House Affiliation Systems in Belau

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As I see it, human social organization emerges as some kind of balance, stable or not, between the political order—Aristotle's polis—and the familial or domestic order—the oikos—a balance between polity and kinship [Fortes 1978:14].

This essay investigates one aspect of the articulation of "the domestic order" and "the political order" in Belau, a Micronesian society occupying a group of islands in the western Pacific Ocean.[1] In making this distinction between these complementary "domains," which are the "interpenetrating media" of social organization, Fortes (1949:12; 1969:97) had in mind the opposition between affective, solidary kinship relations, including parentage, siblingship, marriage, and filiation, on the one hand, and historically stable, jurally corporate, and conceptually permanent social units, on the other. Invoking this distinction in the context of Belau social organization is not intended to reopen debate on its universal applicability, but rather to address the question of how a specific society conceptualizes and actualizes the interconnection between social units that are structurally transient and those that are structurally permanent. Of particular concern here is a systematically ambiguous Belau category often glossed as "lineage," which from one perspective appears to be a group of linked families and from another, a segment of larger units of village polity.

Belau society is divided into traditionally recognized political districts or federations (called "municipalities" during the U.N. Trusteeship period and "states" in the recently drafted national constitution), each composed of several territorially distinct villages. Ethnographic data examined here come from Ngeremlengui district on the western side of Babeldaob Island and its three extant villages, Imeiong, Ngeremetengel, and Ngchemesed. These three villages are the remnants of a much larger district polity which, according to ethnohistorical sources and archaeological evidence, included approximately 30 villages grouped around several capital centers before the drastic depopulation of the 19th cen-

Intravillage and multivillage systems of house affiliation in Belau, Micronesia, are analyzed diachronically in terms of the relationship between the constitution of social groups and the linguistic labeling of those groups. Social changes concerning land tenure and residence introduced during German and Japanese colonial periods disrupted the intravillage house affiliation system; these same changes prompted the rejuvenation, in the contemporary period, of multivillage house affiliation networks based traditionally on migration traditions. Data from ethnohistorical traditions, customary exchange, and title inheritance suggest that the coherence of Belau social organization is maintained by continuities in the relationships among terms referring to social groups. [social organization, lineage, Belau, Micronesia, social change]

tury. Villages are, in turn, made up of "houses" *(blai)* organized into affiliative networks both within the village and across village boundaries. *Blai,* an extremely unmarked term, refers not only to residential structures (whether standing or abandoned) but to both socio-political segments of village organization and domestic families composed of a core of genealogically related individuals. Several other terms are also regularly used for the same senses: *ongalek* refers primarily to families with a depth of two or three generations; *telungalek* can refer to families as well as to groups of linked families and to segments of more inclusive intravillage and multivillage sociopolitical units; and *kebliil* refers to net-works of affiliated houses either focused around high-ranking chiefly houses or spread across district boundaries.

Any investigation of systems of affiliation among "houses" must obviously keep clear various distinct uses of these and other terms in the language of social relations. To this end the cumbersome device of attaching diacritical subscripts to Belau terms used in distinct senses is preferred to substituting a variety of explicit English glosses, since the use of a single Belau term in different contexts is crucial evidence for a degree of continuity in Belau conceptualization of social organization. While overly precise English glosses might be referentially more accurate, they would also make it impossible to grasp the way in which derivational relationships among various terms for social units foster a coherent ideology that conceals important contextual variation as well as systematic ambiguity or contradiction. By taking a diachronic approach to data on house affiliation systems, it is possible to show that such ideological consistency is in part a result of the use of language to impose conceptual continuity upon a changing social reality.

A frequent source of puzzlement for Belau's foreign residents who have just begun to learn the names and faces of local villagers is the arrival of boatloads of men and women from other villages on the occasion of major "customary events" *(chelsang),* such as funerals, house purchase parties, and death settlement talks. An even greater surprise, however, is the discovery that these nonlocal people play an active if not prominent role in these activities, are accorded high privilege and respect, and are referred to as being of "one house" with the locals on whose behalf the event is taking place. Two groups of these visitors can be distinguished. The first includes senior women *(ourrot)* who are related to the houses, titles, and land of the village by strong matrilineal ties, but who have followed the rule of virilocality and now reside elsewhere with their husbands and children. Although they may return only infrequently to their ancestral villages and may bear honorific names associated with their husbands' houses and titles, these senior women exercise great power in their maternal homes. It is their offspring who, as "children of woman" *(ochell),* will be in a strong position to assume matrilineally inherited chiefly titles and to take control of clan-held lands. These women also have the right to be buried alongside their matrilineal kin at the gravestone pavement of their ancestral house or, in more recent times, in the village graveyard.

The second group of visitors includes senior men *(rubak)* and mature women *(mechas)* who are said to come following "paths of mutual houses" *(rolel a kebliil).* That is, these peo-ple follow traditionally recognized affiliations between the local house hosting the ceremony and houses in other villages throughout Belau. These individuals and their spouses also participate actively in the prescribed activities, whether it be providing finan-cial contributions to purchase a new house, deliberating over the inheritance of a chiefly ti-tle, or sharing the sorrow of bereaved relatives.

The same fundamental principle—the primacy of the "house" as the sociocentric struc-turing unit—is operative in this return of outmarried women, in the participation of members from "mutual houses," and in the organization of social activities in the local

village. But these "houses" are not simply actual residential structures or families sharing one roof; they are also recognized sociopolitical units within a village, and their continuity and authority depend less on physical realization in a residential dwelling than on their capacity for regulating and constituting social action (cf. van Wouden 1977:193). Individual responsibility, patterns of cooperation, and lines of authority follow from the labeling of customary events as "affairs of Klang house" *(tekoi er a blai er a Klang)* or as "affairs of Ngerturong house" *(tekoi er a blai er a Ngerturong)*. To count the "houses" in a village, then, is not a matter of mapping kin groups onto residences, but rather of observing the patterns of political power associated with chiefly titles *(dui)*, the organization of cooperative labor and financial contributions during customary events, and the division of land which has not yet been claimed by individual owners.

Given the complexity of these ethnographic tasks, it was initially confusing to hear repeatedly in Ngeremlengui the statement "a village has four houses in it." In 1980 there were, in fact, (roughly) 35 houses standing in Ngeremetengel village and 15 standing in Imeiong (including neighboring Nglabang and Ulechetong hamlets); Krämer's (1917–29, II:141, 149) maps, based on data collected in the first decade of this century, show 7 houses in Ngeremetengel and 11 in Imeiong. As soon became clear, this statement is a normative definition, not an empirical description of any particular case. The "houses" referred to are four sociopolitical networks of affiliated residential houses within a village. Each network focuses around one of four "principal houses" *(klou el blai)*, which, in the traditional pattern of many villages, stood along stone paths leading from the four sides of a central square. These principal houses were located on land parcels considered to be intrinsically high-ranking from ancient times, controlled outlying forests and hillsides within village boundaries, served as seats of the four highest-ranking titles in the chiefly council, and functioned as the burial sites for house members, whose grave stones formed rectangular pavements in front of the dwelling. Although many Belau villages no longer manifest this pattern in which chiefly houses stand on land parcels organized in this quadripartition, the four-part scheme continues to be the dominant organizational principle of village polity—not in spite of the absence of principal houses but, as is argued here, because of this absence. Thus, after a visit to Imeiong village to map and measure an abandoned house platform located on overgrown land adjacent to the central square, my comment, "There is no house X in Imeiong," was countered by the reply, "There is indeed a house X in Imeiong." My preoccupation with a house's physical existence led me to overlook the continuing reality of the house as a social category.

