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Reclaiming, Resisting and Representing: Makings Space for Palauan Knowledge in a Pacific Islander Serving Institution

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Little research exists on the specific ways that Indigenous Knowledge is integrated into institutions of higher education across the U.S.-affiliated islands of Micronesia. This research study highlights the existence of Palauan Knowledge within Palau Community College. An Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, 2003) is utilized to align with Palauan values of respect (omenguul), responsibility (ngerachel), care and compassion (klechubechub). Through interviews (chelededuch) with nine collaborators, in addition to field notes, observations, and archival documents, this study was guided by the following questions: How is Indigenous Knowledge incorporated within Palau Community College (PCC)? Secondly, how do stories from Indigenous teachers and Indigenous learning environments inform PCC? Findings from this study reveal experiences of separation from Palauan Knowledge and the actions some collaborators took to preserve Palauan Knowledge. Collaborators' narratives highlight several instances where Palauan knowledge is honored within the college through visual and oral representations and with academic and community programming. Continuity of Palauan Knowledge through ongoing opportunities to sustain practices in and outside the college is explored in the final reflections of collaborators. They continue to challenge perspectives that Indigenous Knowledge is in the past and instead is evolving. Ultimately, this study lays a foundation for continued inquiry and reflection of the college to continue to interrogate the ways that Palau Community College elevates Indigenous Knowledge.

I grew up with stories. My mother told me a story about death, wisdom, and intuition. As we watched the waves come in, my mother began to talk about the passageway in the Palauan reef. There was a man-made path that the U.S. military created with dynamite to gain access from the sea to the shoreline. What they did not know is that the obstruction to the reef created a dangerous and deadly pathway, one that would capsize a boat and drown its passengers. My mom talked about many who lost their lives. She also spoke of my grandfather, a fisherman, who knew the waters intimately and, through this connection, could make it through that same passageway safely. He would wait for the first wave after the calm, then count each wave thereafter until number seven. On the seventh wave, the ocean granted you safe entry. Anything outside of the ocean's permission was perilous. The story is one of many that reiterated to me how knowledgeable Palauans are of their environment through the personal

connection and relationship they have with changing currents (human-influenced or natural) as well as a reminder of the power and agency of the waters.

Following the end of World War II, the United States retained the responsibility of stabilizing Palau and other Micronesian islands (Epstein, 1987). Palau signed a Compact of Free Association (COFA) agreement in 1994 (Epstein 1987; Pobutsky et al., 2005), effectively ending Palau's status as a territory. The COFA agreement arranged for the U.S. to receive some access to land and water in exchange for Palau to obtain economic, political, and strategic provisions for Palau (Heine, 2002).

Like the dynamite in my mother's story, the United States established and maintained new educational passageways through primary, secondary, and higher education institutions in these island territories. Palau Community College (PCC) is the sole and national college of the Republic of Palau, modeled, developed, and partially funded by various U.S. departments and agencies. As a means to rebuild after the devastating impacts of war, the U.S. established the College of Micronesia for advanced education. In Palau, the Micronesian Occupation Center served as one of the satellite sites of the College of Micronesia. It was previously an established vocational/technical school under Japanese rule (Takeuchi, 2011). When the Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and Marshall Islands signed a Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the U.S to become independent, they each eventually developed separate U.S. accredited community colleges. The story of higher education in Palau reflects what Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes as colonial universities serving within the historical processes of imperialism.

Beyond the framework and funding of education in Micronesia, education policies and practices must be properly understood within a particular social and cultural context, especially in terms of whose knowledge has been marginalized and devalued. Kanaka 'Ōiwi Hawai'i Scholar, Maenette K.P. Benham (2006) insists that schooling for native people has always been a contested space, one that is full of "conflict, struggle, and negotiation over content, context, value, instructional strategies, and measures of accountability" (p. 26). While Indigenous languages are recognized as national languages, within the educational systems in Palau, the English language supersedes native languages in use and legitimacy. Furthermore, Thaman (2003) asserts that Pacific Islander scholars and literature (and thus Indigenous Knowledge) have and continue to be silenced, devalued, and ridiculed. Despite these contexts, PCC has found ways to honor and elevate Palauan Indigenous Knowledge while also recognizing that the knowledge has always been there through its people.

Indigenizing the institution is not a unique effort and is one shared by other Indigenous peoples. This study specifically was supported in thought, literature, and inspiration by the work of Indigenous scholars and spaces. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, committed to being a Hawaiian place of learning, is where some of the Palauan collaborators of this study received their degrees and engaged in special projects aimed at supporting the preservation and resurgence of Palauan knowledge. Native Hawaiians challenged the University of Hawai'i to make space for Native Hawaiian ways of knowing (Lipe, 2016), in doing so, they have established an environment that supports Palauans to pursue similar actions within the colonial institutions of their respective islands, such as systems of higher education.

Purpose of the Study

Much of the research that exists in Oceania is representative of larger nation-states in the Pacific, such as Hawai'i and Aotearoa, while limited research exists regarding Indigenous knowledge in educational institutions of former U.S. territories/Micronesian islands. Similarities exist between Indigenous people from larger nation-states and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands (Palau, Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia). Though U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands are majority Indigenous in population, colonial systems of education continue to wield significant influence on knowledge production, sharing, and legitimacy. This article adds to the literature on how postsecondary educators in the Pacific are making space for Pacific ways of knowing within higher education that, historically and currently, keep it at the margins. The story of this article is guided by the following questions: How is Indigenous Knowledge incorporated within Palau Community College (PCC)? And, how do stories from indigenous teachers and indigenous learning environments inform PCC?

