



## ISLAND ARK PROJECT



**INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS  
LANGUAGES 2019**



In commemoration of:

## **2019'S INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES**

The Island Ark Project has continued to emphasize the importance of preserving and safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in low-lying island communities. By further practicing our core values and mission, the Island Ark Project has chosen to bring in the voices of community members themselves, who are already mindful of the importance of preserving cultural heritage, especially languages.

We would also like to to acknowledge and thank the volunteers who have helped us in completing this project. In addition, we would also like to thank UNESCO's ICHCAP and the IYIL committee for providing these spaces as a way to center the voices of indigenous communities and issues. Thank you and ke kmal mesaul!





# who: ISLAND ARK PROJECT

## Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH):

A practice, representation, expression, knowledge, or skill, as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces that are considered by UNESCO to be part of a place's cultural heritage” (UNESCO).

The Island Ark Project’s approach is to help develop tailored online platforms that are useful for ICH practitioners and groups engaged in ICH safeguarding. Which combination of features make an online platform useful strongly depends on the specific cultural and social context. This is why it is an important part of the work of the Island Ark Project is to bring safeguarding professionals together and provide trainings to ICH safeguarding stakeholders in order to plan how digital safeguarding can be best organized for groups, institutions and communities. Especially when it comes to the question which practices are meant for broader transmission and which constitute guarded family secrets, it is pivotal that many stakeholders cooperate.





# where: **BELAU (PALAU)**

Since our establishment in 2015, the Island Ark Project begun working with community members and organizations in the island of Palau. Over the span of our relationship, we have conducted two notable workshops emphasizing preservation and safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). With this relationship, Island Ark Project has chose to continue to highlight the importance of ICH with the Palauan community members themselves throughout the diaspora in hopes to better communicate these issues.

As follows, the Island Ark Project has interviewed 5 community members discussing the challenges and hopes for those individuals feeling a sense of cultural loss. In addition, we focus on how outside influences and our past history have impacted the community's cultural upbringing as well.





# PALAU'S CREATION STORY

## *and the importance of land*

The story of *Chuab* speaks of a centuries-long relationship that native Palauans have understood between the land, spirit, and connection to the body and soul. This epistemology has also defined how Palauans have continued to practice their cultural heritage for thousands of years, in addition to their respect for the land.



Literacies of Land: Decolonizing Narratives, Storying, and Literature by Sandra Styres emphasize the connection between the land, space and time as basic, yet sacred concepts for indigenous communities. Indigenous communities hold emotional and spiritual ties that make the land more than just physical space. For Palauan epistemology, the creation story for the island of Palau is from Chuab. Chuab, born in Anguar, consistently ate so much food and got to the point where she grew so big that the islanders eventually burned and killed her. Chuab eventually collapsed and died, creating the larger landmass of our island of Palau. Each state of Palau has its own spiritual story and landmarks that many Palauans today still respect. Part of Palauan epistemology includes the respect of land, relative to Styre's argument that land, space, and time are critical concepts to Palauan cultural heritage. Styre brings up many good points that emphasize the importance behind respecting land as a spiritual entity, rather than just physical space alone. From "Land expresses a duality that refers not only to place as a physical geographic space but also to the underlying conceptual principles, philosophies, and ontologies of that space." Also, Land embodies two simultaneously interconnected and interdependent conceptualizations. Land as an Indigenous philosophical construct is both space (abstract) and place/land (concrete); it is also conceptual, experiential, relational, and embodied. (27).

Resources: Smith, L.T., Tuck, E., & Yang, W. (2018).  
Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education:  
Mapping the Long View. New York: Routledge.



*land is spiritual*

*spirit is culture*

*culture is life*




# HOW DOES THIS ALL AFFECT THE COMMUNITY?

From outside influences of colonizing countries including Spain, Germany, and Japan, to emigrating to countries such as the United States for better educational and employment opportunities, this generation has been heavily impacted.





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- 1. COLONIZATION**
  - 2. EMIGRATION**
  - 3. GLOBALIZATION**
  - 4. TRANSNATIONALISM**



# COLONIZATION

## Spain

During the fourteenth century, European and Japanese colonizers have begun roaming the seas, eventually coming into contact with the Pacific. Ferdinand Magellan voyaged from Spain, eventually coming into contact with the island of Palau. From this encounter, Pope Leo XIII acknowledged Spain's claims to the Carolines, including the island of Palau (Rechebei, 1997, pp 58-174). For a little of ten years, Spain had power over the Carolinian islands for a short period of time.

