Dreaming of Home, Dreaming of Land:
Displacements and Hmong Transnational Politics, 1975-2010

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Her Vang

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Erika Lee, Advisor

July 2010

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1933, the Lakota author Luther Standing Bear suggested that written history was second best to oral tradition because "a people enrich their minds who keep their history on the leaves of memory."[1] For much of their history, the Hmong also stored their past not in books but on "the leaves of their memory," and they passed down their history orally from one generation to the next. Parents in Euro-America read to their children to put them to sleep, but Hmong children traditionally fell asleep listening to their parents tell Hmong folklores and their own family history. Storytelling and history-telling were important parts of traditional Hmong culture and livelihood. A Hmong child who learned the most Hmong folklores and knew the most about the family's history often grew up to become the leader of the family and the clan. Today, the keeper of the family's past is still the leader of the family and the clan. A Hmong leader knows all the secrets of his family and clan, and he is responsible for resolving all disputes involving his family and clan.

Despite this significance, history, I admit, has not always been my chosen field of academic inquiry. First, I previously had no strong motivation to do written history because written history, for the Hmong, was secondary to their oral tradition. In fact, most Hmong today still record their history not in books and on paper but in audiocassettes, videos and DVDs. Most Hmong also get their Hmong history lessons not from books but from Hmong-made documentary videos and radio programs throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and California. Only a smaller percent of the Hmong populations, namely college-educated Hmong students and professionals, ever pick up and read a book on Hmong history. Secondly, I initially did not pursue history because the history—indeed, the only history—that I had after coming to America in 1988 was United States history, and it was taught largely as a celebratory history of American progress that excluded the experiences of women, people of color, and the working class. It was about peoples and experiences foreign to my world and me; therefore, I felt it was not for me. Most of all, I felt that it was irrelevant and unnecessary

[1] Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933), 27, quoted in Peter Nakobov, *Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ix.

for me to delve deep into the American experience because the United States was only a temporary refuge for me and my family and not a permanent home. We did not feel welcomed and accepted in America, and we thought of going back to our homeland in Laos when it was safe and possible to do so.

Nevertheless, my desire to understand global conflicts and peacemaking soon led me back to U.S. history. Before coming to the University of Minnesota, I spent two years studying the religious expression of peace and justice at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado and a year studying international conflicts, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame. While I was in the International Peace Studies program at the University of Notre Dame, I realized that I needed a good understanding of U.S. and world history to better understand the different and often complex conflicts that engulfed societies throughout the world. In the end, I came to the University of Minnesota to deepen my understanding of U.S. and world history and prepare myself for work in conflict transformation and peacebuilding in the United States and overseas.

After I arrived in Minnesota in the fall of 2003, I met a Hmong person in the community who had been actively promoting what he called "Hmong nationalism." When he told me about the ongoing fighting between the Hmong and government forces in the Lao jungle and what he and other Hmong people had done to change the political climate back in Laos, I was naturally drawn to the issue. I knew then that this was something I wanted to explore and understand more. I wanted to understand what the conflict was about, and I wanted to understand why so many Hmong people in the United States continued to engage in the conflict in Laos. I also wanted to know why so many of them, especially the elder and middle generations, still wanted to go home even after several decades of life in America and what they had done to end the conflict at home and to try to go home. In a real sense, the dissertation was the product of my own desire to understand the root of that conflict in Laos and begin a discussion about ways to end the fighting and bring peace to the people in that country. It was a work inspired by my study of Black history/theology, Native American history/theology, Asian American history, and third-world liberation theologies, including *Minjung* theology out of Korea and *homeland* theology of Taiwan. It was also a work grounded in my study of Mahatma

Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and their principles of nonviolence at the Iliff School of Theology and in my training on human rights, conflict transformation and peacebuilding at Notre Dame.

As I explored the history of the conflict in Laos, I realized that my inevitable attraction to this history and this conflict was also shaped by my own life history. More specifically, I realized that this history was also my history. Our personal biography, C. Wright Mills pointed out, is inseparable from the public history, or the history of the community or society in which we live.[2] Like many of the Hmong involved in transnational politics who I chronicled in this dissertation, I was born in the immediate aftermath of the Secret War in Laos or in the immediate year following the Communist takeover of Laos. I spent the first four years of my life in the jungle of Laos living as "Chao Fa." Here I use the term "Chao Fa" in the broad sense of the word, which refers to all the people living in the Lao jungle after the Communists came to power in 1975. I then spent the next eight years of my life in two refugee camps in Thailand before coming to the United States. In hindsight, we could have come to the United States before 1988. However, like thousand of Hmong men in Ban Vinai refugee camp, my father adamantly refused to accept resettlement in a faraway land. He held firmly to the thought that life in Thailand was temporary and the hope that our safe return to the homeland was imminent. He agreed to resettle in the United States only after all our relatives had left the camp. In December 1987, we moved to Phanat Nikhom processing center near Bangkok, where we underwent physical exams to ensure that we were healthy and "clean" (that is, drug and disease free) before we could come to the United States. After nine months in Phanat Nikhom, we finally resettled in Marysville, California in September 1988.

