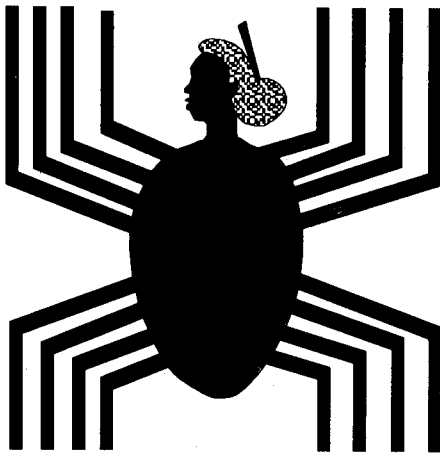


# Traditions Of Pregnancy And Birth

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**MENGIDABRUDKOOL**

**Division of Cultural Affairs**

**1998**

# ***PREGNANCY AND BIRTH***

by  
The Palau Society of Historians

Division of Cultural Affairs  
Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs  
Koror, Republic of Palau

***Traditional and Customary  
Practices English Series 1  
1998***

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The cover illustration depicts the demi-god Mengidabrudkoel. See appendix.

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# Pregnancy and Birth

## A Married Woman's First Pregnancy (Buuldiil and Delsongel Beluu Ceremonies<sup>1</sup>)

When a woman misses her monthly period, it is the beginning of her pregnancy and she must inform her mother. Her mother then gives her advice (*llach*) on pregnancy. Listed below are the traditional rules concerning pregnancy.

1. The pregnant woman should not walk or do anything in the rain. Should she do so, when she is undergoing the hot bath (*omesurech*) after delivery, it will rain frequently until the *omesurech* is completed.

2. She should not stand in the evening sun's rays just before sunset, otherwise, her baby will be bothered by the sun and have a tendency to cry most of the time.

3. She should not break a spiderweb when going for a walk, otherwise her labor will be protracted and difficult.

a. She must not walk by sacred places (*tungl*), otherwise her baby will be born abnormal.

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<sup>1</sup> *Buuldiil* literally is the smell of the womb and the rupturing or breaking of the womb. The term refers to the time before women learned to deliver babies naturally; at that time, the woman's stomach was cut open to deliver the baby. Facing death, she was returned by her husband's side to her mother's side for their care and delivery of the child. *Delsongel* is "to slice open". The term again refers to the above legend. *Delsongel* also can mean raw fish or other proteins (*odoim*) eaten, without starches (*ongraol*). This refers to the fact that her mother's brother (*okdemaol*) alone is responsible to work, provide the food and the *omebael* and to receive the *udoud* from her husband's side.

b. She should not be startled by an astonishing or frightening sight because she will deliver a baby with something on his body resembling the startling sight.

4. She should not eat any food that has a strong or lasting odor because she will have that odor after the delivery of the child.

5. She should not covet another's food or crops, nor take them, because she will deliver a baby who will grow to have an abnormally strong desire to take or steal others' food and crops.

6. She should not eat fruit bat because, after delivery, the placenta will move back into the uterus.

The pregnant woman should not walk alone on the road. There must be a companion to watch and guide her so that she does not do restricted or prohibited things during her pregnancy.

The parents of the pregnant woman prepare for their daughter's pregnancy by making a new basket and setting it aside from the others. In the basket they put a *toluk*, which is a women's *udoud* made of turtle shell, an *chesiuch* (pearl shell *udoud*), a spoon and betel nuts and leaves for her to chew. The parents also look for nutritious foods to put in her basket such as *kukau* (true taro) and other prestige foods.

The father or the maternal uncle (*okdemelel*) of the woman kills a pig for her and the pig's head goes to the husband's father. The pig is cut up and fried and preserved for her consumption. They also make syrup for her to drink, or purchase the services of specialists who prepare it. Her *okdemaol* (the maternal uncle) contracts people to provide hunting and fishing delicacies as her *kerremelel*. This traditional practice is done only for a married woman who is pregnant with her first child. All these special and loving treatments accorded a pregnant woman date back to the time before natural childbirth became known to Palauans. In the old days, when a woman got pregnant, people often assumed that the



end was near, for her stomach would be opened with a piece of crude *lild*, (thin bamboo strip) to make a way for the baby to be taken out of the womb. This practice usually was fatal to the woman giving birth.