These four principal houses in both traditional and contemporary contexts are focal points for two types of networks of affiliated houses. First, they serve as centers for networks of satellite houses located either in the same village or in small contiguous hamlets under the political sway of the main village. Second, they are nodal points for networks of houses dispersed throughout Belau which share migration traditions, political allegiance, social cooperation, and common identity. Since both of these types of house affiliation networks are referred to by the same term, *kebliil*, it is necessary to distinguish *intra*village networks as *kebliil*$_I$ from *multi*village networks as *kebliil*$_M$ where the context does not make this difference clear.[2] The discussion that follows analyzes the changing composition, functions, and interrelationships of these two types of house networks.

intravillage house affiliation

The compositional principles of the intravillage *kebliil* system can best be explained by taking as an illustrative ethnographic case the relationship among houses in Imeiong

village, the traditional capital of Ngeremlengui district. Although in recent years Imeiong has lost population and importance due to the relocation of several high-ranking title-holders, as well as the municipal office, elementary school, and dispensary, to nearby Ngeremetengel village, Imeiong remains an informative example of the traditional complexity of *kebliil*₁ structure. The four principal houses in Imeiong, named Ngerturong, Klang, Ngerutelchii, and Sibong, are ancient seats of the "four respected titles" Ngirturong, Ngiraklang, Ngirutelchii, and Ngirasibong.[3] The establishment of these "cornerpost" houses and corresponding titles is coterminous in mythological traditions and chants with the founding of the village itself.[4] That is, migration stories tracing the arrival of particular lines of people or specific titleholders to the village presuppose these houses as already extant.

In contrast to the permanence of this quadripartition of the village into four principal houses, lesser-ranking satellite houses are subject to the ebb and flow of history. Founded by younger brothers of titleholders, widowed senior women, male offspring of members of the principal house, or strangers awarded land in return for labor and loyalty, for example, these "lesser houses" *(kekere el blai)* usually stand on land near the principal house or close to the landing place associated with the titleholder's "side of the village." In some cases, titleholders themselves reside at an affiliate house, especially if they were established there prior to assuming the title or if their claim to the title is subject to challenge. Repeated instances of the residence of titled chiefs at an affiliate house can lead to the special recognition of this house as one that "looks upon the title" *(melanges er a dui)*, that is, holds the privilege of providing candidates to carry the principal house's title in the event of vacancy due to death, banishment, or political intrigue. A second special denomination is made for the affiliate house that is normatively the residence of widowed senior women who return to their matrilineal homes; restriction on the physical proximity of brother and sister compels these women to establish dwellings, called "houses of senior women" *(blil a ourrot)*, independent from those of male relatives holding the title.

Affiliated with the principal house Klang in Imeiong were the houses Bailunged, Chaklsel, Klematelchang, Cheremang, Obekebong, Obeketang, and Tutang (all in Imeiong proper), as well as the houses Taru, Duab, Melilt, Kamerir, and Telau (in adjacent hamlets). All these houses are known as "houses of Klang" *(blai er a Klang)*, or, when their cooperation and unity are being stressed, as "mutual houses with respect to Klang" *(kebliil er a Klang)*. While household heads at these "houses of Klang" may bear honorific house names (such as Ngiraduab at Duab), or minor chiefly titles belonging to the secondary village council, Ngaracheritem (such as Otaor at Cheremang), none of these affiliate houses is recognized as a "house of a title" *(blil a dui)* belonging to the sacred council of ten titles, Ngaraimeiong. A titleholder may in fact reside at one of these affiliate houses, but the house, or more properly the land upon which the house stands, does not control a chiefly title of its own.

This general pattern of relatively permanent principal houses surrounded by relatively transient affiliate houses is further complicated by an additional operational distinction between (1) those satellite houses whose alliance with a principal house has become institutionalized to the degree that residents are automatically classified, by virtue of their residence, as related to that principal house; and (2) those affiliate houses allied to a principal house only on the basis of some personal contingency pertaining to household heads. Villagers express these two modes of relation with the phrases "paths of the house" *(rolel a blai)* and "paths of the person" *(rolel a bedengel)*. This differentiation is not itself absolute, since in time small houses in the second category can pass into the first category should the personal factor become regularized through repetitive title inheritance, ex-

change, and cooperation. Affiliate houses in this first subcategory are referred to as "cornerposts of the mutual house network," a phrase that repeats at a lower structural level the same quadripartite pattern found among principal houses within a village. Just as four principal houses arranged around the village square "support" the village as a coordinated political unit, so these four (or more) "cornerpost" houses support the central or nodal principal house as a unified "mutual house network" (see Parmentier 1983:14–19). In Imeiong, for example, the principal house Klang recognized Cheremang, Obekebong, Taru, and Duab (as well as Klematelchang, in some accounts) as "cornerposts of the mutual house network of Klang" *(saus er a kebliil er a Klang)*. More common usage, however, refers to these houses simply as "houses of Klang" *(blai er a Klang)*, where the linking particle *-er* implies a stable, internal relationship, but not necessarily possession, as can be connoted by the English gloss "of."

The second subcategory of houses affiliated with Klang included Melilt, Chaklsel, Tutang, and Bailunged. These houses are referred to as "houses [oriented] toward Klang" *(blai el mo er a Klang)*, where the word *mo* implies motion or directionality from the first noun, *blai*, to the second noun, *Klang*. This phrasing is also used to describe the relationship between Klang in Imeiong and Ngereburek house in adjacent Nglabang hamlet. But since Ngereburek is itself the seat of a chiefly title, Ngiruburek, and has affiliated with it several satellite houses in this hamlet, the expression becomes: "Ngereburek is a mutual house network oriented toward Klang" *(Ngereburek a kebliil el mo er a Klang)*.

These ethnographic and linguistic observations suggest that two criteria are operative in distinguishing principal houses and affiliate houses: nodality and titles, or being the focal point for a network of local satellite houses and being the acknowledged seat of a chiefly title. The first criterion expresses whether or not residents of a house participate directly in social exchanges and political alliances with houses *outside* the village, or else must "pass through" or "go along with" principal houses in all external affairs. In the traditional village, affiliate houses contributed labor, food, and money in support of customary obligations of chiefly houses; and in return, titleholders at these principal houses assumed responsibility for paying fines incurred by individuals at affiliate houses and for supplying valuables necessary for certain rites of passage.

The second criterion expresses whether or not the household head is entitled to an independent voice in the local chiefly council and to receive deference and respect accruing to the sacredness inherent in titles. In large capital villages such as Imeiong, Melekeok, and Oreor, the intersection of these two criteria yields an additional typological variation: intermediate houses that are seats of chiefly titles but not nodal points of $kebliil_1$ networks. In Imeiong, for example, there are four principal, nodal houses and ten chiefly titles comprising the council Ngaraimeiong. Obviously, then, six of these titles reside at intermediate houses (in fact, only five do, since the tenth title, Dingelius, the messenger for second-ranking Ngiraklang, does not have a specific house in Imeiong). These six titles are divided into two opposed groups by bonds of political alliance with either Ngirturong or Ngiraklang, the two highest-ranking titles on Ngaraimeiong council. In other words, the council of ten titles is split into two "sides of the meeting house" *(bita el bai)*, with a total of five chiefs sitting on the "side of Ngiraklang" and five on the "side of Ngirturong." It is important to note that the affiliation of these intermediate houses with principal houses is based on political alliance (expressed in the seating arrangement of the council) and not on social subordination, kinship ties, or other dependency. Although there is no Belau term or regularity of expression to distinguish houses in this intermediate category, the category is marked by reference to the six titles as "lesser titles" *(kekere el dui)*, in contrast to the four sacred titles at "cornerpost" houses. The typology of principal, intermediate, and affiliate houses for Imeiong is illustrated in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows, Imeiong village has four ranked principal houses (Ngerturong, Klang, Ngerutelchii, and Sibong) and five ranked intermediate houses (Chedukl, Iterong, Tbard, Uchesbai, and Ngerungelang). The ranked titles corresponding to these nine houses, plus the tenth title, Dingelius, make up Ngaraimeiong council. This council, in turn, is divided into a dual division, "side of Ngirturong" and "side of Ngiraklang." Since the alignment of intermediate houses is, in fact, determined by dualistic political alliances of titles corresponding to these factions, these five houses are affiliated only with the first two principal houses, Ngerturong and Klang. As a result, titleholders Ngirturong and Ngiraklang are "supported" in Ngaraimeiong council by three holders of "lesser titles": Iechadrachedukl, Mengesebuuch, and Okerdeu/Chelid on Ngirturong's side, and Rechediterong, Ulebeduul, and Dingelius on Ngiraklang's side. The other two titleholders from principal houses, Ngirutelchii and Ngirasibong,[5] do not enjoy this kind of embedded political support at their respective cornerposts, although they are joined by minor titleholders from the secondary council, Ngaracheritem.[6]

