis is on "drifting into the village" or "leaning on another clan," the term applies to low-status newcomers who are commonly adopted by one of the existing (generally high-ranking) clans of the village and who have, more or less, the status of servants. The more common term *omengdakl* has come to have the meaning, among younger Palauans, of "slave," and something of the servitude of slavery was doubtless often present; however, the lineage members so termed, by serving the interests of their clan, could anticipate the gradual betterment of their status, generation after generation.

The difficulty that an anthropologist may encounter in trying to determine the ancestry of a particular lineage should be evident in the meanings of the above four idioms. It was best to be considered "old lineage," and origins outside of the resident village were matters of secrecy within the clan. Until recently, however, such origins were not simply forgotten, since the history of a clan, including, for example, prior residence of one of its lineages in another village, formed the justification for wide reaching inter-clan federations through which villages might form alliances or individuals might find hospitality. Such clan federations, termed *klebliil,* sometimes take on some of the meanings of the clan (*kebliil*) with the granting of clan titles and with incest prohibitions.

195. *Ar mechebuul a klekedellel a beluu.*
Commoners are the tools of the village.

This idiom, resembling the organic analogy of society with the common people becoming the "hands" of the state, may be used to "put the commoner in his place," or to suggest that a member of the ruling elite be more considerate of the commoner residents.

196. *Rekung el daob otetechi a rekung el beluu.*
The ocean crabs crowd out the village crabs.

"Crabs from the sea," in other words, commoner peoples who have only recently taken up residence, may become more influential than long-term residents of higher, historical rank. Members of such lineages, *omengdakl* or low status, because they must achieve to gain recognition and because they are adopted and protected by high ranking clans, may actually be more privileged than older residents.

197. *Ngkora chad re Ngerechelong, el dibital modechor era debsel a lei.*
Like the people of Ngerechelong, standing together on the base of the coconut tree.

The mound or hump that forms at the base of the coconut tree is said to represent the highest ranking village clan. The leader of that clan is spoken of as "standing on the mound." In the idiom, it is suggested that the people of Ngerechelong (northern Palau) would all like to be leaders—all

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standing on the mound at the same time. The idiom may be applied where too many people try to direct an operation; too many leaders.

198. *Ngkora iubt ra keburs.*
Like the core of the mangrove log.

The core of the mangrove tree (*keburs*) has the interesting quality of being quite soft and workable when green, but very hard and durable when dried. Hence, a person of old age, especially a high-titled elder; one who has reached great age. Wider applications include a long-standing tradition; a long-term employee.[17]

199. *Msebechii a kelel Ngersuul.*
Weigh the food of Ngersuul.

According to folk history, Koror once sent a very large force of warriors against the tiny village of Ngersuul (Ngchesar in central Palau). When the force was seen offshore, the people fled to a sheltered hill and one of the village club leaders shouted to the enemy, "Why don't you weigh the food of Ngersuul?" suggesting that Koror either pick on a village its own size or send a more equivalent-sized force. The idiom expresses nicely the ideal of balanced opposition characterizing appropriate competition in Palau.

200. *Ngouchaet a chikled rengii el tekoi.*
My neck is sore from that affair.

Looking up for a long period makes for a sore neck; hence, a person who is tired of occupying an inferior position for a long time. More widely applied: One who is facing work that is beyond his capabilities.

201. *Ousebus a medob.*
Make a minnow of a whale.

The *sebus* is said to be the smallest fish in the sea. The idiom may be applied to one who belittles another if the latter is really far more powerful or prestigious. It can be applied in the reverse, referring to a person who shrinks from an inferior foe or from easy work.

202. *Ngelek el chelsel.*
Inside child.

A child of the inside is a member of an elite lineage, one who is not bashful before elite persons.

203. *Ngelek el budel.*
Outside child.

A child of the outside is a commoner and is likely to be bashful in the presence of an elite person.

X. *Names Applied to Places; Nicknames and Insults*

Village raids, general feuding, and intervillage competition seem to have led to a proliferation of insulting idioms or labels that can be hung upon the people of other places. As a generality, these labels are names of foods that are eaten more or less exclusively at the place named and are always intended as insult. Some, however, relate to presumed history (never as told by the people of the place cited) or habit. All except No. 204, and there seem to be few like this, are insulting and, according to Palauans, injudicious use will start a fight. In some instances, those named by an idiom will firmly declare that the idiom is properly applied to the people of another, named, place.

204. *Choreor chourois a rechad.*
The mountains of Koror are people.