As she approaches her fifth month, we say “*ng mesumech el rrodel*”<sup>2</sup> which means she returns to her place of birth (her mother’s house). Her mother’s brother (*okdemaol*) then hangs the *omebael* (*udoud* worn during a first pregnancy to ensure the healthy development of the baby) around her neck. Her mother prepares a fragrant ointment made of coconut oil mixed with turmeric, and other fragrant herbs and all kinds of sweet smelling leaves. The ointment will be applied to the entire body of the expectant woman daily until birth. The mother then puts on her *btekel* (coconut husk fiber woven belt to hold up her grass skirt) and weaves her stomach cover to wear for walks around the *beluu*. The pregnant woman remains in this state of preparedness until it is time for seclusion. She continues to follow the advise on the taboos of pregnancy until the birth time arrives.

At seven months, the husband’s parents send word to the parents of their daughter-in-law to inform them of the date they will come to *omuu er a diil* — literally to rupture the womb. At the appointed day for the *buu el diil*, or the rupture of the womb ceremony, the parents of the young husband and their relatives go to the young wife’s parents house for the ceremony. The *okdemelel* (maternal uncle) of the expectant mother and their relatives will have prepared foods for the *buu el diil* ceremony.

When the family of the young husband and their relatives arrive, they carry a husked mature coconut, which has barely sprouted through the husk. They will have cleaned off its fiber and covered

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<sup>2</sup> *Ng mesumech el rrodel* means to return an adopted child to her mother’s family. A daughter is under her father’s care but once she is pregnant with her first child, her mother’s brother takes this responsibility. Even though she has a father and may live with him, she is considered as an adopted child to him. Her mother’s brother or the mother’s side is her true place.

it with tumeric. This coconut is usually a *madeldubech*, or a matured coconut, which has been suspended off the ground so it is quite dry. The woman from the husband's side who will crack open the coconut is usually one who is not shy but rather humorous and easygoing; one who can easily make people laugh and feel at ease. At the opportune time, this old woman brings forth the coconut with comical movements, and walks straight toward the pregnant young wife and her husband. She shakes her head in funny ways and makes funny facial expressions as she does this. As she approaches the couple she exclaims, "If you are born a male, you will be like your father who is industrious and hardworking, and financially adept and *bekorkmall* (attentive and careful in everything); and if you are born a female, you will be like me, humorous and funny, beautiful and lucky as well as possessing all the good qualities a female should have!" As this is taking place, everyone watching predicts the gender of the baby which is still in the womb. When this part of the ceremony is over, a more serious discussion begins. The husband's father goes to take the *duuschiau* (money pieces, only *klsuk*); he takes them and examines them. If there are no small pieces among them, he holds a piece briefly and returns it to the father of the expecting wife, as *osumech-ulitech*. At this juncture, the father of the young husband will put out a money piece, usually a precious *kluk* piece which will be then known as the *buuldiil*, payment for the rupture of the womb, and another piece known as *dik* (literally "a side support will be paid out"). Usually one *dik* is sufficient and appropriate, but where there are many pieces, and the family may want to show off their wealth, they may put a second *dik*, which means there will be two pieces for *dik*, one for each side of the pregnant woman. These pieces are to be received by the maternal uncle of the expecting young wife. However, if she does not have a maternal uncle her brother may

receive the pieces and in the event that she does not have a brother, then her father can rightfully receive the pieces.

This whole ceremonial process for the married woman on her first pregnancy is known as *del songel beluu*.

## Birth (Cheroll)

When a woman's labor pains begin, her mother positions her so that she faces the *tang* (house post) of the *rseI orengodel* (corner of the house where cooking takes place) and gives her daughter instructions on birth techniques. On giving birth, her mother or a sister of the mother who is attending the birth holds the umbilical cord with her fingers and strips it to remove the blood, strips the outer surface of the *lild* (thin bamboo used for spear handles), snips the umbilical cord with the *lild* and presses the back of the baby's tongue (to ensure the baby does not grow up to be talkative or a gossip). She then takes a thin piece of string and ties the end of the cut umbilical cord. The mother then cleans the baby with water in a *keai*<sup>3</sup> to remove birth fluids. After the baby is bathed, she places the baby to sleep in another *keai*. The *keai* on which the baby was bathed is used to wrap the *rached* (placenta) and is buried in the ground in the yard. A plant is placed on top of this place.