## Germany

Spain eventually sold the Carolines to Germany in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War, giving Germany complete autonomy of Palau. During this era, German Administration had immediately focused it's efforts in taking advantage of Palau's natural resources including mining phosphate. The period of time that German administration was in Palau, this had also implemented minor cultural influences including language, outlawing certain cultural practices such as

*mengol* (concubinage), and the introduction of German priests and Catholicism.



Image: German officials in Airai, Palau  
(Belau National Museum)



# Japan

In 1914, Palau was occupied by Japanese Administration in 1914. Of all three nations, Japan held Palau under their administration for the longest period of 30 years. Aside from the physical remnants left from the war, cultural and linguistic ideologies and practices were given to the Palauan community as well. Japan's influence has continued in certain aspects of Palauan culture and language today. Figure 1 indicates certain words that are commonly used in Palauan vocabulary. Japanese development of Palau had introduced urbanization in Koror, from the construction of airports and the continuation of phosphate and bauxite mining, and the construction of airports. As of 1940, Palau's population was estimated at around 7,000 Palauans and 23,700 Japanese (Pacific Worlds). After Japan had lost World War II, they seceded Palau to the United States. Decades later Japan and Palau's new formed relationship brought new opportunities and the evident reconstruction of the Palau-Japan Friendship Bridge that goes from Koror to the other end of Babeldaob.

Figure 1:

## Language

たんじょうび (tanjyobi)  
*Birthday*

しょうゆ (shoyu)  
*Soy Sauce*

まど (mado)  
*Window*



Image: Palau International  
Airport (2017), Island Ark Project



## EMIGRATION:

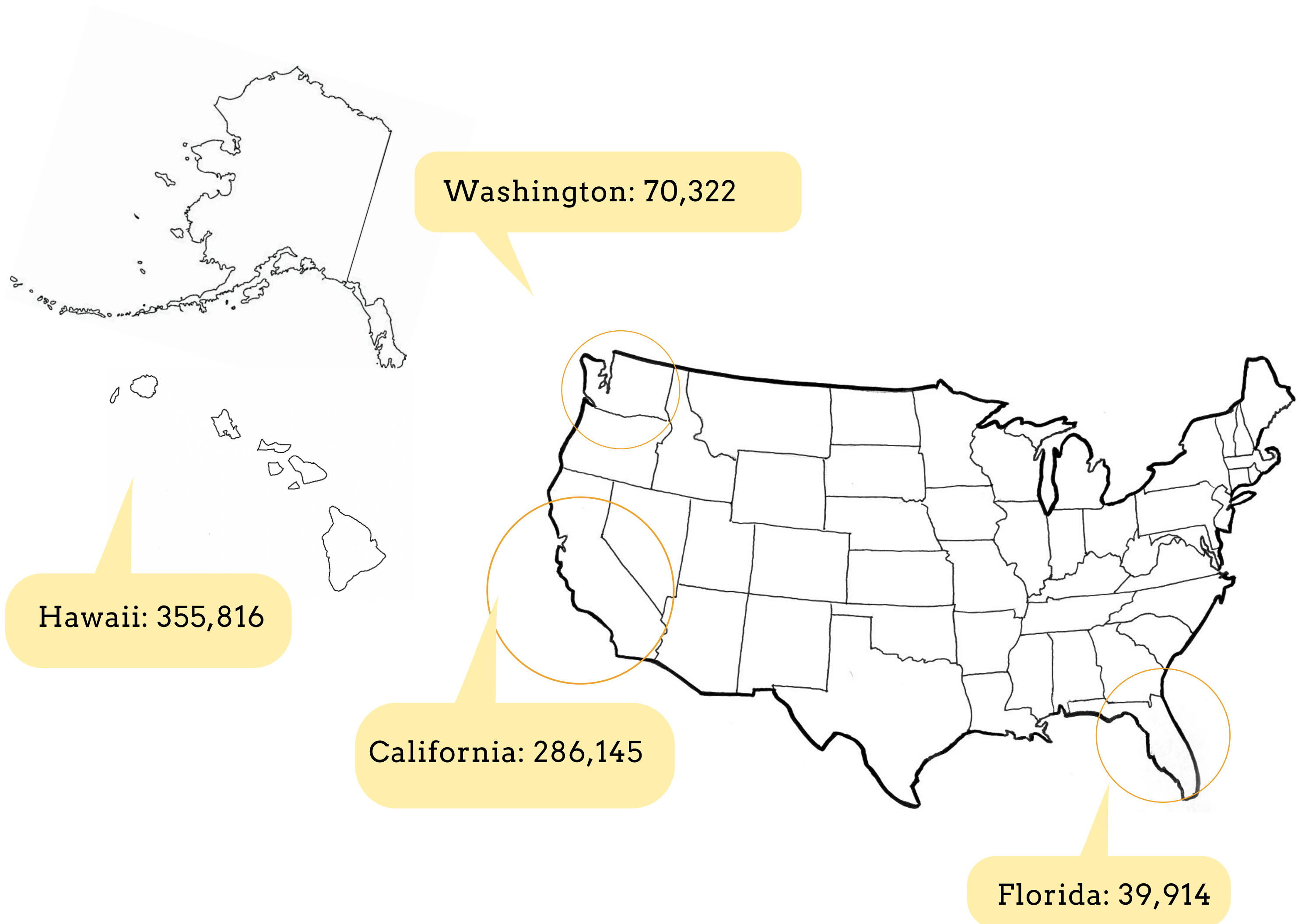
Beyond just climate change and rising sea levels, a vast number of Pacific Islanders have emigrated to other countries seeking educational and economic opportunities. world's island nations. From salt water intrusion into fresh water sources to increasingly powerful bad-weather events such as storms and droughts, the challenges for these nations increase steadily. A share of the inhabitants of today's island nations will likely become environmental refugees living in foreign lands. Adding to increasing already high levels of migration, climate change further increases the pressure on the