Review of Literature

Higher education systems were not created by or for Indigenous peoples globally and Palauan/Indigenous people of the Pacific specifically. Mi'kmaq scholar Michelle Pidgeon (2016) critiqued higher education as nestled in a predominantly Euro-Western defined system, challenging the creation of meaningful inclusion for Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, being, and doing. The Euro/Western-settler culture privileges Western knowledge systems, and in turn, Indigenous identity is marginalized (Gonzalez & Colangelo, 2010; Semali & Kincheloe, 2011; Teaiwa, 2006). Specifically, literature on Indigenous Knowledge in higher education calls attention to its devaluation as well as the lack of legitimacy it receives (Battiste, 2008; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Erwin & Muzzin, 2015; Schofield et al., 2011; Smith, 2012; Teaiwa, 2006; Thaman, 2003).

Colonial ideologies depict Indigenous peoples as barbaric and question Indigenous knowledge systems (Gonzalez & Congalelo, 2010; Hau'ofa, 1994). Gonzalez and Congalelo (2010) assert little has changed from previous notions of Indigenous peoples as savages, instead "these settler nations have essentially changed only the means and not the substance of how they treat Indigenous peoples, particularly with regards to higher education" (p. 6). Furthermore, this colonial legacy continues to create tensions for Indigenous Knowledge in the academy (Cole, 2010), as they are required to meet the expectations of Western agencies and organizations overseeing institutional evaluation and accreditation through mainstream standards (Cole, 2011). Justice (2004) writes, "The academy is the privileged center of meaning-making dominated by imperial nation-states; as such, its primary history is one that has served colonialist cultural interests, both directly and covertly" (p. 101).

Reclaiming Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges within the Broader Indigenous Global Community

In their 2015 study, Assiniboine scholar Sweeney Windchief and Hopi scholar Darold H. Joseph highlighted instances of survival when Indigenous students took ownership of their educational spaces through ceremony and tradition. The students' powerful examples led the authors to recommend that Indigenous students engage in a "conscious act of seeking" Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing while simultaneously participating in post-secondary education (Windchief & Joseph, 2015, p. 279). Similarly, the intentional inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is found in a

scholarly essay by Lumbee scholar, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy and scholar Emma Maughan (2009) that provides examples of how IK informs the work of Indigenous pre-service teachers at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the United States. The article makes a case for centering IKs in the curriculum so that “predominantly non-Indigenous educational spaces might come to value IKs as both worthy and useful” (p. 5).

Challenges Caution Tension

The discussion of the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Predominantly White Institutions is not without opposition. Hart et al. (2012) documented how Australian mainstream institutions utilized more of a “learning about” technique as opposed to “learning from” (p. 717) for programs striving to include Indigenous pre-service teachers. Still, other institutions, such as Botha’s (2007) study of South African institutions, found problematic beliefs by faculty about the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge. Faculty expressed concern about the impact on “standards of living,” suggesting minimal inclusion in optional modules. Their findings also suggested broader themes of “fear of Africanising” and “add-on curriculum,” with the former a threat to Western knowledges and the latter minimizing Indigenous knowledges’ value for learning within the institution (Botha, 2007, p. 212). Another challenge to the inclusion of IK is the limitations in resources that negatively impact opportunities to bring Elders to share their knowledge as well as barriers in hiring Indigenous faculty members (Hart et al., 2012; Pidgeon, 2008). Lack of IK in higher education leads to an “absence of the spiritual dimension which is the heart and soul of IK” (Erwin & Muzzim, 2015, p. 60). All in all, the findings in these studies reveal how Indigenous knowledge continues to be at the margins of higher education institutions due to ignorance, racism, and misinformation. It is therefore motivation to engage in practice and conduct additional research to center Indigenous Knowledges.

Indigenous-led Institutions Indigenous Post-secondary Institutions: Protectors of Indigenous Knowledge

Studies within post-secondary institutions that serve the majority of Indigenous students, administration, faculty, and staff offer additional insight regarding Indigenous Knowledge’s place in higher education. Studies by St’uxwtews and Nlaka’pamux scholar, Verna Billy Minnabarriet’s (2012) and Iñupiaq scholar Pearl Kiyawn Brower’s (2016) reveal the role of leadership in the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing to strengthen educational sovereignty.

Brower (2016) insisted that Indigenous Knowledge is living and argued that Indigenous holders of knowledge be respected as teachers and not as assistants. Minnabarriet (2012) contends that Indigenous post-secondary colleges, see Indigenous Knowledge as a guiding force for institutional leadership such that it “help[s] students understand the cultural, academic, and social strength that they receive [and] help[s] them realize their self-determining nature” (Minnabarriet, 2012, p. 111).

Gaviria’s (2012) study on Nunavut Arctic College recognized the “tensions [in] development, decolonization and survival” whereby the institution had to contend with meeting conflicting objectives as a result of academic programs being influenced by their resource-rich environment (p.122). Along with other scholars (Agarwal, 1995; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Gaviria’s (2012) study on Nunavut Arctic College insists that Indigenous Knowledge (Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit) does not solely remain in the past

but is contemporary and changing. Therefore, it contradicts the idea that Indigenous people are stuck in the past. This evolving presence is illustrated by the deliberate actions of Nunavut Artic College administrators addressing current global pressures with Inuit knowledge that values resourcefulness and seeks solutions through “creativity, adaptability and flexibility” (Gaviria, 2012, p.120).

Hunt-Jinnouchi (2011) further added to Indigenous Knowledges legitimacy affirming Aboriginal controlled institutions’ important role in building self-identity and knowledge in your own culture. Their study explored challenges for students transferring from Aboriginal-controlled colleges to public post-secondary colleges in Canada. An elder in the study exemplified its importance by insisting that Indigenous institutions are not stepping stones in post-secondary education but rather “sacred places of learning... designed to resist mainstream pedagogy in order to retain cultural practice and understanding and to revitalize language and traditional practice” (Hunt-Jinnouchi, 2011, p. 293).

Pacific Indigenization

Higher education institutions in Oceania also offer insights into challenges, efforts, and instances of indigenizing the academy. Māori scholar Mere Kēpa and Tongan scholar Linitā Manu’atu (2011) studied the conflicts between Western and Indigenous worldviews in New Zealand tertiary institutions. The languages and traditions of Oceanic peoples, collectivity and connectivity, are at odds with mainstream pedagogy entrenched in “assumptions of individualism and competition” (p. 619). This then creates some of the barriers found in the following studies.