Several interpretations are given for this idiom: (1) Koror doesn't have mountains as high as other districts to the north, but the people are as high (elite) as mountains. (2) Others lay claim to the height of the mountains near their village, in Koror the people make the villages great. (3) A group of warriors from a northern village set out to raid Koror, but, as they approached the islands on which the hamlets of Koror are situated, they saw mountain after mountain fading away into the distance; dispairing any success against such a great nation, the raiders turned home. Actually, the mountains that they saw—rugged, raised limestone islands—are nearly uninhabited, with Koror's population concentrated on islands of clay and volcanic origin along the northern fringe of the group.

205. *Tiuach.*
[Name of shell food of oyster class.]

Designates people of Koror, who used to eat it.

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206. *Ksull.*
[A variety of sea crab, red in color, generally found under rocks.]
Designates people of Koror with the implication that they eat it.

207. *Abtulul okdemelem a cheloit era Emerert.*
Your mother's brother's head is discarded at Emerert.
In head-hunting days villages on the same side-haven as Koror, or otherwise allied, would visit Koror last with heads taken in raids or ambush after visiting several allied villages for dances and money collections marking a successful hunt. By and large, the purpose of head-hunting was economic, with money paid the men of the successful raiding club at each allied village where the heads would be displayed. The collection went to the coffer of their village chief. By the time the warriors reached Koror, then, the heads would often be quite odorous and unpleasant (economically useless). So they would be discarded at a place called Emerert in Koror. From the standpoint of any male "ego" the mother's brother (*okdemaol*; *okdemelem*: "your mother's brother") is always significant, since one such individual usually acts as guardian and financial advisor for the younger clan member. The idiom, then, is used by the people of Koror to insult persons of other, generally hostile, villages.

208. *Ngiull e ngedall.*
To accompany and send back.
Used of the people of Ngaraard district, especially Ngebuked villagers, as a reference to cowardice. When the club-hostess system (*mongol*) was practiced, in which a group of women from one village would be "abducted" (with the consent of village leaders) to serve as hostesses in the men's club of another village, it was customary for the women of Koror to be taken to a men's club in Ngebuked. This involved four trips by the men of Ngebuked past the hostile villages of Aimeliik: (1) to go to Koror to "abduct" the girls at a pre-designated place; (2) to bring the girls "secretly" back to Ngebuked; (3) to take the girls back to Koror for the payment (money payments to the girls' village chief, to the club to which the girls belong, and to the fathers of the more active girls); (4) the final trip home by the men. In each instance, the canoes of Ngebuked would be joined, by prearrangement, by canoes and warriors from Ngeremlengui as an escort past Aimeliik.

209. *Mekebud.*
(A small sardine-like fish.)
Used of the people of Ngaraard where this food fish is abundant.

210. *Metkul a bkul a Ngirair, e kloul Belau el more Ngerechelong.*
From the Metkul boundary point at Ngirair, Palau is yet huge up to Ngerechelong.
This saying is given two meanings, both negative, pertaining to the people of northern Palau and to Ngaraard particularly: (1) the people of northern Palau are so provincial that they still think Palau is a huge country; (2) the people of northern Palau are the biggest liars (a play on "to deceive," which sounds like Belau [Palau]). The idiom may be shortened to "Men of the point" (*Chad ra bkul*), referring to a point of land at Ngirair marking the boundary of Ngaraard. Or the act of patting the elbow (*bkul*) may carry the same meaning. Actually, the idiom is of fairly recent vintage, pertaining in part to resistance on the part of some of the people of northern Palau to administrative programs instituted by the Japanese.

211. *Bungud a derrir.*
Stinking of fish.
Used of the people of Ngerechelong (northern Palau) who specialize in trap fishing. Trap fish are said to be especially oily and smelly.

212. *Meng a kim.*
Eat tradacna.
Tradacna, one variety of which is the so-called Giant Killer Clam, occurs in quantity off Ngerechelong and is a prominent food there; hence, the people of Ngerechelong.

213. *Euid ello mengur.*
Eat seven times.
Used of the people of Ngiwal with the implication that they eat seven (instead of three) times a day. Two interpretations: (1) Ngiwal is fronted by a shallow, narrow fringing reef with poor fishing, hence the people must eat an unusual amount of taro; (2) the region of Ngiwal conforms, in the origin myth, with the location of the stomach of the fallen body of the giant Uab. Hence, the people of Ngiwal are continually hungry. Generally, throughout Palau, Ngiwal is

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famous for the taste of its exceptionally good taro.

214. *Ar delemiu ouerau ongeched.*
Your wedding gift is a coconut-husking stick.
Spoken of the people of Ngiwal. It seems that in a folk tale the husband of a Ngiwal bride, who had complained about her wedding gifts, beat her with a stout coconut-husking stick.