The part of the umbilical cord that was cut and tied on the baby's navel falls off in about three to seven days. When it does so, it is put away. Then they look for an astringent medicine for the healing of the navel. If the baby is a boy, the umbilical cord is firmly placed in the deep spot at the base of two coconut fronds (*chesuchal*)

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<sup>3</sup> *Keai* is the bark of the betelnut tree. A newborn is swaddled in *keai*.

which signifies that he will be good, skillful and courageous in all of the arts of men. If the baby is a girl, the cord is placed in the place between the leaves of the taro plant (*chesuchal*) which signifies she will be lucky and diligent in her womanly arts.

At birth, the husband's family sends to the new mother's family one basket of uncooked taro, to be roasted for her consumption. The is called "*lkil a diil*" — to hold the stomach or abdomen. In the meantime, she drinks the prescribed medicines to cleanse her and make her strong and healthy. When the baby's navel has healed, she is ready to begin her *omesurech*, or hot water baths.

### **The Hot Bath, Steaming and Presentation (Omesurech)**

When a married woman has given birth to her first child, her mother, mother's sister or a "sister" (*merrengel* or *chudelel*), will stay to care for the baby until the *omesurech* (hot baths) have been completed. The best foods are brought or prepared by the kin of the new mother (*mlechell*) to indicate how much she is loved. After all preparations for the hot baths have been completed and before the boiling of the *osurech* (water containing leaves of the *rebotel* [wax apple tree]), the mother of the *mlechell* charcoals some cooked taro (*kukau*) and brown coconut meat (*ulechouch*) and lets her daughter eat this before the hot baths start. The mother or father of the *mlechell* obtains someone to give the hot baths. Before *omesurech* starts, the mother of the *mlechell* unties the *omebael* (pregnancy *udoud*). *Chelsobel* (food brought during *omesurech*) then begins, especially with raw food coming from the kin of the mother of the *mlechell*. The relatives of the *mlechell* bring raw taro to be roasted for her meal.

During the *omesurech*, the new mother is bathed with the hot boiled leaves from the *rebotel* tree. She drinks some of the liquid,

and the woman giving the baths uses some of this liquid to bathe the *mlechell*. She eats *dechedechemel* (various herbal leaves to be chewed and swallowed with water). The number of days during which the *mlechell* undergoes the baths depends on the number of days allotted either to her mother's *kebliil* or her father's *kebliil*. On the last day of *omesurech*, the kinswomen (the "children of the house," *ngalek ra blai*) collect especially fragrant herbs and prepare them for the medicinal pot for the next morning. The men build a *bliukel* (a frame made of stripped bamboo, bent and tied together). The *bliukel* will be covered with cloth to retain the heat. The next morning the new mother undergoes her steaming in the *bliukel*. The female affines of the family (*buch el sechal*) gather large taro (*brak*) and boil them until the next morning. This taro is used for the *ongat*. The morning of the *omengat* day is the time to stop the hot baths but leave the pot of fragrant medicinal herbs on the fire. When the sun has passed midday, male kin build a chair to place in the steam hut (*bliukel*). The *bliukel* is covered with blankets or mats woven of pandanus. First, the *mlechell* is covered heavily with turmeric oil and led into the *bliukel*. She sits on a seat with a hole cut in the center. Close kinswomen by birth follow the *mlechell* into the tent to act as guardians to ensure nothing happens to her. Next, the medicinal hot bath water is placed under the seat, followed by the *ongat* of giant taro. The door of the tent is closed. The blood relatives of the *mlechell* maintain the required heat until they leave the *bliukel*.<sup>4</sup> They move the giant taro into the house, distributing it among the *omeachel*<sup>5</sup> of the ceremony. Those who brought food as *ongeseb*<sup>6</sup> during the *omesurech* period and those

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4 The temperature is as hot as possible, and the young mother must endure as much of the heat as she can. The heat helps to heal and is said to strengthen her for work in the sun.