Amidst its land grant responsibility and endeavors, Christopher S. Collins and Kanaka ‘Ōiwi scholar M. Kalehua Mueller (2016) emphasized the responsibility of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa to recognize Indigenous epistemologies within the sacred relationship that taro farmers have with land. Similar to research by Botha (2007), they reviewed faculty researchers’ perceptions about the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge. Collins and Mueller (2016) found a devaluing of Native Hawaiian scientific knowledge in taro cultivation. Some researchers acknowledged Native Hawaiian science while others kept it “at distance... relegat[ing it to] a second-class form of knowledge” (p. 321).

Wāhine ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian women) scholars, Salis Reyes, Wright, Goodyear-Ka’ōpua, and Oliveira (2020) give their perspective as Indigenous faculty within the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. They highlight in their scholarly article the continued importance of utilizing “education to add to the constellation of actions in the Hawaiian movement for *ea*” such that teachings include Hawaiian knowledge (p. 241). The authors assert that *ea* carries more than one meaning, including sovereignty, life, and breath. They further discuss ways that their *kuleana* (responsibility) moves them to support Kānaka students validating their existence as “practitioners and producers of knowledge” within a Predominantly White Institution in a still occupied state of *ka Lāhui Hawai‘i* (the Hawaiian nation).

Indigenization in Palau

The limited research focused on the U.S.-affiliated Pacific (former and current U.S. territories) is filled with stories of resistance to supremacy claims of Western knowledges (Cholmay, 2013; Soaladoab, 2010; Uriarte, 2010). As Palau gained its independence in 1994 and thereby took leadership over colonial systems, including

educational institutions (K-12 and higher education), conversations concerning the inclusion of Palauan culture and ways of knowing intensified. Indigenous-based, sustainable development was inhibited immediately as a “huge flow of American aid” came in to maintain the influence of Western systems (Epstein, 1997, p. 145). Debates arose, including imagining what (re)centering Palauan knowledge would look like in K-12 and higher education systems (Uriarte, 2010).

Belauan scholar, Kiblas Soaladaob (2010), interviewed Palauan ngeasek (youth) and ulsemuul (Elders) to gain an understanding of the interplay of Western and Palauan knowledge. Her research revealed that both ulsemuul and ngeasek valued Palauan traditions and culture; however, traditional practices are harder to maintain with both Palauan and Western ideologies present. She recommended interrogating these conflicts to combat the negative interaction. Participants in her study provide insight into the significance of Palauan knowledge as being an “intangible heritage” that must be practiced (action-oriented) and lived, not something idly kept in a museum.

Research that exists within Palau discusses the impact of hundreds of years of colonization on Palauan schooling and learning through the Western educational system. In Belauan scholar, Edelene O. Uriarte’s (2010) study, Palauan Elders insisted that Palauan culture and knowledge be the center and rationale for all curricula. Furthermore, Uriarte (2010) insisted that the first step in creating a Palauan Studies program was to have “our (Palauan) culture, our way of knowing and how we see the world around us as the center and key rationale for all course instruction in the curricula” (p. 5). She concluded that the development of a Palauan Studies program was a necessary step towards the decolonization of Palau Community College. Since the publishing of this master’s thesis, Palau Community College has established a Palauan Studies program.

It is clear from the studies in this review of literature that 1) challenges exist for Indigenous Knowledge due to its devaluation, marginalization, and misuse in higher education (Battiste, 2008; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Botha, 2007; Erwin & Muzzin, 2015; Hart et al., 2012; Schofield et al., 2011; Smith, 2012; Teaiwa, 2006; Thaman, 2003). Indigenous Knowledge is not all-encompassing (Hart, 2010; Smith, 2012; Thaman, 2003); 2) there is need to center Indigenous Knowledge as a consequence of centuries of suppression (Collins & Mueller, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016; Salis Reyes et al., 2020; Windchief & Joseph, 2015, Uriarte, 2010) and 3) Indigenous people are significant contributors and supporters of Indigenous students and knowledge within higher education institutions (Boyd et al., 2011; Collins & Mueller, 2016; Hunt-Jinnouchi, 2011; Minnabarriet, 2012; Pidgeon, 2016; Salis Reyes et al., 2020; Soaladaob, 2010; Windchief & Joseph, 2015). This study seeks to expand research on the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge within Oceania in an Indigenous controlled university where Indigenous people are the majority. The study seeks to shed insight into the ways in which Palau Community College resists the dominant notion of a typical community college.

Indigenous Paradigm and Methodology

My study was influenced by Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson’s (2003) book *Research is Ceremony*. It is a book fitting for this research topic as it honors relationality in understanding Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing within the context of the academy broadly and research specifically. It approaches the

construction of an Indigenous research paradigm in storytelling amongst other Indigenous scholars and in conversation with his family and his children. The approach is embedded in storytelling, aligned with the significance of narratives, legends, and myths as central lessons and knowledge in Palauan (and Pacific) culture. Solomon Islands scholar David Gegeo (2001) describes such alignment in the oral tradition of Oceania describing Indigenous epistemology as a “cultural groups’ ways of thinking and of creating, reformulating, and theorizing about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of the discourse in culture” (p. 58).

Indigenous epistemology helps me identify, understand, honor, and appreciate Indigenous knowledge. Through Indigenous axiology, I honored the Palauan values that guided this study, including 1) Omenguul (respect), 2) Ngerachel (responsibility), and 3) Klechubechub (care and compassion). Respect/Omenguul within this study necessitates relationship building with the ideas and people involved in the study and identification of and guidance from Elders and Indigenous scholars.

Responsibility/Ngerachel is to hold sacred and appreciate my relations within the research study, carrying my relations wherever I go. Care and

Compassion/Klechubechub upholds the value of reciprocity that centers Palauan and Pacific culture at the center of this research.