The 18 affiliate houses of Imeiong listed in Table 1 were not all occupied at the same time and are not recognized in any rank order.[7] That Ngerturong house has only two affiliates is explained by the fact that at some point in the mid-19th century Chief Ngirturong

Table 1. House affiliations in Imeiong.

House	Title in Ngaraimeiong Council	Affiliation
Principal houses:	Important titles:	Political alliances:
Ngerturong	Ngirturong	
Klang	Ngiraklang	
Ngerutelchii	Ngirutelchii	Klang
Sibong	Ngirasibong	Ngerturong
Intermediate houses:	Lesser titles:	
Chedukl	Iecharrachedukl	Ngerturong
Iterong	Rechediterong	Klang
Tbard	Ulebeduul	Klang
Uchesbai	Mengesebuuch	Ngerturong
Ngerungelang	Okerdeu/Chelid	Ngerturong
[none]	Dingelius	Klang
Affiliate houses:		*Kebliil* affiliation:
Ngerusong		Ngerturong
Tbad		Ngerturong
Bailunged		Klang
Chaklsel		Klang
Klematelchang		Klang
Cheremang		Klang
Obekebong		Klang
Obeketang		Klang
Tutang		Klang
Chebechubel		Ngerutelchii
Itab		Ngerutelchii
Kokemerang		Ngerutelchii
Ngebei		Ngerutelchii
Lengleng		Ngerutelchii
Smaserui		Ngerutelchii
Ngeremau		Ngerutelchii
Smesei		Ngerutelchii
Ngeremesungil		Chedukl

moved his residence to neighboring Ngeremetengel village (Cheyne 1866: entry of 17 June 1864). The absence of houses associated with fourth-ranking Sibong house can be accounted for by the fact that several of its satellite houses were located in contiguous Nglabang hamlet, regarded as part of the landholdings of Sibong. In Table 1 Ngeremesungil house is listed as an affiliate of Chedukl, the fifth-ranked house in the village. This violation of the regularity that intermediate houses are not nodal points for *kebliil* in fact provides support for the more important claim that the house typology represents the linkage between structural complexity, historical depth, and social rank: Chedukl began to develop satellite houses before Iterong, Tbard, and Uchesbai. In fact, before they were abandoned following World War II, Chedukl, Ngerungelang, and Ngeremesungil houses were referred to as a unified *kebliil* under the name Babelobkal. (This development enabled Ngerungelang to act either as a house directly aligned with Ngerturong's side of the village or as a house affiliated with quasi-independent Chedukl.) An additional factor in the structural ramification of Chedukl is the mediating role traditionally assigned to the fifth title-holder Iechadrachedukl, who takes responsibility for communicating council decisions to other village councils and who pays for the central roof beam when a new meeting house is purchased. Also, the Chedukl stone foundation is located at the center of Imeiong village and was the "seat" of the village god Uchererak.[8]

disharmonic houses

The description of Imeiong's traditional house affiliation system has focused on the role of principal houses in structuring social action in accordance with their quadripartite order. Social processes such as incorporation of immigrant groups, relocation of houses from abandoned villages, fragmentation of households with several males competing for a single title, and expansion of the chiefly residence to include homes for male children residing patrilocally are all governed by the primacy and permanence of village *kebliil*. These and other historical contingencies are rendered meaningful in terms of the four *kebliil*, and this premise continues to assert itself in contemporary Ngeremlengui, even in the context of dramatic changes in the authority of titleholders and in the composition of affiliation networks.

In this section I sketch some of the specific changes introduced during the German and Japanese colonial periods to show how new practices, such as individual land ownership and patrilineal inheritance, have weakened the intravillage *kebliil* system.[9] The disruptions caused by the imposition of a "disharmonic regime" (Lévi-Strauss 1969:441–442) on Belau are reconsidered in following sections from the perspective of their impact on the multi-village *kebliil* system.

For the concerns at hand the most significant changes introduced during the German (1899–1914) and Japanese (1914–44) administrations were the fragmentation of extended families residing together at principal houses and the institution of patrilineal land inheritance. Traditionally, land in Ngeremlengui was either "land in the public domain" *(chutem buai)*, subject to the local village council, or "land of the principal houses" *(chetemel a kebliil)*, controlled by the titleholder and his close matrilineal relatives (cf. Kaneshiro 1958; Saiske 1966). Residential sites and taro patches were assigned to families that were segments *(telungalek)* of the affiliation network focused around the chiefly house; rather than being passed on to offspring of families, these lands reverted to the principal house for redistribution.[10] When, during the German period, the colonial administration forced many Belau men to build new houses for their families apart from the house of the titleholder, many did so on lands within the area of "land in the public domain" to

which they had nominal claim by virtue of planting coconut trees. These scattered nuclear residences challenged the authority of principal houses when household heads asserted their independence in customary exchange and their right to leave these houses, coconut groves, and taro patches to their children.

What the Germans encouraged the Japanese codified by inventing two new types of land ownership, "land of the matrilineage" (chetemel a telungalek) and "individually held land" (chetemel a bedengel). For the first time land passed permanently out of the control of kebliil leadership, and for the first time a foreign power claimed ownership of vast unoc-cupied forest lands which had been controlled by councils. In Ngeremlengui, for example, 39 land parcels were claimed by 10 matrilineages in the second Japanese land survey of 1938–40; 605 land parcels were registered by 161 individuals; and 136 land parcels were claimed by 19 chiefly houses (Parmentier 1981:626). Although there is evidence that some of the parcels listed as individually owned were intended to be held in trust for families and networks by powerful individuals, these statistics do show the extent to which traditional land tenure principles were subverted. Even more dramatic, however, is the fact that the colonial administration itself took title to over 94 percent of the district's territory; and of the remaining 6 percent, just under three-quarters of the land was awarded to individual claimants.

One of the consequences of these imposed changes in land ownership and residence is that an increasingly large number of village residents became affiliated with the four kebliil$_1$ by ties of patrifiliation rather than matrifiliation. In the traditional context, post-marital residence was initially patrivirilocal; at the death of the husband's father the couple either remained at the father's house, as "offspring of man" members of the kebliil, or moved to the husband's matrilineal house, where their children would be strong "offspring of woman" members and where the husband would be a powerful candidate to carry the house's title (cf. Kubary 1885:62; Yanaihara 1940:126). These residence patterns resulted in a situation in which each village was composed of individuals related matrilineally to its principal houses and of individuals linked only through weaker paternal ties. The former group was labeled "people of the village" and "people of the house," while the latter group was labeled "children of the village" and "children of the house."