5 *Omeachel* are the kinswomen of the *mlechell* who spent the entire period of *omesurech* in her parents' home, providing the mother of the *mlechell* with advise for *omesurech* procedures.

6 *Ongeseb* generally consists of raw taro or tapioca. It is brought by female kin and affines during the *omesurech* period to help the mother of the *mlechell* to feed those in attendance.

who are relatives of the mother of the *mlechell* or relatives by *kebliil* through the father of the *mlechell* again prepare their share of food in baskets to bring to the home on the day of the steaming. The food is called *ongat*.<sup>7</sup>

Before emerging, the body and face of the new mother are rubbed with *reng* (tumeric oil). Her hair is fixed, and they put on the grass skirt that belongs to the *kebliil* from which she obtained the number of days for her *omesurech*, along with her woven belt *chelius*. Word then is passed to the visiting family of the baby's father. This family is expected to place an *udoud* around the new mother's neck. When they have done so, kinswomen of this family lay out the *telutau* (woven green coconut fronds) on which she will stand, for her feet must be splashed with water and herbs. The relatives place the fragrant *osurech* water and herbs on the *telutau*. They help the *mlechell* walk on other *telutau* which have been laid on the ground for her. Holding her hand, they walk her outside to stand on the mat (*telutau*) where the scented water is splashed on her feet. Then, the kinswomen of the baby's father splash the new mother's feet with water and herbs.

After this, the mother and father of the *mlechell* say their farewell to the one who performed the *omesurech*. If there is *udoud*, they would give a small one; if not, then one *toluk* is given, or a complete grass skirt (*telechad*). The specialist in the *omesurech* then packs her food into a basket and returns home. The relatives of the baby's father give an *udoud* to the *okdemaol* (the mother's brother of the *mlechell*, or her maternal uncle). This *okdemaol* is responsible for the pregnant woman, from the fifth month of

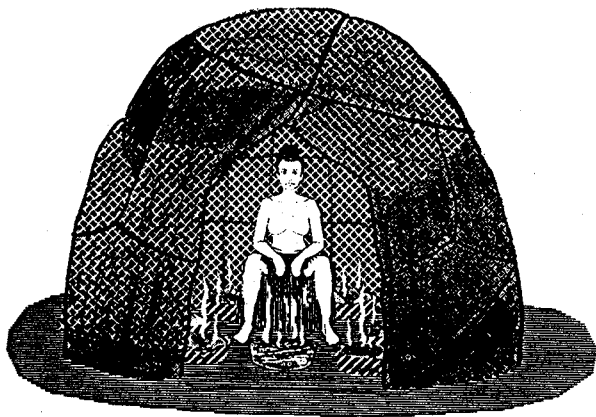
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<sup>7</sup> Cooked assorted food in baskets, brought by female kin and affines (*buch el sechal*) of the parents of the *mlechell* as their aid for the *omesurech* ceremony.

pregnancy to the birth of the child. These ceremonies involving both sides of the family are referred to as *del songel beluu*.

After the *omengat*, the *mlechell* continues to apply turmeric oil to keep her skin tender. She waits for a first child to be born to another *blai*. During this period, she still observes the things that are prohibited by taboo:

1. She should not have intercourse with her husband.
2. She should not eat any fatty foods.
3. She should not eat food with a strong, lasting odor.
4. She should not perform strenuous tasks.
5. She should not eat pounded taro, for it produces gas in the stomach, or other foods of this nature.



Steam Hut (*Bliukel*)

Should an *omengat* take place in another *blai* within the next ten months, the new mother enters the *bliukel* (steam tent) a second

time (*mekesebech*), as at her own *omengat*. However, if ten months elapse but there is no other first childbirth in the *beluu*, the mother of the *mlechell* goes on her own to pick fragrant herbs (*ochod*). She boils them, puts them in an *orsachel* (wooden container) and gives it to the *mlechell*. All the women at the birth of their first child should drink *osau* (a final medicine which is supposed to synergistically combine the effects of all birth medicine that have been consumed by this *mlechell*). The mother of the new mother begins the preparations to end the restrictions of childbirth, which are called *olebes*. The *mlechell* is given a cold bath under a shower but submersion in a stream is preferred. This completes the ritual; she no longer must observe birth taboos. This is the practice of *omesurech* and *omengat* by tradition. Variations in this practice exist in different parts of Palau.