Indigenous methodology

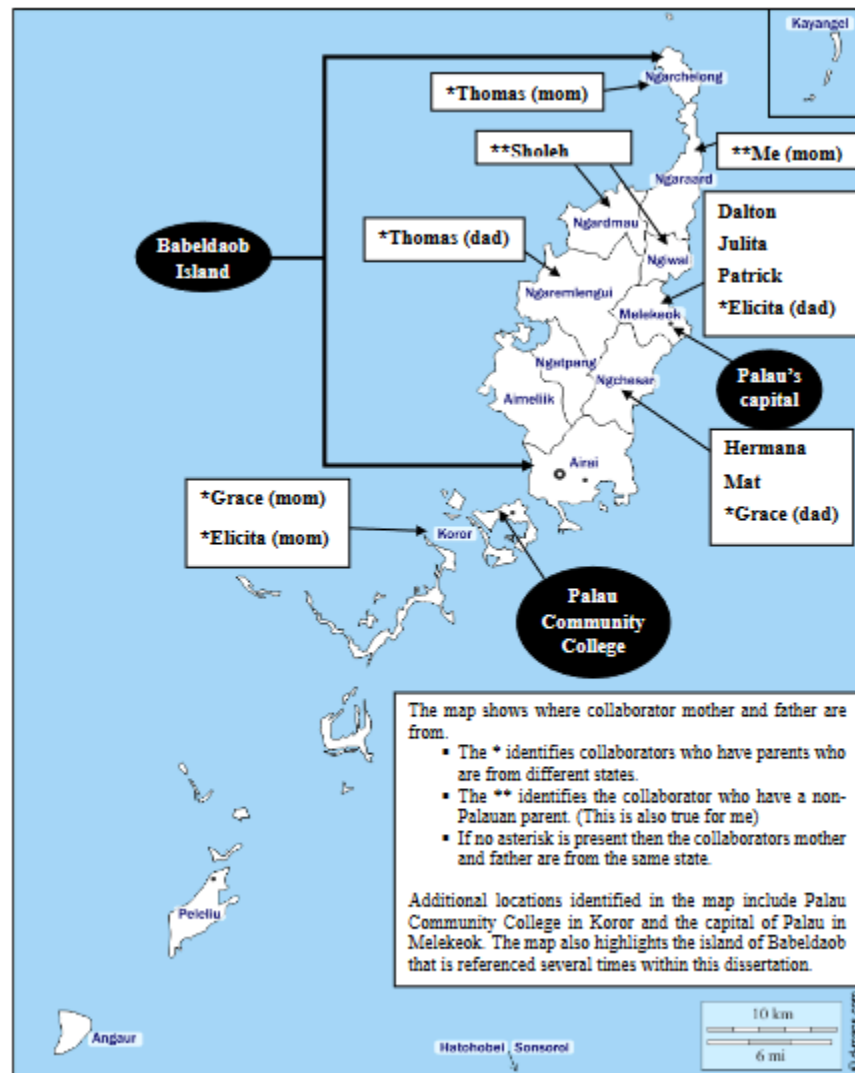
Wilson (2008) describes Indigenous methodology as “a process that adheres to relational accountability [with] respect, reciprocity, and responsibility [as] key features” (p.77). The research study employed a cheldecheduch (story) methodology proposed by Belauan scholar Kiblas Soaladaob (201). Cheldecheduch is generally translated to mean speech, discussion, discourse, or a meeting and is when Elders pass on oral histories to younger members of their family (Soaladaob, 2010). I use cheldecheduch as it fulfills relational accountability to people and settings.

Collaborators

Diné scholar Nizhoni Chow-Garcia and scholar Vanessa Svihla (2019) presented their research at a conference and shared that they utilized the term collaborators instead of participants. A collaborator best honors the contributions of the Palauans who shared their personal stories and imparted information to me in a way that also acknowledged my responsibility as a Palauan to honor Palauan Knowledge. Within Figure 1 and Table 1 are descriptions of the nine collaborators. Figure 1 is a map of Palau with the family origins of the collaborators and me. Table 1 includes information on each of the collaborators regarding 1) their educational experiences and 2) their affiliations with Palau Community College.

Data Collection

The main method of collecting stories was through cheldecheduch (interviews). Interviews were all done in person, lasting from 40 minutes to 2 hours. Collaborators provided ideas for spaces to meet, including PCC offices, library, and private outdoor space. Indigenous scholars caution that, out of respect for this, sometimes you may not enter with a set of questions or use a recording device if it is not permitted (Wilson, 2003); therefore, flexibility and notetaking were employed in collecting stories and information. Additional data was retrieved through field notes and observations as well as with digital and physical copies of archival documents.

Figure 1. Map of Palau with Collaborators Family Origins**Data analysis**

Relational accountability to all relations must be carefully communicated within data analysis. Wilson (2003) poses the following questions regarding data analysis: what relationships help hold the ideas together? The aim is to build relationships that provide useful results for the community. The interviews were transcribed without any transcription service to avoid issues with accent compatibility. With relational accountability in mind, I listened to recordings of stories that honored relationships to Palauan Knowledge, the main topic of this study. My field notes offered additional information about the sounds, location of the interview, and emotions I interpreted or felt. I used these data to create visual representations (pictures and diagrams- Figure 1) to make sense of the collaborator's stories. I was alert to the possibility that some stories were sacred; therefore, a written account was inappropriate. Scholars caution that not all Indigenous Knowledge can be shared (Smith, 2012; Wright & Balutski, 2016) and so some I guard and do not make it widely accessible so that narratives are not misappropriated or misinterpreted. Lastly, dreams and visions were equally knowledge sources and pillars of support. In the interpretation of collaborator narratives. I wrote or

illustrated dreams and visions I remembered. I often spoke to my Palauan mother about my dreams, and she would offer Palauan interpretations. After her passing, I continued to communicate with her in anticipation that she would respond in a memory or dream.