Continuity of the kebliil was possible through the return to the village of "offspring of woman" men to take titles and of widowed senior women with strong voices in kebliil af-fairs. In the colonial period, the percentage of local individuals who were "children of the house" increased suddenly; consequently, there began a profound disruption in the af-filiative links among houses within kebliil networks when these patrifiliated individuals in-herited houses and other lands. Basically, while affiliated houses continued to be regarded as normatively linked to the four principal houses, with each generation of patrilineal in-heritance the strong matrilineal ties of residents increasingly passed beyond village boun-daries. Instead of being willing to cooperate with and show obedience to titleholders at local principal houses, heads of nuclear families saw their social obligations in terms of houses in other villages.

A second consequence of this imposed disharmonic system is that it became difficult to maintain actual residences at chiefly houses which functioned as focal points of kebliil net-works. In terms of political ideology, the prescribed chiefly house and its corresponding taro patch represent the permanence of the kebliil as a segment of village polity. But in practice, titleholders are reluctant to take up residence at these houses, since in doing so they face the prospect of not being able to pass these properties—destined to remain as matrilineally controlled kebliil land—to their offspring. In other words, while these houses and taro patches continue to symbolize the continuous matrilineal core of the kebliil, they

do so only by being abandoned by titleholders. In contemporary Imeiong, for example, all four of the sacred chiefly house sites surrounding the central square lie empty, hidden by dense forest growth. Occasionally, women affiliated with these houses trim the weeds around rectangular gravestones and upright pillars. In the villages of Ngeremetengel and Ngchemesed, the sites of principal houses are universally abandoned, with titleholders residing on land they control as individual owners. *Kebliil*$_I$, already fragmented by nuclear residences, no longer have spatially manifest focal points.

Certain terminological continuities make it difficult to discern the structural discontinuities of *kebliil* organization. Before the changes in land ownership, extended families living at affiliate houses within a *kebliil* had ties of kinship as well as political allegiance to the matrilineal core at the principal house. As component segments of *kebliil*, these families were referred to as *telungalek*, a term derived from the stem *ngalek* ("child") and translated as "lineage" in anthropological literature and in formal Belau contexts such as land commission hearings and court proceedings.[11] Thus, *telungalek* are structurally equivalent to "lesser houses" *(kekere el blai)* in the context of *kebliil*$_I$ composition. But the social changes described above introduced a bifurcation in the referents of the term *telungalek*. On the one hand, the term continues to be used in a sociopolitical sense to refer to the lesser, affiliate houses of a *kebliil*; on the other hand, the term continues to refer to families linked by ties of matrilineal kinship. This bifurcation results from the fact that linked families produced in the course of the "developmental cycle of domestic groups" are no longer identical with local *kebliil* segments, since matrilineal ties increasingly cross village boundaries. In other words, *telungalek*$_H$, an affiliate *house* of a *kebliil*, and *telungalek*$_K$, a set of families related by *kinship* ties, diverge as a direct consequence of the disharmony between principles of lineality and residence.[12]

As residential land is passed from father to son, and as social exchange involves the collaboration of matrilineally linked families in different villages, the very existence of *kebliil*$_I$ as relatively permanent sociopolitical segments of villages seems threatened. Should contemporary patterns continue, in time there will be almost no connection between *telungalek*$_H$ and *telungalek*$_K$. But, as we shall see in the following sections, these same structural conditions which work to impair the *kebliil*$_I$ system operate to provide multivillage *kebliil*$_M$ networks with the capacity for infinite regeneration.

migration traditions of multivillage house affiliations

A senior male *(rubak)* arriving at Ngeremetengel or Imeiong to participate in some prescribed customary activity who announces that his money, food, or service "follows the path of the *kebliil*" is not referring to the network of intravillage house affiliations discussed earlier. The term *kebliil* in this usage refers instead to a set of houses in other villages which are linked together according to a linear model of a "path" and not by the "cornerpost" model found in the intravillage context. In the Belau language the term "path" *(rael)* has the same double meaning found in English "way"; it can refer to a cleared road or mountain path linking spatially dispersed points in a unified chain (and, by hypostasis, the relationship among these points) and to an established technique or recognized procedure for accomplishing some task (cf. Cunningham 1965:374; Parmentier 1983: 11–14). The primary ideological constructs that account for these lines of connected houses are migration traditions which chart the sequential movement of individuals or groups from an origin point *(uchul a rael)* to the other houses. For a *kebliil* link to be established, it is necessary for one or more individuals from the migrating group to remain at a given house long enough to formally "enter into the house" or to found a new residence,

while others from the group continue on to enter or found additional houses (see Force and Force 1972:50; Parmentier 1981:484–508; Smith 1977:69–72).

Migration stories told in Ngeremlengui mention a variety of circumstances that cause the departure from the original source point and several mechanisms for "entering" a new house. If the source village is completely destroyed by warfare, poor environmental conditions, or natural disaster, then the house of origin is simply a narrative anchor for storytelling, since no one from that house participates in contemporary exchanges. If, by contrast, the source house still exists, then it is given special recognition in food distribution, seating position, and other forms of respect as the "origination" *(uchul)* of the *kebliil*. In addition to these three causes for departure, stories mention banishment from the village, flight from monsters, accidentally sailing off course while fishing, drifting out to sea, and youthful wandering. As for mechanisms of entry, stories mention a child taken by an old woman and brought up as her daughter; a brave young man awarded a minor title and convinced to settle down; a castaway brought into the house of a senior titleholder and eventually given the same high title; a woman claimed as a "concubine" who ends up marrying her lover; and an old woman who entered a prominent house to be the "sister" of a titleholder living without female support.

The migration story told for Klang house of Imeiong, for example, begins at the source house of Ucheldenges in Ngerekiukl village located in the southern part of the archipelago. Originally the lowest-ranking of four "cornerpost" houses of a *kebliil*$_1$ named Telebudel, this house advanced in position by paying a fine on behalf of the first house, whose titleholder was unable to come up with the required money-piece.[13] Later, a small group of people from Ucheldenges decided to leave their home in search of better living conditions, for Ngerekiukl village was at that time suffering from a shortage of taro patches, small fishing areas, and bad drinking water. The head of Ucheldenges, who carried the title Chaderekeroi, did not himself join the traveling party, which stopped first at Ngetmadei, a small village located along the Ngeremeskang River in Ngeremlengui, and then passed through the house of Ilild in Ngchemesed to land named Olebatel.

Today, this piece of land overlooks a large taro swamp between present-day Ngeremetengel and Ngchemesed, where a large stone foundation marks the house. When a woman from Ilild married one of the men living at Olebatel, the children of this couple became "offspring of woman" *(ochell)* to Ilild. By virtue of the fact that all houses in Ngchemesed are "houses oriented toward Klang" *(kebliil el mo er a Klang)*, these people at Olebatel thus acquired a "path" directly to this high-ranking house in Imeiong. In time, a man from Olebatel built a residence at Bailunged, one of the affiliate houses of Klang in Imeiong; and when there were no other men to take the high title Ngiraklang, the honor was awarded to Rikemed from Bailunged. Some of the people from Olebatel who "entered" the house of Klang continued on to Ngedengcholl in Ngerdmau village, and from there they finally went to Meketii in Chol village. As a result of these movements there was established a "path of mutual houses" *(rael er a kebliil)* among Ucheldenges, Ilild, Olebatel, Klang, Ngedengcholl, and Meketii. At customary events held at Klang, senior men from these houses, including titleholders Chaderekeroi of Ucheldenges, Renguulrailild of Ilild, Beouch of Ngedengcholl, and Ngirameketii of Meketii, come to assist Ngiraklang by contributing money *(blekatel* or *belduchel)*. And, should the title Ngiraklang become vacant, men from any of these *kebliil*$_M$ houses have a strong claim to take the title—not, however, without counterclaims from senior men residing at the various *kebliil*$_1$ houses in the village.