## **Naming of a Child**

Naming a newborn is not treated differently whether it is a boy or a girl. It is the responsibility of the father to choose a name for the baby, and the name should come from his *blai* or *kebliil*. If he cannot find a suitable name but he likes the name of someone who is not related to him, he prepares food for the *chosngakl* (naming ceremony). At the time the father receives the *udoud* from the owner of the name, he takes the name for his child.

## **Unwed Mother's First Child Birth**

An unwed mother who gives birth to her first child is cared for by her father or her mother's brother. If her mother is unable to perform the *omesurech*, she will retain one of the specialists to give

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8 The ceremony for an unmarried mother is called *omengat er a ralm*, "hot baths with just water" This term stresses that the important factor, a husband to bring *udoud*, is missing.



the hot baths to her daughter. This hot bath process for an unwed *mlechell* utilizes the given number of the days of the *kebliil* of her mother's brother or of her father. She is entitled to the same treatment as a married *mlechell*, from her hot baths to the steaming, but she is not to be adorned for a presentation ceremony.<sup>8</sup> She does not go out to be viewed by the public because she is not married. All expenses of this event are absorbed by the *mlechell*'s father and her mother's brother. It is considered shameful to give birth without a father for her child. Such an event is disgraceful for the *mlechell* and to her family as well.

### **Illnesses from Breaking Pregnancy Taboos**

The following are some of the illnesses of the women who do not adhere to birth taboos.

*Daob* - excessive or abnormal bleeding after giving birth.

*Badedill* - a sharp abdominal pain that comes after birth due to a lack of bleeding that should come for several days after delivery.

*Kliriull* - A *mlechell* who has intercourse with a man before the requisite number of days are over is considered to have disobeyed the most serious birth taboo of all. Therefore, every time she is exposed to direct sunlight, she gets dizzy. She often will be ill with stomachaches, headaches, have a tendency to vomit and a loss of appetite. She easily faints, etc.

All these matters relating to the care of pregnancy and birth, as well as the associated rituals, have been practiced by our people throughout the years. Depending on the village and clan, there are differences and slight variations in the finer aspects of the practices as described. Such variations occur throughout the land depending

on *kebliil* and *beluu*; however the main aspects of such practices are the same.

### **Children of a Male's Sister (Chebedel a Kesol)**

*Chebedel a kesol* refers to male or female children of a male's sister (nephews & nieces). In turn, the brother of the mother of such children is said to be *okdemelir* — the maternal uncle. When the female *chebedel a kesol* has children, her children will be called *bkul a kesol* of the *okdemelir*. Whether they are male or female, the male *chebedel a kesol*'s children are all *ulechell* of the *blai*. When the female *bkul a kesol* has children, they are referred to as *tiul a kesol* of the *okdemelir*; and the children of the male *bkul a kesol* are considered as *ulechell* (male children) of the *blai*. After this generation, the children of the females are called *titiul a kesol* of the *okdemelir*.

### **Ngalekulaol**

*Ngalekulaol* is the child of a woman of the family, who lives with or is reared by the brother of the birth mother, his/her maternal uncle or *okdemelel*. So the child essentially becomes like a child of his own *okdemelel*. *Ngalekulaol* possess status and carry more weight than any of the adopted children within a Palauan family setting. Another adoption scenario which is essentially the same (also *ngalekulaol*) is the child of one sister who is reared by other sisters and stays with the maternal kinswomen within their *blai* and *kebliil*.

A child who is reared by his/her maternal uncle is *ngalekulaol*. Because of his status, this child is not considered for inheritance and property settlement when the maternal uncle (*okdemelel*) or

his wife dies because his status dictates that he/she is theoretically one of the decision makers in the distribution of the personal properties of the maternal uncle. However, he/she does not necessarily have authority to manage and administer the properties for the family and clan unless authority is given her/him by the *ourrot* and *okdemaol* of the his family and clan.