Table 1. Collaborators Information

Collaborator	Education	Affiliation with Palau Community College
Dalton	Palau Community College	-Alumni -Employee -Palauan Studies student
Elicita	California State University	-Employee - coordinator and instructor for Palauan Studies
Grace	Palau Community College	-Alum -Employee - Librarian Assistant
Hermana	-High school in Guam -University of Guam (bachelor)	-Guest lecturer in Palauan Studies
Julita	-US Exchange student HS -University of Hawaii, Manoa (bachelor/master)	-Community consultant for Palauan Studies
Mat	-University of Hawaii bachelor and masters	-Retired Employee of Micronesian Occupational College / Federal Title II program coordinator
Patrick	-Micronesian Occupational College (former name of PCC) -University of Hawaii, Manoa (bachelors + masters), -San Diego State University - doctorate	-Employee - President of PCC
Sholeh	-Attended in Palau K-12 school -Palau Community College	-Alum
Thomas	-US International University -San Diego State University - masters	-Employee - VP, Cooperative Research and Extension (CRE)

Findings: Recentering and Honoring Palauan Knowledge in Palau Community College

The findings that follow highlight how Palauan Knowledge has been honored and preserved through 1) representation and 2) academic and community programming. Elicita, the coordinator of the Palauan Studies program, spoke about the importance of a collective effort in Palau Community College in honoring Palauan Knowledge, saying: “it is a collective movement of people, collective effort to make things work... so no one is left behind... somehow the integrity of preservation of knowledge is important because if we want to live in this island ecosystem we have to make wise decision.”

Holding Space Through Representation

At the hands of colonial and imperial actors, systems were in place to marginalize and even eradicate elements of Palauan knowledge. Findings from this study offer insight into how Palauan knowledge is acknowledged and represented in Palau Community College through the actions of collaborators. They have centered Palauan knowledge within its physical presence and have centered representations of Palau and Oceania.

Physical Representations of Palauan Knowledge

The land and some of the buildings of Palau Community College hold memories of war. The Japanese army used the college site as their hospital during WWII. They dug tunnels beneath the hospital to the shoreline so they could hide the movements of injured people (Takeuchi, 2011). These buildings were then transitioned into satellite sites for the College of Micronesia and later renamed Palau Community College. Dr. Patrick Tellei, PCC's president, led by his Palauan sense of responsibility and knowledge of Palauan ways, is a leader in honoring Palauan knowledge in the college. Julita, a guest speaker in PCC's Palauan Studies program, credited Patrick, the community college president, for reclaiming the college's buildings through its renaming. She spoke with pride: "when you ask what are the names of [the] building[s], well before there was a time when they were A-B-C, but now they are Palauan names for trees or are fish." Patrick *recentered* Palauan Knowledge in the college by removing the legacy of the American period to Palauan words for the buildings (See Table 2).

Table 2. *Palauan names for Palau Community College buildings*

Baderirt (medicinal tree)	Meluis (swordfish)
Beloachel (pigeon)	Miich (tropical almond tree)
Biib (crimson crowned dove)	Olik (fruit bat, part of <i>bai</i>)
Btaches (tree for canoe)	Rriu (mangrove trumpet tree)
Dadait (tropical mangrove)	Sebus (cardinal fish)
Demul (dolphin)	Smuuch (scorpion fish or calm person)
Dort (ironwood tree)	Tekrar (Sailfish)
Esuch (owl)	Tekuu (yellowfin tuna)
Ewatel (stone wall on shore for protection)	Temekai (grouper fish)
Kedam (frigate bird)	Tutau (Morning)
Keskas (fish-wahoo)	Ukall (tree good for building)
Ksid (tree)	Urur (mangrove apple)
Laib (bird in Palauan proverbs)	

Amidst these buildings and positioned within a courtyard is the Mesekiu bai. Traditionally, villages had several bai or meeting houses that served various functions. The bai in PCC - the Mesekiu bai, is not elaborately adorned as with the elite bai er a klobak (the seat of the council of high chiefs). It is instead representative of the tetib bai or the bai el beluu, a meeting place that served as the common space for men and women to gather as well as sit and eat (Tellei, 2014). This bai in PCC is decorated with stories such as the legend of Uab (the islands of Palau origin story) and symbols representing udoud (Palauan money beads = Palauan currency) or demonstrating cheldechduduch (meaning communication). Still more Palauan stories holding history and lessons as well as symbols appear throughout the college on building walls,

airconditioning units, pillars, and stairways (see Figure 2a and 2b). The artwork is reminiscent of ancestral traditional paintings within caves and bai.

Figure 2a. *Mural of Indigenous Places of Learning at Palau Community College*



Figure 2b. *Pillar Showing Palauan Symbol*



Centering Representations of Oceania and Palau in Conversations

My collaborators shared that, in their experience, Western minds minimized and downplayed Oceanic peoples and their environment. Patrick brought up a few instances when he challenged such Western notions and supremacy. He presented on a conference call with other administrations in the United States as they met to review the higher education accreditation process. His leadership and responsibility to Palau specifically and Oceania broadly provides a call to action for his colleagues:

I started by saying for some of you, you are so concerned about what you are doing with your accreditation. There are a lot more issues on this island called planet Earth that we are in together. So, I do not know how many of you who are commissioners have thought of our very existence on our planet. So, I am asking

you to get out of your comfort zone in San Diego City College, Mesa Community College... I was on a Zoom conference, so I was looking at them. How many of you drove an SUV to the meeting this morning, and do you know that your SUV is contributing to some of these island countries and the level rise in the climate...that we will have to relocate from these islands? So now you can tell they are saying, why is he raising the concept of climate change? Because you are responsible for that, and if it is not in your consciousness, it must be in your consciousness. You are listening to someone in your community, and some of the islands are actually going to disappear. These islands will be missing as a result of your inaction. You are so insular in your thinking. You are concerned about this teaching and the cost of this and that. There is more happening. If people are displaced, it is our problem. The standards are not addressing this; your standards are hollow.