Comparison of migration traditions from the four principal houses in Imeiong shows that the "ideal type" journey—one in which a group of travelers stops at a series of places, with some individuals entering or founding a house and others continuing on as far as the last

place on the line — is never in fact realized. These stories instead reveal complicated divisions in the movements of groups, back-migrations along previously traveled paths, breaks in the social continuity of the traveling party, and even dead-end spurs. Once established, however, the set of *kebliil* houses tends to be treated as if it were the result of an ideal journey; the linear model of the "path" exerts a typifying pressure which straightens out gaps, spurs, and other deviations. This linear modeling also accounts for the strong self-perpetuation of *kebliil* sets, since one break in the chain of houses would segment the "path" into unrelated and relatively less powerful units. Except for token ceremonial precedence accorded the source house of a *kebliil*, member houses are not sequentially ranked, although individual houses may differ in respect to local village ranking. And because *kebliil* cooperation occurs in the context of one of the member houses and never in some abstract "meeting of the *kebliil* itself" on neutral territory, the set of houses is referred to ad hoc by the name of the house hosting a particular gathering. Should six or seven representatives of *kebliil* houses converge at Klang, for example, they would become the *kebliil er a Klang*.

kebliil representation at death settlement talks

While attending a large "death settlement talk" held in Ngeremlengui in 1980 I had an opportunity to compare directly the set of houses mentioned in migration traditions with those actually represented by financial contributions. This event normally occurs several months after the death of a spouse and involves the collection of money, both traditional Belau valuables and U.S. currency, from the husband's side; the money is then divided up among close male relatives of the wife. Although the complexities of the affair are not at issue here, it must be pointed out that a death settlement talk marks the culmination of years of affinal exchange in which money flows from the husband's side to the wife's side, while food and service flow in the opposite direction (see Smith 1977:395–454). The largest portion of money, however, is delayed until the marriage itself is terminated and is paid out at this ceremony. In the case at hand, the husband outlived the wife, and so this senior titleholder from the principal house Klang sent out over the local radio an invitation to titleholders representing both "*kebliil* houses on the father's side" *(kebliil er a chedam)* and "*kebliil* houses on the mother's side" *(kebliil er a chedil).*[14] These two "sides" refer not to the husband's and wife's sides but rather to those houses in a *kebliil*$_M$ affiliation with the host's father's house and those houses in a *kebliil*$_M$ affiliation with the host's mother's house. Since in this case the host's father and mother came from Klang and Sibong, respectively, two principal houses in Imeiong, this ceremony proved to be an excellent chance to corroborate the migration traditions I had already recorded.

While relatives on the deceased wife's side work together preparing lavish meals throughout the day in one final effort to demonstrate generosity by their affinal services, relatives of the host assemble in the village meeting house *(bai)* to await the actual money collection. Many local villagers contribute their services, but since this event is primarily a financial transaction, much of this labor is translated into "debt" *(blals)* and later repaid with the money collected. Several senior males on the host's side confer together at the host's residence to discuss details of the day's arrangements and to determine the ultimate distribution of the anticipated contributions. In particular, a decision must be reached as to which of the wife's male relatives will receive the "marriage payment" *(chelebechiil)* and which the "children's money" *(ududir a rengalek),* two named pieces of Belau money. The first is normally taken by the woman's male relative who throughout her marriage assisted her in providing affinal food and services; the second is intended for one of the woman's

senior male relatives who holds the money on behalf of the children produced by the marriage (i.e., the man who takes this money becomes the acknowledged's "mother's brother" of the children).[15] In the case under consideration, the wife is deceased, but should she be the surviving spouse a small portion of money called "meat [i.e., filling] for the purse" *(techelotungel)* would be given to her. Since a woman's brothers have claims on her financial resources, however, even this money is not likely to remain for long under her control.

When all preparations are completed and all the host's relatives and friends are assembled in the meeting house, the money collection begins. After a stirring welcome speech delivered by an expert orator hired for the occasion,[16] individual contributions are brought to the front of the building where the amounts are carefully recorded and the name and "path" of connection of the giver are loudly announced: "Dirrakukau! Two hundred dollars! And one piece of Belau money! From the house of Ngeredoko and entering the house of Klang!" In other words, Dirrakukau's contribution of 200 dollars and one piece of Belau money comes from Ngeredoko, one of the *kebliil*$_M$ houses of Klang. It is important to note that this woman need not, and most likely does not, actually live at Ngeredoko; in fact, this does not have to be a physically standing house at all. The contribution is given this label to keep this *kebliil*$_M$ tie alive and to strengthen the affiliative link between Dirrakukau's house and Klang.

The ceremony continues in this manner, with individual contributions labeled as "entering Klang," alternating with those "entering Sibong." When the contributions from the women *(redil)* are finished and a subtotal is calculated and announced, the obligation then falls to the assembled men *(okdemaol)*. Since, according to the principle of marriage exchange, money passes from the husband's side to the wife's side, these men are not expected to give more than a token amount ($10 or $20), and rarely do they present a piece of Belau money. Married women attending the death settlement talk are expected to receive substantial financial support from their husband's sides, and as a result their contributions range from $50 to $1000. Toward the end of the ceremony, just before final tallies are announced, the senior men examine the contribution list to make sure that all invited *kebliil* houses have been represented; should one be missing, a token amount of money is gathered together and presented under that house name. This is also the appropriate time for distant relatives to declare their "paths" with small contributions; genealogical, personal, or house affiliation links may be so obscure at this point that the assembled elders may have to ask for clarification. Finally, friends, business associates, local villagers, and others may make contributions, utilizing this opportunity to pay their respects to the host and his deceased wife. These latter classes of contributions are given with only the general division between "side of Klang" and "side of Sibong" and do not specify a particular *kebliil*$_M$ link. Similarly, local individuals from *kebliil*$_I$ houses of Klang or Sibong do not distinguish their money from the general Klang or Sibong categories.

A summary of *kebliil* representation at the ceremony is given in Table 2.[17] The first category lists *kebliil* houses mentioned in the Klang migration story; of these six houses, five were represented at the event. (As noted above, Olebatel is a titleless, ancient house site that is not part of the village polity of either Ngeremetengel or Ngchemesed.) Contributions received which explicitly followed these five "important paths" *(klou el rael)* based on shared migration traditions came to 67.6 percent of the total *kebliil* contribution. As Table 2 indicates, however, these five houses do not exhaust the *kebliil* houses participating in the ceremony. The six additional houses can be differentiated into two further categories: the houses in the second group (Ngeredoko and Ngerebuuch) base their affiliation on sociocentric or institutionalized factors, while the houses in the third group (Ngeremechuu, Ngerebis, Ibai, and Dmangelchab) are represented only by virtue of the per-

Table 2. *Kebliil* houses of Klang (1980).