### ***Ildeuekl el Ngalek***

*Ildeuekl el ngalek* refers to the *ulechell*, a child from a male member of the family, who is adopted by a powerful *ourrot* of the *blai*. Such a child will acquire more status and power compared to another of the same line but is not adopted under the same arrangement as above. Another term used synonymously is “*rirot a chocherir a ruurrot*”. This essentially means that the child slept in, played in and was fed from the lap of the *ourrot*. The *ourrot* in the family are those elder women who have contributed much to the family (*blai*) and clan (*kebliil*). The female *ildeuekl el ngalek* could eventually be considered as *ourrot* of the family and thus she can participate with the *ourrot* or the maternal members of the family in their deliberations and important discussions about the affairs of the *blai* and clan. Yet, she will never attain the rank of *re ourrot*, the matriarch of the family. The male *ildeuekl el ngalek* as well could eventually be considered in the important discussions and deliberations about the affairs of the *blai* and *kebliil*. However, their strength will never exceed the strength of the *re ochell* (children of the females) of the *blai*.

However, depending on accomplishments, and contributions by *ildeuekl el ngalek* — including their commendable behavior — whether male or female they can acquire the appropriate titles and responsibilities within the *blai*, the *kebliil* and the *beluu* as a whole.

He/she can even be given some authority to discuss selected affairs and valuables of the family and clan.

### **Adopted Child of an *Ochell* (Male/Female)**

The child of an *ourrot* who was adopted by the relatives of the father, whether male or female, is possessed of status among the female members of the family. At the death of their mother or father, they will only be given one Palauan *udoud* piece as their children's money because they have one natural birth mother.

Status and authority of the children via the natural birth mother is vested in the female children. They possess more status and authority than the male children. This is due to the fact that the female children bring money and other valuables into the family, (*telungalek*), lineage (*blai*) and clan (*kebliil*) while the male children are the source of depletion of financial resources as well as wealth and other valuables of the *telungalek*, *blai* and *kebliil*.

### **Pregnancy and Birth in Sungesol**

When a woman realizes that she has conceived, right away she must confide in her mother about the situation. The mother is responsible for preparing the daughter for the pregnancy and the birth process. Below are some of the norms and rules which govern the pregnancy status of the woman.

The pregnant woman should never sleep by the door. This is to prevent anyone entering the door from accidentally hitting her stomach, causing discomfort and possible complications which might hurt the child inside.

She should not sleep on her stomach or on her back; she should only sleep on her side. Whenever she has to change her position,

she may roll to her stomach but quickly must raise herself up by her arms then turn to face the other side.

She should never run or jump up and down, but walk only with her normal pace. If she runs or jumps, the position of the child might be adversely affected.

She should never climb trees or floating logs by the beaches; nor should she walk on places which might be slippery or step on something slippery in order to prevent slipping and falling and hurting the child inside.

The pregnant woman will eat *delmedimes* (special) foods which her husband (if she is married) and her family find for her. The pregnant woman has to eat all kinds of good nutritious foods to keep her healthy as well as to help nurture the new baby inside her.

She should not eat any food which is not brought into the household by a family member. She should not eat octopus otherwise the child will be born with sticky hands like an octopus.

She should not eat fruit bats otherwise the baby may be born with large ears like the ears of fruit bats.

The pregnant woman should be prevented from seeing or witnessing any ghastly-looking things, situations or events or she might have a child which is hideous-looking.

These are the norms which the pregnant woman should follow from about the third month of pregnancy until birth.

When the pregnant woman is ready to give birth, her mother finds a suitable midwife in the village to assist the mother in delivering the baby. Delivery takes place in the *ipor*.<sup>9</sup> In the event that the child is born with breathing difficulties the mother of the new mother, with the assistance of the midwife, will suck the nose of her grandchild to remove any obstruction in the nose so the child can breath. The umbilical cord will be cut at about two and a half

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<sup>9</sup> *Ipore* is the name of a hut used by menstruating women, as well as for giving birth and for one month after.

inches from the navel utilizing a sharp piece of shell. The umbilical cord and the placenta are buried. The mother is enjoined against getting wet until after the umbilical cord falls off.