intangible cultural heritage of small island communities. This separation from tradition and culture will be painful for climate change refugees, who will have a hard time continuing cultural community practices that have existed for thousands of years. This means that safeguarding ICH must be seen as a way to adapt to climate change.



# GLOBALIZATION

Globalization entails the interactions and influences between different people, entities, and ideologies. An increasing number of Pacific Islanders in the United States has also



There are more than 1.2 million Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders living in the United States as of the 2010 Census. Between 2000 and 2010, the rate of the NHPI population grew to about 40%.

The graph broadly encapsulates the number of NHPI individuals per state. Each district per state varies.

## TRANSNATIONALISM

According to the 2010 Census, approximately 1.2 million Pacific Islander Americans lived in the United States (Census). Vakalahi and Godinet (2012) have found that while although the population growth of Pacific Islanders in the U.S is growing, it also poses certain threats and risks, including poverty, health disparities, and social challenges. The idea of Transnationalism, or Transnational community, refers to individuals or groups who migrate and reside in another nation, facing social challenges between both nations and their social, political, and economic rules (Vakalahi et al, 2012).

Relational connection to community and cultural identity through language, provides a crucial foundation for overall wellbeing by increasing self-confidence and sense of belonging... Disconnection from community and cultural identity has the opposite effect and “increases the risk for every kind of stress-related disease, from depression to heart attack” (Fullilove, 2004, p. 14). Although Mila-Schaaf (2011) highlights focuses on young New Zealand-born Pacific people, these encounters in relationship to their identity is similar to that of American born Pacific Islanders as well. Transnationalism speaks between understanding their community, in addition to feeling a sense of exclusion at the same time (Kennedy, 2019, 28).



# *what:* **COMMUNITY VOICES**

Although many Pacific Islanders are affected by climate change and rising sea levels, the Island Ark Project would also like to emphasize that many communities around the world have been emigrating for decades and for many reasons. Of those already migrated, they have already been [attuned] to the loss of Intangible Cultural Heritage, including the loss of language. In trying to better understanding these unique challenges and unique experiences, it is only best to hear it from those who have and currently are dealing with it first hand. The Island Ark Project wanted to highlight the stories and narratives from the voices of Palauan community members themselves in discussing the importance of language and cultural preservation, amidst inevitable causes such as globalization, emigration, and transnationalism.



Prior to written text, the passing of Palauan culture was oratory. Talking, or *cheldecheduch*, was the method used to transferring information, including narratives, songs, chants, and language.

Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's "Decolonizing Methodologies" also emphasized the importance that oral histories have had and continue to have for Pacific Island communities. "Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place... The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story.

As a research tool, Russell Bishop suggests, story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control " (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 146).







*profile:*

**CHASIMON ONGEU TARIMEL**

## Biography:

Seattle native, Ongeu is currently residing in Seattle, Washington, Ongeu is a school counselor for middle school students. Being a Pacific Islander School Counselor, he holds hopes of one day creating spaces to help Pacific Islander youth. As a Palauan-American born and raised in the United States, Ongeu, like many other Palauans in the U.S, cannot fluently speak nor understand his native language. Disheartened by this loss, Ongeu still holds hope that linguistic and cultural revitalization is possible. He has helped organize the First Annual Palauan Heritage Summit in 2018 in Portland, Oregon amongst other Palauan-Americans in the Pacific Northwest as a way to cater to issues and concerns of the diaspora.