House	Village	Title
Houses sharing migration tradition:		
Ucheldenges	Ngerekiukl	Chaderekeroi
[Olebatel]	[Ngeremetengel]	
Ilild	Ngchemesed	Renguulailild
Klang	Imeiong	Ngiraklang
Ngedengcholl	Ngerdmau	Beouch
Meketii	Chol	Ngirameketii
Other institutionalized affiliations:		
Ngeredoko	Ngcheangel	Rdechor
Ngerebuuch	Ngerbelau	Ucherbuuch
Houses linked by personal paths:		
Ngeremechuu	Ngersuul	Obakeramechuu
Ngerebis	Ngchesar	Rechesengel
Ibai	Ngiual	Ngiraibai
Dmangelchab	Iebukl	Obakeraiebukl
Telungalek:		
Itungelbai		
Ngeruauch		

sonal genealogy of the host. If this same ceremony held at Klang involved a different host, these four houses would not be expected to attend, while Ngeredoko and Ngerebuuch would come to any affair of Klang. Financial contributions from the second "institutionalized" category were 12.3 percent and from the third "personal" category 16.0 percent of the total *kebliil* contribution. A final 4.1 percent was presented in the name of Itungelbai and Ngeruauch houses, which were given the distinctive label *telungalek* rather than *kebliil*.

The term *telungalek* in this context serves to mark the fact that the houses in question are linked by personal ties to this particular ceremony: Itungelbai in Oreor is the house of the host's father's father, while Ngeruauch in Ngerard is the house of the host's oldest sister's husband. The difference between these two *telungalek* contributions and those in the third "personal" category is simply that the houses represented in the latter are connected to the host's "father's side" (Klang) by relatively strong matrilineal links. These links thus have some chance of being perpetuated through repetition at subsequent exchange ceremonies. For Itungelbai and Ngeruauch this is probably the last affair at Klang to which they will contribute; for Ngeremechuu, Ngerebis, Ibai, and Dmangelchab, future contributions might lead to permanent *kebliil* affiliation (as in the second "institutionalized" category) after the death of the host.

This usage of the term *telungalek* in the context of *kebliil*$_M$ activities is an excellent example of the confusion that results when the perspective of sociopolitical units mixes with the perspective of multigenerational linked families. As noted earlier in the discussion of intravillage house affiliation, *telungalek* can refer to an affiliate, nonnodal member of an institutionally codified *kebliil*$_I$ network (i.e., *telungalek*$_H$ from the sociopolitical perspective), and to residentially dispersed yet genealogically linked families related to the titleholder or senior women of a given house (i.e., *telungalek*$_K$ from the developmental perspective).

By the time I attended the death settlement talk in 1980 I was already familiar with two

finer discriminations in the use of the term *telungalek* in the context of multivillage affilia-
tion. First, a house can be labeled *telungalek* when its financial contribution follows an in-
direct "path" mediated by one of the full *kebliil* houses. To use a hypothetical example:
house A in Chol village is one of the full *kebliil* houses related to house B in Imeiong
village; if house A and its title become weak or abandoned, one of its local affiliate houses,
C, might decide to come to Imeiong to participate in the affairs of house B. Since house C
has no relationship to house B other than through house A and its titleholder, the money
presented will be labeled "money of the *telungalek*" to indicate that house C is not attempt-
ing to usurp house A's traditional, though presently vacant, nodal position. In this example,
the use of the term *telungalek* in the *kebliil*$_M$ context depends on house C's being a
telungalek$_H$ to house A in the *kebliil*$_I$ context. In the second usage, *telungalek* frequently
refers to houses acknowledged as permanent members of *kebliil* sets but not part of the
"important path" described in archaic migration traditions. In other words, *telungalek* can
denote those houses labeled "other institutionalized affiliations" and "houses linked by
personal paths" in Table 2. Since these *telungalek* houses may themselves be nodal houses
in their local villages, their less-than-*kebliil* status stems from a relative shallowness of
tradition rather than from a subordinate position in local village polity.

   While reference to Itungelbai and Ngeruauch as *telungalek* clearly depends on particular
contingent relationships among families rather than on either of these sociopolitical
kebliil$_M$ criteria, it is possible to see a thread of continuity running between the two mean-
ings: generation of new *kebliil*$_M$ ties will be grounded in the regularization as permanent
house-to-house affiliation of relationships first existing among (primarily matrilineally
related) dispersed family segments. Documentary evidence from Ngeremlengui confirms
this generalization about the transformation of *telungalek*$_K$ into full *kebliil*$_M$ status. Com-
parison of my own ethnographic observations between 1978 and 1980 with a list drawn up
over a decade ago of houses in other villages which should come to assist the four principal
houses of Imeiong and to which these four principal houses should go at times of
customary events shows: first, that houses listed then as *telungalek* are now regularly re-
ferred to as *kebliil*; and second, houses mentioned in recent years as *telungalek* do not ap-
pear on the list.[18]

title inheritance through *kebliil* ties

   In addition to securing a broad base of financial support for obligations incurred by
member houses, *kebliil* sets also provide a pool of senior male candidates to inherit titles
associated with these related houses. Ideally, the strongest claim to a title rests with the
male matrilineal relatives of the deceased titleholder. These individuals, referred to as "off-
spring of woman" *(ochell)*, exercise greater authority in house affairs than "offspring of
man" *(ulechell)*. In the absence of competent "offspring of woman" candidates, the senior
women *(ourrot)* of the house direct their search in several alternative directions: to talented
and energetic men from *kebliil*$_M$ houses, to local men attached to *kebliil*$_I$ houses, or to
unrelated individuals who have distinguished themselves in service to the house in general
and to its senior women in particular. Many subtle factors influence the final selection.
Should there be intense yet balanced competition between two local men, the senior
women might be swayed to step over the conflict by bringing in a nonlocal *kebliil*$_M$ in-
dividual whose impartiality might reunite the local *kebliil*$_I$ factions. Or, if there is an "off-
spring of man" who has gained the respect of other titleholders in the village council and
who has proved himself knowledgeable in areas of specialized skills such as financial ex-
pertise or chiefly oratory, they might pass over a younger, "offspring of woman" candidate.

Once again, data from Imeiong and from Klang house in particular are used to illustrate the importance of *kebliil* affiliation in title inheritance. In Belau, lists of titleholders are not memorized to the extent that chiefly genealogies are recalled in some Polynesian cultures. One of the reasons for this is that upon taking a title a man is referred to and addressed almost exclusively by title rather than by his personal name, which is all but forgotten by those outside the immediate family. A second reason is that wide-ranging alliances are often as important to a chiefly house as deep but narrow matrilineal lines; social strength and prestige of a house and its title depend as much on the complexity of the affiliative network in which it is embedded as on the purity of its "offspring of woman" line.

It was possible for me to draw up lists of titleholders for the four "cornerpost" titles in Imeiong only by piecing together genealogies, house histories, migration stories, and accounts of social events. Informants frequently disagreed as to the order of titleholders, the location of their original home, and the validity of "offspring of woman" claims. Table 3 gives a partial list of Ngiraklang titleholders, along with annotations regarding their "paths" to the title (bracketed entries indicate disagreement among informants). The case of the Ngiraklang title demonstrates clearly that Klang house turned frequently to *kebliil*$_M$ houses to find men to carry this high title: five titleholders were affiliated with Ilild in Ngchemesed village, three with Klang itself, two with Ngedengcholl in Ngerdmau village, and one each with Meketii in Chol and Ngeredoko in Ngcheangel. Only three titleholders had ties with local *kebliil*$_l$ houses, and two were men whose principal affiliation was with other "cornerpost" houses in Imeiong.

To these data for Klang house must be added more comprehensive evidence concerning title inheritance in Ngeremlengui as a whole. While it is true that the four principal houses in Imeiong have in the past frequently brought men from *kebliil*$_M$ houses into the village to carry these four high "cornerpost" titles—in many cases thereby securing a strong "offspring of woman" yet nonlocal titleholder—the other six titles of Ngaraimeiong council as well as the titles represented on Ngarabedechal council of Ngeremetengel village and on Ngaramelong council of Ngchemesed village have recently been inherited by *local* candidates (whether "offspring of woman," "offspring of man," or genealogically unrelated)

Table 3. Ngiraklang titleholders.