215. *Eremerum.*
[A variety of trepang.]
The people of Ngardmau and Ngeremlengui, where this variety of sea slug is supposedly eaten.

216. *Olik.*
Fruit bat.
The people of Aimeliik, where the fruit bat is eaten.

217. *Kmai*
[A variety of sea crab.]
The people of Aimeliik, where the crab is plentiful and often eaten.

218. *Molch.*
[A variety of trepang.]
The people of Aimeliik, where it is a food. The word also means penis.

219. *Mechas.*
[A small, black reef fish of excellent quality.]
The people of Airai who seasonally harvest this fish in abundance when it spawns on nearby tidal flats. During the spawning season, traditionally, the people of Airai host specific other villages, including Koror, for a feast featuring *mechas.*

220. *Rechiil.*
The fighting conch.
The people of Airai; a food.

221. *Emang.*
Mangrove crab.
The people of Ngatpang, where the food crab is abundant in the mangrove swamps.

222. *Meduch a ngerel.*
[A variety of banana.]
The people of Kayangel; a banana occurring there.

223. *Telib.*
Breadfruit preserve.
The people of Kayangel and Peleliu, who rely more than others on breadfruit and who, in the past, preserved the fruit for off-season food.[18]

224. *Sengall.*
[A pair of tongs (clamp) made from the wood of hibiscus.]
Refers to the people of Angaur. In the traditional intervillage rankings Angaur was quite low. The low rating is said to have resulted from the fact that the people of Angaur deceived the Giant Uab, who had taken to scooping up people when hunger demanded, and set him afire. His fallen body became the other islands of Palau. Islanders of higher ranking northern communities recall a time when visitors would lead the men of Angaur about by their necks or hold them in place with the hibiscus tongs and otherwise abuse them if the visitors found their women attractive.

225. *Menga e kil.*
Eating rope.
The implication is the same as in the preceding; reference is made to rope that might be used to whip or tie up the lower ranking Angaurese.

XI. *Political Strategies*

The preceding may form a backdrop for the following seven names of political strategies. The word "arena" has been used occasionally to describe social and political competition in Palau. The Palauan political leader did not enter the "arena" unprepared. A young man who, by being born elite, was destined to become a leader in Palau would begin his career in one of the village clubs, where, because of his standing, he would at first become a leader of the younger club members who went by such descriptive terms as *Ngaraeritem* ("Being Paint," implying their membership was "paint" deep) or *Ngaramonki* ("Being Monkeys," apparently a recent term). In this context their leadership abilities would be assessed and, if they showed promise, they would be encouraged to gain spe-

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cific political training. Not much is known about this phase of political behavior in Palau. As sources explain it, the young man, probably in his mid-twenties, would advise his father or mother's brother that he desired tutoring from a specific leader whose success or techniques he admired. Where possible such requests were apparently honored, probably at considerable cost to the student's family, and private tutoring was conducted. Considering the intensity of the training, which might last for a year, the student probably took up residence at the tutor's home and, in essence, imitated him in detail. But tutoring was also by instruction, with extensive use of didactic folklore, probably with some emphasis on proverbs, and with attention to body posturing, gestures, and general deportment. The end product was a complete personality "shell" that the student adopted and would wear whenever consciously possible.

The formalization of this tutoring in Palau has resulted in the definition of seven categories of political strategy or seven different "shells." Candidly, I considered the propriety of including these titles. They are idioms only to the Palauan versed in the history and political behavior of his society. That is, they are professional "jargon." But they are also somewhat secretively managed. No trained political leader will casually tell another the name of his particular strategy and in no instance did any one source in Palau choose to tell me the names of all seven strategies. Yet the names as such are not secret and, on the whole, the names tend to define broadly the method involved. The Palauan political leader would not refer to these terms as *"blukul a tekoi."* They are properly called *"rolel a kelukau,"* or "ways of politics." The term *rolel* properly translates as "way," "method," or "road" and has the same broad and prestigious implication as the Chinese *"tao,"* or the Japanese *"michi."* All sources agreed that there are but seven named strategies though there were expected differences; usually minor, regarding the implications of a particular "way."[19]

226. *Omchar a reng.*
Buying the heart.

This is the strategy of anticipating the desires and wishes of others. It involves generosity in favors, gift giving, and praise. The art of anticipating the desired response by the question asked is polished. The use of humor to cajole those led is approved. When confronting a group, whether in dance or speech, a smile or pleasant, friendly expression is assumed.

227. *Mengar ma mecherochr.*
Bitter and salty.

The strategy of "doing things the hard way." When alternatives are available, the appropriate choice is the more difficult one. In voice, expression, and action there is a positive accent on personal ability.