*profile:*

**AUSTIN "AJ" HALEYAPIY**

## Biography:

Palauan, Feshailap, and Satawal descent, Austin proudly represents his cultural roots, especially throughout his activism within the Micronesian community. Currently at the University of Hawaii Mānoa, Austin is a BSW student at the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work. Despite being fluent in Woleian, Austin wants to connect more with his Palauan roots and sees that speaking the language plays a proactive and natural way in understanding the culture itself. In the summer of 2019, Austin and fellow UH CPIS students attended field program in Palau where Austin claimed was a worthwhile experience that allowed him to reconnect with his Palauan roots. He hopes one day he would be able to speak Palauan and hopefully teach his kids as well.





*profile:*  
**NELSON MASANG JR**

### Biography:

Having recently graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa with a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources and Environment Management (NREM), Nelson continued his education and is currently a graduate research assistant in the Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences program working towards a Master's in Tropical Plant Pathology. As a native-born and raised in Palau, Nelson has grown up already understanding his native language and cultural heritage. He acknowledges that by reading, writing, speaking, and understanding the language, it plays an important role in cultural understanding and cultural preservation. Language alone carries a lot of weight that shows what values and ideas are important to the community.





*profile:*

## **SHA MERIREI ONGELUNGEL**



### **Biography:**

Daughter of Palauan artist Hans Ongelungel, Sha is an affluent Palauan-American activist who has accomplished many endeavors including launching the Palauan online radio station Native ExPat Radio, launching her podcast Sha Nanigans Podcast, and is infamous for her #BeingMicronesian hashtag raising issues around racism and discrimination within the Micronesian community. Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, Ongelungel was 28 years old when first stepping into Palau for the very first time. However, Ongelungel was taught how to speak, read, and write in Palauan growing up, a very uncommon narratives in the larger diasporic Palauan community. She was fortunate to have been sent textbooks, letters, and other resources to help keep her refreshed. Given her experience, she feels that despite the little information educational settings today have on teaching the Palauan language and culture, she stresses that reciprocity and helping each other is an important factor in the learning process.





*profile:*

## **SENATOR UDUCH SENGEBAU SENIOR**

### Biography:

Senator Uduch Sengebau Senior received her primary education in Palau eventually traveling to Hawaii for high school and attending the University of Hawaii where she obtained her Bachelor of Art degrees in English and Philosophy. She continued her education at the University of Hawaii, studying at the William S. Richardson School of Law, where Senator Senior received a Juris Doctor in 1993. Now in the 10th Palau National Congress (Olbiil Era Kelulau), Senior was sworn into office for her second term in January 2017 and is currently the chair of the Senate Committee on Culture and Traditions. Senior understands the disparity amongst Palauans today who do not speak their native language. She had briefly discussed her motives for hopefully providing opportunities for Palauans to learn the language and culture, arguing that the best way to learn about cultural heritage is to live, engage, speak, and experience it. Language and culture go hand in hand.



## EDUCATIONAL SPACES

Sumida Huaman's *Small Indigenous schools: Indigenous resurgence and education in the Americas* (2018) looks at I ask, how are Indigenous community members reclaiming learning spaces and envisioning the transformation of schooling based on their Indigenous knowledge systems, which emphasize" (Huaman, 2). Huaman touches on particular themes that encompass the importance of histories, relationships with the environment and political involvement. As Ongelungel discussed, schools do not necessarily have the resources that cater to teaching culture. Whether catering to the Palauan community abroad, or even educational spaces in Palau, as Senator Uduch Sengebau has mentioned as well, the *ideal* would ultimately be emphasizing Palauan culture and language to the Palauan diaspora



This could include culturally relevant practices including *mesei* (taro growing), carpentry, and other practices.



## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing has been a primary way that individuals and communities have gotten together to discuss and tackle community issues. Ongelungel has emphasized the importance behind community organizing herself, involved in a number of organizations and using her platform to better her community. From kickstarting her *#BeingMicronesian* campaign to creating her *Sha Nanigans* podcast, Ongelungel has offered so much. From Senator Sengebau Senior's interview, she agrees with and reiterates Ongelungel's point that the lack of standardized educational spaces and resources to teach and uphold Palauan cultural and linguistics studies has also contributed to the gradual decline in language use. Many schools within other communities around the world have initiated

culturally-relevant schools and pedagogies that have aimed to emphasize cultural revitalization and preservation, through community-based institutions. Small Indigenous schools: Indigenous resurgence and education in the Americas. Sengebau Senior has also contributed to community work through *Risel Belau* teaching cultural practices and language with local women in the community.



## **THANK YOU**

Island Ark Project is a non-profit organization that aims to continue its mission towards preserving and safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). This work is only possible through the relationships and connections amongst Pacific Island communities themselves.

If you are interested in helping the Island Ark Project and facilitating future projects in your island, please reach out to