Name	Path
1. Ngirasumang Chelungel	Ngedengcholl
2. Ngirachosbesiang	Ngeredoko
[3. Rebetuu]	[?]
[4. Beouch]	Ngedengcholl
[5. Ngirachomureng]	Klang
6. Ngirngotel	Ngerturong
7. Blau	Klang
[8. Iechadrabutelbai]	Ngrill village
9. Rikemed	Ilild and Klang
10. Samua	Taru
11. Ngiracheungel	Ilild and Duab
12. Remesechau	Ngerutelchii
[13. Meleoang]	[?]
14. Iekar	Ilild
15. Ngirachereboi	Ilild
16. Ngirailab	Meketii and Bailunged
17. Meriaur	Ngerechelong district
18. (present titleholder)	Ngerungelang and Ilild

rather than by men linked through multivillage ties. In fact, of the 20 currently held titles in all three villages, none are carried by $kebliil_M$ individuals.

This evidence runs counter to the generalization made earlier that in the context of customary exchange, multivillage affiliations are becoming increasingly ramified, and that the level of financial contributions from these houses is escalating. I think this apparent contradiction can be resolved by seeing both tendencies as the result of a similar set of structural conditions. The modern practice of patrilineal inheritance of individually held house parcels has fragmented the power of principal houses over their local satellites, thus increasing both the ability and the need for these nuclear houses to enter into their own customary exchanges in other villages. At the same time, as the principal, nodal, and title-bearing houses grow weaker and become universally abandoned in Ngeremlengui, the necessity to secure from other villages "offspring of woman" titleholders is replaced by the greater need to find leaders familiar with local village conditions and political sentiments. (In some cases in other districts, the principal house title may be held by nonlocal people who do not relocate their families and do not attempt to use their sanctioned authority as a tool of actual political power.) So, the *local* continuity of houses and titles is paralleled by the *nonlocal* dispersion of customary financial obligations. And since patrilineal inheritance of residential houses implies geographical distribution of matrilineally related families, the proliferation of $kebliil_M$ ties from family-based $telungalek_K$ relations is made possible by the same structural conditions that make it socially necessary.

conclusion

There are basically two perspectives that villagers use to orient their actions and discourse concerning both intravillage and multivillage dimensions of house affiliation. The first perspective takes as its premise the permanent and presupposed existence of institutionalized, sociocentric units: the four principal houses of Imeiong for $kebliil_I$ and the houses sharing with Klang migration traditions for $kebliil_M$. Component parts of subordinate subdivisions are either structurally or developmentally dependent on these permanent units: affiliated houses—$telungalek_H$—within the village are lesser satellites founded with the consent of principal houses; and relatively recent members of $kebliil_M$ sets are regularized according to the model offered by houses linked by "important paths" of migration. The second perspective reverses the priority of event and structure by taking as its premise the assumption that customary exchange obligations, title inheritance, and local village politics are matters ultimately grounded in matrilineally related families *(telungalek)*. Although families linked through women are considered to be especially strongly linked, the recognition of bilateral personal kindreds ("side of the father" and "side of the mother"), as well as the right of a son to inherit his father's land (and in some cases his title), have created a system of broadly dispersed family ties *(telungalek$_K$)*.

As the ethnographic illustrations show, these two perspectives find a point of articulation in the term *telungalek,* one of the most elusive words in the Belau language of social relations. While the term *blai* ("house") can refer to almost any level of social categorization (Force 1960:50), *telungalek* carries a relational or differential implication: something is called *telungalek* to put it into structural relationship with something else. *Telungalek* in the first perspective are structural components of intravillage and multivillage *kebliil* networks; *telungalek* in the second perspective are generationally expanded linked families.

This articulation of perspectives through *telungalek* may be seen as a linguistic convenience leading to a conceptual "ironing out" of historically grounded structural ambiguities. The existence of a single term at the intersection of what Fortes calls "the domestic order"

(linked families) and "the political order" (permanent sociopolitical units) encourages a picture of Belau society as being a three-tiered hierarchy, with "families" *(ongalek)* joining together to form "lineages" *(telungalek),* and these lineages combining to form "clans" *(kebliil).* Since *telungalek,* in one meaning of the term, are subunits of $kebliil_{I,M}$ networks, and, in another sense, ramified domestic families, this inclusion hierarchy can be constructed only if $telungalek_H$ are identified with $telungalek_K$. Unfortunately, as the ethnographic reasoning offered here demonstrates, in contemporary Ngeremlengui domestic *ongalek* multiplied into extended $telungalek_K$ cannot in fact become intravillage *kebliil,* and multivillage *kebliil* houses are not all connected by ideal-type migration traditions. As more men inherit individually owned residences from their fathers, fewer principal houses with their titleholders are able to maintain local networks of satellite houses. Customary obligations such as making financial contributions and providing food and labor at funerals, house payment parties, and death settlement talks are thus increasingly spread across village and district boundaries. In other words, in contemporary Ngeremlengui the growing weakness of $kebliil_I$ is compensated for by the strengthening of $kebliil_M$.

The potential for expansion of $kebliil_M$ ties seems to be unconstrained by either a need to legitimize such affiliation in ancient migration traditions, or by a restriction against purely "personal paths." These traditions have not been forgotten; they have become frozen reminders that, whatever the current state of relationship among houses, titles, and persons, certain houses (or their ad hoc representatives) must always be invited to attend customary events. Personal paths, if repeated by future generations, can become regularized and recognized as valid reasons for $kebliil_M$ participation.

One reason, I think, that many instances of Belau conceptualization[19] and many examples of ethnographic description[20] represent the social organization as an inclusion hierarchy in which "families" constitute "lineages" and these "lineages" *(telungalek)* constitute "clans" *(kebliil)* — and even that "clans" join together to make "superclans" *(klebliil)* — is that the same term occurs in different social contexts. *Telungalek* is used in the developmental perspective, starting from domestic families, as well as in the sociopolitical perspective, starting with house affiliation networks. The term *kebliil* is used for house affiliation networks both in an intravillage context and in a multivillage context. This paper shows that *telungalek* and *kebliil* have come full circle in the course of social change since the early part of the 20th century. Prior to the institution of patrilineal inheritance and nuclear residence, *telungalek* were institutionally recognized segments of local *kebliil,* which were at the same time matrilineally related houses. As these local *kebliil* ceased being strong sources of social support and cooperation, families turned to related houses in other villages. These houses then became added to lists of multivillage *kebliil,* the core "line" of which traced common identity through ancient migration traditions. This rejuvenation of $kebliil_M$ has been accomplished by harnessing social relationships which traditionally constituted $kebliil_I$ systems. Throughout all these changes an ideology of coherence has been maintained by the application of identical terms, which, while denoting different social realities, maintain the same relative position in the language of social relations.

The continuing existence of relatively permanent $kebliil_I$ in Ngeremlengui thus depends as much on the "concrete" nonexistence of chiefly residences at principal house site in the three villages as on the conceptual continuity provided in the terms *telungalek* and *kebliil.* The ethnographic descriptions by Fortes and others (e.g., Bloch 1971:219; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940:6; Traube 1980:97; van Wouden 1977:195, 217) may be correct in distinguishing relatively permanent, fixed, or eternal social groups from relatively transient, or temporal social groups; but the Belau case suggests that permanence can be a matter of linguistically stable categories rather than continuity in existing social relations (cf. Meggitt

1965:53). The relational stability of terms referring to social groups is not always under-mined by social changes which transform the patterns of social interaction and group com-position. The example presented here shows that, to the contrary, social change can be a powerful stimulus for the development of conceptual continuity. The role of ideology in confronting "structural contradiction" is not that of imposing what Kelly (1977:288) calls "arbitrary context restrictions"; rather, it is one of providing a generalizable model based on terminological equivalences across contexts and on diachronically stable relational constructs.

notes

[1] Formerly called Pelew and Palau, the islands became part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands shortly after World War II and have recently become self-governing as the Republic of Belau. Although usually classified within the Caroline Islands of Micronesia, Belau has much in common culturally and linguistically with Austronesian peoples of Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Osborne 1958; Parmentier 1981:1–25).