228. *Ideuekl chemaidechedui.*
The concealment of the lizard.

This technique, perhaps the best known, derives its name from a lizard that may be seen to dart around to the other side of a tree to conceal itself from any observer. Properly used, the technique is regarded as unbeatable and almost magical. Its tactics are designed to surprise and confuse the opposition, always keeping the opponent off balance by maximizing the variable and unexpected. The selected alternative, where there is a choice, is the one calculated to surprise. No goal is approached openly until it is surely secured. General behavior and facial expression are a study in noncommitment.[20]

229. *Bkokuii ere reng. .*
Sympathetic heart.

Emphasis is on empathy with the other person: serene contemplation of the problems of others and the art of taking the position of the other as one's own. Sources identify it with the Golden Rule and ideal Christian behavior.

230. *Tuich el kelulau.*
Firebrand politics.

The essence of this technique is the successful threat. Depending on the circum-

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stances, the threat may be rendered by outshouting, boasting, or a display of anger. In more refined settings, it involves the carefully veiled threat, soft rather than harsh words, and quiet confidence rather than open boasting. It involves bluff and rumor. Facial expression is stern and threatening, or at least confident.

231. *Tuich el kelulau e loubuch ra ralm.*
Firebrand politics extinguished with water.

In a sense this is a response to "Firebrand politics," but it appears to be a fully developed technique none the less. It involves responding to anger with quiet calm and kind words. If it has a character of its own it would be called compromise. Buying the opponent off is approved. J. Useem names this strategy, but was perhaps unaware of the wider significance. For him the phrase pertained to "a small time official who uses his authority for his own benefit but shrewdly avoids being detected by superiors."[21] I think that most Palauan political leaders would agree that any political tactitian, knowingly using the strategy of his training, would expect to accomplish as much.

232. *Dmolch ere reng.*
Sincere heart.

The technique suggests a quiet rational approach to any problem; the acceptance of circumstances without getting ruffled. The advocate does not defend himself against criticism and will meet anger with sincere concern. It involves "checking the facts," rather than backing down in the face of challenge. The student of this discipline is serene in the face of danger.

XII. *Weather, Seasons, Time of Day, and Miscellaneous*

This category is frankly "residual." There would appear to be dozens of idioms to describe weather and seasonal variations. Since no overt effort was made to collect proverbs as such, these simply became a part of the total collection. A systematic collection of proverbs would no doubt reveal many more.

233. *A iolt a bad ra eskiik.*
The wind sleeps in the *eskiik* bush.

Around March the wind quiets at about dusk and begins to pick up the next morning. During the night the wind is said to sleep in the *eskiik*, a small shrub common on the hills of Palau. A quiet night is appropriate in the Palauan view because economically important fruit trees, such as breadfruit, are setting their buds at this time. This period of budding is thought to be analogous to the second or third month of human pregnancy, when exertion or shock may precipitate a miscarriage. If the winds blow strong at night during this time, elders note that the season will be poor as far as fruit harvest is concerned. The *eskiik* bush, where the wind sleeps, has a characteristic bad odor said to be caused by the wind performing its "natural functions."

234. *Oldubch ra malt.*
Pushing out of the leaves.

While Palau remains "green" yearlong, in late March or April many trees push out leaves of a lighter green color; this phrase designates this season.

235. *Ngomok a kerrekar.*
Opening of the trees.

From late April to June is the time of greatest flowering or opening of many trees in Palau.

236. *Omerekerk ra mark.*
Jelling of the fruit.

Coconut syrup, collected from the stem of the cut flower, is boiled to make it thick. The weather in August is spoken of as being extra hot in order to bring fruit to its final stage of ripeness for harvest.

237. *Rekil-ongos.*
Year-east.

The word *rak* in Palauan is commonly used to mean year (*rekil*: year of). Actually the traditional Palauan year lasted six months, dividing the solar year into two parts conforming generally to spring-summer and fall-winter. The "Year-east," when the wind blows from the east, is the time of spring-summer.[22]

238. *Rekil-ngebard*
Year-west.

The Palauan year, conforming roughly to fall-winter, when the wind blows generally from the west.

239. *Mengoit chedal Ngetkeuang.*
Disposing the group at Ngetkeuang.

The saying pertains to a situation that occurred at Ngetkeuang, a hamlet in

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Peleliu. Some members of a group about to sail north were already at the docks ready to board their canoes and set sail with a good strong wind from the south, slightly at an angle to the course they would follow and ideal for sailing. Impatient, the group at the dock finally left the remainder behind and the wind was so strong that they were soon well on their way. The phrase is applied to a wind that is strong, steady, and from the south, like a steady "tradewind."