Patrick is emphasizing the impact of Indigenous Knowledges within Western contexts. In his communication with higher education officials, Patrick conveyed the Palauan principles of valuing, respecting, and taking responsibility for the welfare of land, water, and people. He highlighted the need to consider global perspectives beyond what people in the U.S. or other parts of the Global North. Patrick urged the higher education accreditation community (of which he considers himself a part) to reflect on their carbon footprint both presently and in the future. He acknowledges how, in many island nations, reciprocal and nurturing relationships with land have been impacted by climate change.

Additionally, Patrick consistently advocates for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge when reclaiming spaces and speaking with visitors to Palau Community College. He shared another story with a visiting faculty member who was supporting a new course at Palau Community College. Patrick elaborated:

The first [course plan] he submitted; I took him to the map in the front. I showed it to him and asked, "What is in the center of the map? And he was looking and was like, wow, why is the U.S. way over on that side? Because the U.S. is not the center of the universe, this is our map, and so the U.S. is not in the center. But you know [Americans] are so used to when you put the map on the wall, U.S. is on the center. The professor wondered why this center of nothingness exists. [The Pacific Islands] may be considered the center of nothingness to you, but it is home to 6.3 million people, of which 4 million live in Papua New Guinea and the rest [of the islands are] scattered. If you cannot put yourself at that level to understand that, it will be tough to graph it.

While helping with the course, Patrick made sure to challenge his awareness of bias and notions of superiority by the West. Such introspection can lead to a more respectful exchange of knowledge for the creation of the course.

Academic and Community Programming

Visual and oral representations of Palauan knowledge continue through the intentional programs led by Palauans in the community college. Collaborators center Palauan Knowledge within 1) the Palauan Studies program, 2) a non-credit course 3) a summer youth program, and 4) through research and extension activities.

Palauan Studies Program

Many of my collaborators spoke about their involvement with the development and implementation of the Palauan Studies program. Patrick stated that the motivation for the development of the Palauan Studies program came from a resolution drafted by the annual Palauan Women's Conference. Elicita accepted an offer to develop the program. She grounded her approach to the Palauan Studies course on her personal experience in the struggle for land rights and usage as Palauans worked on their constitution to become independent from the United States. She spoke of the Palauan Studies program and her activism saying:

And it is important... to have the Palauan Knowledge, especially here at the college. I continue because I believe in academia and action. I learned that from the women that we worked with, to be reflective of your actions and actively stand to educate the young people of this knowledge.

Elicita shared more about mesei activism, a defining moment in her life as well as a formidable and significant period in Palau's history. She shared her own personal experience within the movement.

I was one of them... who were against the militarization and nuclearization of Palau...we were making sure that the message was being sent, this is too small to have a nuclear submarine, this is too small an island to have a military base, this is too small to have 32 acres, to have Babeldaob to be the sort of a burial for the nuclear stuff... No!... we had enough of the Marshall Islands, and [from that] we learned the lesson that Palau wants to be nuclear-free...if we are not careful if we do not know our history that will leave us to make a decision that is detrimental to our lives and our children, especially the children, because we are older and we want the children to have a sustainable lifestyle and sustainable future and that is what our mothers and our grandparents want[ed].

The organization, Otil A Beluad, led by Elicita's mother, Gabriela Ngiramang, and others actively resisted the nuclear storage plans for Palau. They filed a lawsuit against the government to protect the Belauan constitution by upholding rights to land, respect for freedom, and the preservation of traditional heritage. Gabriela Ngirmang, who was at the time the highest-ranking woman in East Koror, Palau proclaimed that "land has names here... land is the most valuable thing we have. It is our identity. Without it we are lost" (dé Ishtar, 1994, p. 47). Ngirmang and other Belauan women, withstood violence, and threats, resolute in their stance to "ban all nuclear and any other toxic substances, [a] global first" for any nation and an ultimatum which has never been repeated (dé Ishtar, 1994, p. 44). Their battle lasted over a 15-year period (1979-1994) with 11 votes (dé Ishtar, 2007). Elicita asserted with pride that the women traveled to taro patches to educate women about the vote for a nuclear-free clause in Palau's

constitution. Resistance centered on an Indigenous place of learning, the taro patch, a sacred place to dismantle efforts to desecrate Palauan land and knowledge.

Much like her time in mesei activism, Elicita approached the development of the course with community expertise, wisdom, and support. She insisted that it was also important to bring community leaders to speak in the Palauan Studies courses. Mat, Julita, and Hermana are knowledgeable storytellers serving as guest lecturers and/or instructors for the courses.

Mat presents to students on the development of standardized Palauan language. In speaking about his experience with Bilingual Language Project Mat describes the standardization explaining:

Before Palauan was taught by writing Palauan how we speak it, so the students from Babeldaob, when they come to Koror, will have different spelling than from Anguar [because] they have a difference in pronunciation. I will give an example if we do not standardize the [language,] people from Ngaraard have a little sort of k sound for some words that others do not and drop the end of the words... how do we spell those words if we spell it the way they spoke it... so [Palau] contract[ed] with the University of Hawai'i to work with a linguist to develop the system of writing... We created rules, and we had a committee of different people from different islands [in Palau].

Hermana lectures in Palauan Studies courses using her published collection of poetry and other publications she has supported to educate Palauans now and in the future about history, Palauan culture, and the Palauan language. She explained how her poems are reminiscent of Palauan chants carrying stories, information, and lessons. She continues by stating:

I have American friends that kind of tell me that we live under [their/US] tax money... and I respond to them... I feel like I was invaded... because we were victims of war and... a lot of colonialism we did not have our freedom. We were being imposed on, and things were imposed on us.

As in her poems, Hermana challenges the idea that the U.S. is “saving” Palau given its past and continued military interests.