[2] The word *kebliil* is derived from *blai* ("house") by a complex process involving the *ke-* allomorph of the reciprocal prefix and the final verbal morpheme, long stem-final vowel + *l*, which is used to mark the anticipation of the state denoted by the stem (Josephs 1975:181–185). Although *kebliil* appears for-mally to be a reciprocal-state verb meaning "to be mutual houses to each other," it can also be used as a noun to denote those houses expected to treat each other as mutually related.

[3] The *Nger-* prefixed to land names is derived by vowel reduction from the basic existential verb *ngar* ("to be, to be at") and commonly forms house names: Nger-Turong. *Ngir(a)-*, prefixed to land and house names to form chiefly titles, is composed of the third-person pronoun *ngii* and the relational particle *-er;* Ngira-Klang could be translated "He of Klang" or "Mr. Klang."

[4] The story of the founding of Imeiong (given in Parmentier 1981:532–535) mentions that the quadri-partite organization of the "four to be respected" titles intentionally replicates the "cornerpost" political structure of Belau districts.

[5] The political alliance between Ngirturong (# 1) and Ngirasibong (# 4), on the "side of Ngerturong," and between Ngiraklang (# 2) and Ngirutelchii (# 3), on the "side of Klang," contradicts the ideal Belau pattern in which solidarity exists between first and third chiefs, and between second and fourth chiefs. This discrepancy can be accounted for by the historical fact that sometime between 1870 and 1880 the rank of Ngirturong and Ngiraklang reversed. When Ngirturong "seized" the political leadership of Im-eiong through the murder of Ngiraklang, the rank order of Ngirutelchii and Ngirasibong did not change (Krämer 1917–29, II:144; Kubary 1873:215; Parmentier 1981:344, 608–613; Semper 1873:243).

[6] Full diagrams of the seating arrangements of Ngaraimeiong and Ngaracheritem councils are given in Parmentier (1981:347, 358). Members of Ngaracheritem council (from *cheritem,* a sticky substance used to make glue) are said to "glue together" the more important council. Although all titles in this secondary council are aligned with one of the four "cornerpost" titles in Ngaraimeiong council, the ten or more titleholders normally reside in Ngeremetengel and Ngchemesed villages, as well as in the capital village of Imeiong. They function to unify the district of Ngeremlengui by carrying orders from the Imeiong chiefs to the lesser villages. With the development of elected municipal councils during the Trusteeship period, however, the secondary councils in many Belau districts have ceased function-ing.

[7] I did not find evidence in Ngeremlengui to support Force's (1960:58) observation that affiliate houses are individually ranked within an intravillage context, nor do my data correspond to those reported by McKnight (1960:43), who organizes affiliate houses or "lineages" into ranked categories such as "meat of the tropical almond," "old sails," "new sails," and "slaves." In Ngeremlengui these expressions have metaphorical meanings unconnected with the composition of house networks.

[8] The geographical and political mediation of a fifth element is characteristic of many Indonesian societies; see Cunningham (1965:360), Jansen (1977:106), Schulte Nordholt (1971:319).

[9] For descriptions of these colonial periods see Clyde (1935), Force (1960), Palau Community Action Agency (1976–78), Parmentier (1981:25–36), Useem (1949), and Vidich (1949).

[10] Similarly, the chiefly residence *(omesolel a blai)* and its prescribed taro patch *(lkul a dui)* used by the titleholder's wife belonged to the *kebliil* and not to the individual holding the title. Included within the category "land of the principal house," these two properties differed from other parcels in that their assignment followed automatically from the fact of title inheritance.

[11] The precise derivation of *telungalek* is unclear. One hypothesis is that *telungalek* is formed from the (now archaic) prefix *telu-* ("one bundle, one cluster, one pair") and *ngalek* ("child"), in which case the underlying stem could be *ongalek* ("family") rather than *ngalek*. The derivation given by Hidikata (1973), in which *telungalek* comes from *te* ("they") and *l* ("plural marker"), seems incorrect, since there is no such infixed plural marker. McKnight (1968:4) notes an interesting folk etymology according to which *telungalek* comes from *tut el ongalek* ("breast family").

[12] The distinction I am proposing here is not parallel to the distinction made by Smith (1981:228) between a descent-based and a residence-based meaning; whereas I view the meanings of *telungalek* as the key to a basic structural contradiction, Smith analyzes the differences in terms of contextual variation.

[13] This seemingly minor event involving the internal affairs of Telebudel of Ngerekiukl is important for the migration tradition, since it establishes the "origination" of the path at a prominent rather than a subordinate house.

[14] This complementary opposition between the man's side and the woman's side is, I think, strongly influenced by Belau translations of biblical phraseology. The expression *chedam me a chedil* ("father and mother") is a formulaic way of referring to an individual's universe of relatives and to the parental generation of church members.

[15] The senior men who attended this ceremony later told me that, today, the mother's brother does not actually hold the "children's money" in trust. It is his money to do with as he pleases, since the father has already given his children money, often as assistance in purchasing a house or for school tuition.

[16] This eloquent speech repeatedly emphasizes the division into the host's paternal and maternal relatives: "But when I stand up in this meeting house . . . and reflect, I start to remember the father and the mother. And when I think of the father and the mother I realize that today we have summoned groups of fathers and mothers to assemble together to help out. So they all came and this meeting house was divided in two, with those related to the father at this end and those related to the mother at the other end where the *orengodel* beam terminates."

[17] Table 2 and the discussion here give only one side of the contributions; *kebliil*$_M$ houses on the maternal side of Sibong included eight houses in other villages and one *telungalek* from Imeiong.

[18] This document, apparently mimeographed for educational purposes, lists the houses in other villages which "come and enter into the four cornerposts" of Imeiong: "Listed above are those *klebiil* which should come to help out at these houses if there is to be a customary event; and also if those houses are going to be burdened with customary obligations, then these houses [in Imeiong] will go. And in the case that there is a vacant title at these houses, then senior men from those houses can come to take the title, following the *kebliil* and the *telungalek*." The term *klebiil* refers to the abstracted collectivity of all *kebliil*$_{I,M}$ houses (see Parmentier 1981:439–443).

[19] Of greatest importance are variants of the Story of Kebliil, which account for the origination of the Belau social system by the personification of Ongalek and Kebliil. In a version I recorded in Ngeremlengui (text given in Parmentier 1981:444), a woman Tellebuu living at the house of Luill at Beliliou gave birth to three children: a girl Kebliil, a boy Seked, and another girl Dedaes. Each of these offspring in turn gave birth to children named Ongalek. When these three Ongalek came together they formed a *telungalek*, and if they were in need of help for customary obligations they could turn to the eldest Ongalek's mother Kebliil. In this and other versions of the story (McKnight 1958:21–22) the inclusion hierarchy of social groups is explained in terms of levels of social cooperation.

[20] For attempts to see *telungalek* as the middle category between "family" and "clan" see Barnett (1949:21), Force (1960:38), Hidikata (1973), McKnight (1960:43), Useem (1949:68–77), and Vidich (1949:29).

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