240. *Ngkora uchul a delil ar rurrot.*
Like the crotch of an aristocratic woman.

Women of the wealthy elite in old Palau would be tattooed up the entire leg and about the thighs and hips. Reference is to the black color of such tattooing and the phrase may be applied to any dark occasion, but usually to dark clouds.

241. *Mengib otechel a sils.*
The sun is throwing projectiles.

The sun is a demigod who comes daily from an eastern heaven and follows a winding path leading down to the ocean. During the afternon hours the sun will receive reports from all the other gods concerning the work that they have accomplished during the day. Two of these gods are in charge of the stars and take frequent trips to the moon to investigate their star-charges. (Palauans like to note that they traveled to the moon long ago while we are just preparing to do so.) Toward evening, as the sun approaches the ocean, it first lands on a large orange tree (*kerukur*) and hurls the fruit into the ocean to frighten away hostile fish, such as sharks. Hence, the orange beams often associated with sunsets. After securing the safety of the ocean, the sun makes its final descent for the day. Thus, evening is the time when the sun throws darts.

242. *Bertechelel a deleb.*
Mark of the spirit.
A natal, or birth, mark.

243. *Ungil a ianged.*
The heavens are good.

Generally this phrase applies to "good weather," but a second meaning is good humor or a good mood.

244. *A ralm a diak locheraol.*
Water is without cost.

Palauans bathe frequently; many will not miss a daily bath if at all possible. Bathing places are usually widened areas, natural or artificial (some elaborately paved with stone) in fresh-water streams. The phrase simply reminds another, probably a reluctant child, that he should bathe.

NOTES

1. The materials for this paper were obtained over a five-year period (1958–1963) while I was serving as District Anthropologist with the Palau administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The idioms came from many sources and were usually collected in the context of general conversation, but particular credit may be given to Mr. Adalbert Obak, my assistant and mentor in things Palauan; to Mr. David Ramarui, who kindly shared with me those idioms credited to him; and to Mr. and Mrs. John O. Ngiraked, who helped with many of the interpretations and explanations, and with the orthography. Spelling in Palauan follows generally that used in Palauan schools at the time: *ch* is close to a soft German *g*, a velar fricative, and is often omitted when it occurs as an unvoiced initial sound before a vowel; *ng* is as in the English word "*sing*."

2. An interesting paper exploring the application of idioms in Palauan society is that of R. W. Force and M. F. Force, "Keys to Cultural Understanding," *Science*, No. 3460, CXXXIII (April, 1961), 1202–1206; for a comparative reference to proverbs elsewhere in Micronesia (Ponape) see S. H. Riesenberg and J. L. Fischer, "Some Ponapean Proverbs," JOURNAL OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE, No. 267, LXVIII, 9–18; for Palauan society generally, see H. G. Barnett, *Palauan Society: A Study of Contemporary Native Life in the Palau Islands* (Eugene, Oregon, 1949).

3. I explored this notion in some detail in "Competition in Palau," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University.

4. See also J. Useem, *Report on Palau*, CIMA Report No. 21, Pacific Science Board, National Science Research Council.

5. Provided by D. Ramarui.

6. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 3: "A man is a boulder."

7. Provided by D. Ramarui.

8. Provided by D. Ramarui.

9. See McKnight, "Kedam, the Palauan Kite," *Micronesian Reporter*, XIII.

10. Provided by D. Ramarui.

11. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 9: "Small but a man."

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12. Provided by D. Ramarui.

13. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 12: "No man vomits up something and swallows it down again."

14. R. W. and Maryanne Force, 1204.

15. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 11: "Fierceness is (like) the quietness of the barracuda."

16. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 52: "A young man's light is darkness." But there the meaning seems to relate to the ability of the young to do the impossible: to get along without a torch.

17. See Riesenberg and Fischer, Proverb 10: "The core of a mangrove log."

18. Breadfruit preservation in Palau (Peleliu) is discussed in McKnight, "Breadfruit Cultivation, Practices and Beliefs in Palau," Anthropological Working Papers, No. 7 (Office of the High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands).

19. For more, in the context of Palauan leadership behavior, see McKnight, *Competition in Palau*, 91–98.

20. R. W. Force refers to *amaidechedui* as a simile pertaining to circumlocution (*Leadership and Cultural Change in Palau,* Anthropological Series, Vol. L [Chicago]).

21. J. Useem, 62.

22. See, for more detail, McKnight, "Taro Cultivation in Palau," *Taro Cultivation Practices and Beliefs, Part I,* Anthropological Working Papers, No. 6 (Office of the High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands).

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