Elicita not only focuses on centering Palauan Knowledge by inviting elders to speak in her classes, but she also engages students in the same storytelling with the mechas and rubaks (elder woman and man) in their lives. Students are assigned a project to learn Palauan Knowledge from their family, including history, lineage, and lessons. Grace, who works in the PCC's Micronesian-Pacific Collection, commented on her engagement with the assignment, saying: “I ask for all the student papers, and they fill out a consent form for us to keep them here... It is important to keep these Palauan stories.” The Micronesian-Pacific Collection holds Palauan knowledge as well as other Micronesian and Pacific knowledge in a variety of forms, such as dissertations, archived documents, books, artwork, and artifacts. Grace also regularly scours depositories for undergraduate papers, theses, dissertations, and artifacts produced by Palauans/ Pacific Islanders to add to the Micronesia-Pacific Collection.

Non-credit Course

Like the Micronesian-Pacific Collection, knowledge from another Micronesian island has been shared over the years. Sesario Sewralur teaches a non-instrumental

navigation course (wayfaring) which is offered as a non-credit option at the college. Sesario is from the outer island of Yap. His father Mau Pialung mentored Native Hawaiians as they aimed to protect and reclaim the knowledge of wayfaring. Julita unveiled additional insight regarding the impact of having Sesario's course at Palau Community College:

Before we never heard about that name, only some people in Koror around the area knew the name of the dock, so the fact that [Palau Community College] is reviving those place names, mean that we may learn more information like about practices and migration as the college talks to more people.

The navigation course is an example of Palau Community College's commitment to other Indigenous Oceanic knowledges as well. It is notable that Palau and Yap have a close relationship. The people of Yap often sailed to Palau with the interest in obtaining Palauan stone to make their money. Julita shares that the course also supports Palauan knowledge in reviving place names and interest in wayfaring.

Summer Youth Program

In partnership with Koror State Government Division of Cultural Affairs and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity, PCC offers an annual Summer Youth Program to "promote cultural appreciation in young Palauans by providing hands-on experiences in Palauan cultural practices" (Palau Community College, 2013, p. 1). Hermana is involved in the program as one of the youth instructors and discussed the types of experiences offered to students. These experiences include cultural practices such as basket weaving, making fish traps, and learning Palauan chants. Hermana talked about the importance of learning and embodying the origin story of Palau, *Uchelel Belau*, and how many of Palau's customs come from its central character, Uab. Hermana elaborates on how she instructs the youth about the story, narrating:

Uab (a giant figure) fell so the population [of Palau] that was growing very fast would have a place to live. [After the islands were established with the body of Uab], then came immigration...educating people and then... omes, meaning you transform, he became a woman and started going around educating people [on how to cultivate a] taro patch throughout the villages of Palau... [Uab] then went to the east coast and did the ritual for the [first] birth.

Indigenous stories are "theory not just for educational pursuit, it is intimate and personal with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives" (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). As Uab grew from a baby into a man, he consumed a great deal of food, despite limited access, so believing they would starve, villagers killed Uab. One lesson of the story for today speaks to the conservation efforts in Palau and worldwide (Public Broadcasting Service, 2013). Likewise, legends in Palau take on slightly different meanings across the different villages within Palau and across different storytellers. Hermana and the other instructors, through the summer youth program, are helping support the regeneration of Palauan legends and, consequently, Palauan Knowledge. Therefore, children may send these stories back to family members to understand their nuanced version and lessons from Palauan legends.

Research and Extension Activities

Community work continues in the college's Cooperative Research & Extension (CRE) Department. Julita highlights some of its work, saying: "the college has extension programs in Ngremlengui (Babeldaob), so there is work in agriculture and [in] the mesei (taro fields)... that is reviving Palauan Knowledge and practices." Thomas, who ran the CRE, spoke about the importance of taro:

There is never enough taro; it is used for funerals... and first birth [ceremonies]... What we have been doing is work[ing] with the community in terms of supporting the food security problem due to climate change and issues with water resources (drought and saltwater mixing). You cannot be eating all rice and no taro for [customs]; that is not culturally acceptable.

Food is a central concern for CRE, and because of a shipping strike, Thomas highlighted concerns about food security based on Palau's reliance on imported foods. Thomas focused on recentering Palauan Knowledge through a renewed relationship with land. Research projects have documented the knowledge of skilled mechas (elders/women) in the taro fields. One of the projects was to test various fertilizers since mechas expressed disinterest in the commercial fertilizer that CRE offered. Thomas explained:

We went around interviewing all the women...to know what kind of tree or grass they used to fertilize the taro patches...they use trees most of the time and some banana leaves... the [researcher's] results were very encouraging. [Their results showed that] traditional knowledge is still there and still very useful... [The women were] growing really good corm (meat of the taro plant). [The corm] was big...it was very starchy. Palauan women shy away from commercial fertilizer [because] they don't like it...they say that the corm is not good when it is used.

Even though commercial fertilizer was an efficient choice, the traditional and intuitive knowledge passed down over generations was best and preferred even if Palauan women were taking the more labor-intensive route. Thomas has a good relationship with the women in the taro patches. He acknowledged that some information is not to be shared, such as sacred Palauan names for the different varieties of taro (Del Rosario et al., 2015). The CRE has documented much of its projects in books which are filled with Palauan Knowledge, old and new, including taro cultivation, names for local varieties of taro, taro recipes, and the processing of banana and medicinal plants. The information within these books leveraged knowledge from other cultures, including other Pacific Islands, to introduce new techniques, skills, and agricultural crops. The results from these developments provide an example of how Palauan Knowledge can work in concert with other knowledge to evolve and meet the changing needs of the community.

Thoughts on the Continuity of Palauan Knowledge

Continuity efforts to maintain, produce, and share Palauan Knowledge were a commonly held interest among collaborators. Thomas insisted that:

The basic foundation is still the same. Palauan Knowledge throughout the many centuries and influences have evolved throughout so much. If [Palauans] from the 1800s arrive today they would see that the basic principles, values, and the

knowledge of Palau is still here even though time has changed to suit the living conditions that we are in today.