The new mother stays at the *ipor* for one month. When the second month arrives, she and her child transfer to the second hut or house known as *imeri bungutohoo*. They stay there for two more months and thereafter she is allowed to return home.

The procedures for pregnancy and birth set forth above are the same for married and unmarried pregnant women in Sungesol.

# Glossary

**Badediil** — a sharp abdominal pain after birth due to a lack of bleeding that should come for several days after delivery.

**Bekorkmall** — attentive and careful in everything.

**Btekel (btek)** — woman's belt for a grass skirt (cheriut).

**Chosngakl** — naming ceremony that a person goes through in order to name his child with the name of a person not related to his family. The requester of the name prepares foods while the person whose name is being requested presents *udoud* to insure that the name is not brought into disrepute.

**Dik** — money given by the father of the husband during a woman's first pregnancy as symbolic support for her womb.

**Okdemaol (oktemaol)** — maternal uncle; also any older male relative.

**Okdemelel (possessive singular)** — his/her maternal uncle.

**Okdemelir (possessive plural)** — their maternal uncle.

**Telchad** — refers to a complete cheriut (grass skirt).

**Tueached** — a person who rushes to talk about something that is not her responsibility or not his business.

## Appendix: Mengidabrudkool

Mengidabrudkool is a Palauan legend about child birth in Palau.

Mengidabrudkool was a spider-like demi-god who lived in a breadfruit tree in Ngibtal, an ancient village which has since become extinct. The village was situated between Melekeok and Ngiwal and is currently a reef with shallow shoals around it. From there he travelled to Ngermechmau village in Ngiwal, following his web strand which connected to the top a mango tree. Eventually, he developed an amorous relationship with Turang, a beautiful young woman of the Ngesechei clan. Wanting to marry Turang, he transformed himself into human form, courted and finally married her.

In ancient Palau, the pregnancy and birth process was a difficult and critical time for a family and clan. When a woman got pregnant, it was assumed she was getting closer to her death, for when she was ready to give birth a midwife would perform crude surgery, opening her stomach with sharp sticks made of *lild* (*Schizostachyum lima*), a thin bamboo, to take the baby out; and often the mother would die in the process. Delicate and critical, *cheroll* (the birth) was an occasion which demanded the full and caring attention of the family and clan as well as the neighbours and the village. Kinswomen would gather with the family of the expectant mother.

When Mengidabrudkool married Turang, they lived separately in the *Ulengang*, a precinct of the house usually reserved for ancestral spirits. It was not too far from the main Ngesechei house. Turang conceived soon after she married Mengidabrudkool. From there on she began eating all the special foods from the Ngesechei house which her family prepared for her and the child growing inside her. Tradition dictated that special foods be prepared for a pregnant woman throughout the pregnancy period. Mengidabrukool, who was reserved, quietly cared for his wife and attended to her needs until the birth time arrived.

When the time came for delivery, it was nearly dawn and all the people were still asleep. Being a demi-god, Mengidabrudkool ensured that Turang gave birth to a healthy and robust baby boy who uttered a loud cry. In addition to the normal morning birds' calls and cries, a loud baby cry awakened all the women kin of the house who had congregated for the labour to show support and wait for the birth of the baby. They exclaimed in fear and cried out, "Our child has died in the *Ulengang*!" They all jumped out, grabbed whatever sharp sticks were at hand in the kitchen and rushed to the *Ulengang*. Neighbour women did



the same, all intending to beat Mengidabrudkool who was not supposed to assist in the birth at all. Traditionally, men were not allowed to be present when a woman gave birth.

The women arrived in the *Ulengang* and found Turang alive and healthy, sitting with the baby. Their anger turned to joy and happiness, and they began singing and dancing, exclaiming, “*A chedalikikii, a chedalikikii, a delal a di koiei, me a ngalek a di koiei*” (“Goodness gracious, the mother is alive and the child is alive”).

This event marked the transformation of the birth process in Palau. No longer were pregnant women opened up crudely during labour. Rather, the natural childbirth process became the way birth occurred in Palau.

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