Elicita, the program coordinator and instructor in the Palauan Studies program, also affirmed Palauan Knowledge's relationship to the past saying, "I think we need as people of today, we need to consistently see what happened in the past [as] we start engaging in decision-making because [the past] is important." Reconciling the impacts on Indigenous knowledge over time - past, present, and future is evident in the history of colonization in Palau. Patrick spoke about this change, insisting that we ensure "when we paint [the past], we paint it in a way that [takes into context that] different colors were used because the sun rose on a different location and was shining in a different place." He explained through this metaphor and through our overall conversation that there is a need to maintain things from the past, but we must also acknowledge that with changing circumstances, there are skills, information, and practices that have different stature or are delegated to remembrance in storytelling rather than lived out.

Lastly, collaborators asserted that continuity of knowledge has boundaries due to respecting sacred knowledge. These boundaries were intact prior to settler contact. Hermana provided an example saying, "some families are known for their skills with medicine... they teach their children, and we commoners are not supposed to know what they know." Julita and Sholeh also talked about this through their community work in Palauan organizations, Palauan Conservation Society and Belau National Museum, respectively. Reflecting on her interviews with elders to document and preserve Palauan Knowledge, Sholeh, an alumna of Palau Community College, affirmed that "knowledge is also secret... [and] a lot of clans have their own knowledge and we do not want to pressure them...it was whatever [they] want to share."

Conclusion and Implications

It is clear from this study that Indigenous teachers are formidable advocates and conveyors of Palauan knowledge within Palau Community College. Collective leadership and personal responsibility are at the heart of the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the college. As Brower (2016) asserted, the role of leadership is critical, calling Indigenous custodians of knowledge to be at the forefront as instructors and not assistants. Dr. Patrick Tellei plays a profound role in honoring Indigenous Knowledge within the institution. His leadership extends from his role in society as a builder to (re)construct PCC to make space for Indigenous Knowledge. The study revealed his efforts to rename buildings to Palauan names and commission Palauan artwork to be displayed across campus have played a significant role in showcasing Palauan Knowledge. While Cole (2011) cautions against neocolonial realities impacting institutions through accrediting agencies, Patrick is sharing Indigenous Knowledge with those same agencies effectively elevating island nation concerns for global action on climate change as well as uplifting Palauan identity in conversations where maps shift the central focus away from Western nations to center Oceania. This study aimed to find how Indigenous Knowledge shaped institutions, however in many instances, Patrick seized the opportunity to enlighten the larger higher education community.

The role of women and Palau's matrilineal society offers some nuanced perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge and leadership. Women have played a crucial

role in the protection and education of Palauan culture. Elicita and Julita exemplify this vital leadership and, in this study, have shared stories of collective actions taken by women. Each of them has experiences and roles in protecting Palauan land: Julita is co-founder of the Palauan Conservation Society, and Elicita played a significant role in Otil a Belaud, an organization protesting against U.S. imperial pursuits. The mesei, an Indigenous space of learning traditionally for women, is central to their leadership. Julita's contribution to a chapter on taro cultivation is important, especially as land and time have limited people's engagement in taro patches. Elicita has firsthand experience and knowledge of the Palauan women's determination to educate and unite people. The movement utilized taro patches to fight against U.S. nuclear interests in Palau. I refer to the movement as mesei activism with great respect for their collectivist ingenuity.

The Cooperative Research & Extension (CRE) Department is a space that has been inclusive and respectful of the Palauan knowledge within Palau's agriculture and aquatic environments. It has been a place to contend with the tensions of Western ideologies (for example, commercial fertilizer vs. traditional methods) as well as a space to bring both Western and Indigenous scientific knowledge together. It also provided a chance for me to learn and indigenize my descriptions of the interactions of Western and Indigenous Knowledge. I wrote my dissertation, I discussed my analysis of the findings with Dr. Stephanie Waterman, describing the activities of the CRE as advocating for food security. She gently corrected me that I was instead describing food sovereignty. The work of Thomas and other extension employees went beyond providing access to food (security), but he was adamant about growing and eating food from the land for self-sufficiency, health, and cultural connection as opposed to dependency on imported and processed foods.

The Palauan Studies program is a focal point of this study as it offers a space for Palauans to interrogate and understand the colonial impacts of Palauan knowledge. The collaborators who are involved in the program are living legacies who impart important narratives on Palauan knowledge within colonial systems. These include the process of standardizing Palauan language, marked by transforming an oral/spoken language to a written language. Kovach (2005) described Indigenous languages as fluid, non-linear, and relational as opposed to written languages that have rigid rules of standardization. Future teachings and research need to capture the ongoing process of consensus, areas of divergence, and conversations regarding the standardization process. Palau Community College remains young in comparison to other colleges so additional research, particularly participatory research, may be helpful to maintain a focus on centering and respecting Palauan knowledge and other Indigenous knowledges within Palau Community College.

Lastly, there is a collective impact and synergetic opportunity for Indigenous peoples of the Pacific to reflect on the impact of colonial legacies that have marginalized our knowledge production, sharing, and legitimacy. Native Hawaiian scholar Kaiwipunikauikawēkiu Lipe (2016) insisted that we recognize that spaces of support for Indigenous knowledge did not always exist within colonial institutions of higher education. Furthermore, Lipe (2016) asserted that her mom represented those who forged a path at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa for other Native Hawaiians "to thrive and survive" by "transform[ing] UH Mānoa into a Hawaiian place of learning" (p. 228). UH Mānoa is where Palauan collaborators contended with similar tensions between

Indigenous and Western knowledges and similarly have challenged and made space for Palauan knowledge in Palau Community College, as referenced in the findings of this study. Through this study, I have become more attuned to acknowledging the impact that Indigenous peoples of the Pacific, from various islands, have on one another in the pursuit of sovereignty and the resurgence of language and knowledge. Therefore, we must work together to fuel continued work to create Indigenous places of learning and to also tell our connected and collective story.

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