In Thailand, I experienced what it was like to live as aliens in a foreign land and to be deprived of freedom. In both Ban Vinai and Phanat Nikhom, we were restricted to a limited geographical space. People caught outside the imaginary border in Ban Vinai and the barbwire in Phanat Nikhom were beaten, jailed, and forced to pay a fine. I had personally seen Thai security officers club Hmong men caught playing cards for leisure in Ban Vinai while I was on my way to a movie theatre in Center 3 one afternoon. As

[2] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

children, we used to frighten each other when playing cards to kill time with "Thaib tuaj lawm!" (The Thais are coming!). I heard that Thai officers gang-raped a mute woman in Center 1 while she was collecting firewood outside the border. Thai officers arrested and jailed my brother, Xe Vang, and his friend for coming home from their girlfriends' houses after curfew. I witnessed Thai officers whip a neighbor, Kaoyia Xiong, in Phanat Nikhom for buying candies outside the barb-wired fence for his little girl. I saw the pain of this man on his face and the agony of his daughter in her eyes. I understood what it was like to be a stateless people.

In the United States, in spite of the seemingly endless educational and economic opportunities in this country, life for my parent, many parents, elders and people in the community, including myself, had not been easy. As a teen growing up in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I saw how my parent and many parents and elders in the community struggled with life in the United States and how many of them dreamed of the day when they could return to Laos and reclaim their mountain homeland. I saw how, because of this dream and this desire to go home, many of them voluntarily contributed money to Hmong General Vang Pao's organization, the United Lao National Liberation Front, even if they did not know how the money was spent or what the organization was about.

I admit I could not understand their profound desire to return to Laos until I went to Shanghai, China in the summer of 1998 to participate in a summer program administered through Harvard University called WorldTeach. I went there with a group of English-speaking teachers to teach English to Chinese students at Shanghai Middle School. At the time, I was not yet an American citizen. I only had a green card. When I applied to go on this program, the Department of Justice issued me what was known as a "Refugee Travel Document." With this document, I was able to check in and board the plane to go to China. However, when we landed in Shanghai, the officer at the gate did not recognize my travel document. Not all of my colleagues were American citizens, but all of them had passed through the gate because they carried recognizable passports from their countries. I, on the other hand, had no country. I kept telling the officer that I was an American and that I came from the United States. For the officer, I was surely not an American. I did not look like an "American" because an American was a white person.

Baffled, the officer consulted other officers. Still, none of them recognized my travel document. It was an embarrassing and humiliating experience. There was a long line behind me, and everyone was staring at me as if I was a criminal. I did not speak Chinese and could not understand what they said. I did not know how they made their decision, but somehow they decided to let me in.

During the three months that I was in Shanghai, I got up early everyday to do Tai Chi with one of the Chinese instructors at the school where we worked, and I closely observed the way that Chinese people interacted with one another on the streets and in other places. What I saw was joy and happiness on their faces. In 1998, Shanghai was the metropolis that it is today. China itself was not as wealthy and developed as it is today. Yet, the people were happy. I saw plenty of smiles. At the time, I remembered thinking how wonderful it would be to have our own country. Regardless of how poor the Chinese people were, they were happy. I wanted that for the Hmong people. To be sure, we lived in one of the most powerful and richest countries in the world. Yet, my parents and so many Hmong people were unhappy.

In the summer of 2006, I took my first trip back to Laos, a country I had left some thirty years ago when I was only four years old. I saw the same thing in the Hmong people in Laos that I saw in the people in China eight years earlier. The Hmong people in Laos were poor. They struggled financially; yet, they were happy. I also was joyful when I was with them. I felt a deep sense of connection and community with the Hmong people I met in Laos even though they were complete strangers to me. I saw the same expression of joy and happiness on the faces of other Hmong Americans who returned to visit Laos as well as those who had re-established long-term residence in the country. Many Hmong American visitors told me they felt relaxed in Laos, and they felt connected spiritually to that land. They had no depression, no anxiety, and no stress; they were happy.

My experiences in the refugee camps in Thailand and during my trips to China and later to Laos enabled me to understand better why many Hmong people continued to dream of the day when they could return home. These experiences allowed me to sympathize with those Hmong who continued to dream of having their own land or country. I understood why they wanted to find a Hmong land or country for the Hmong

to live because I experienced what it was like not to have a country. If I had carried a passport from a Hmong land or a Hmong state, for example, that Chinese officer would not question me. He would not hold me that long at the gate. Regardless of how tiny and impoverished our country might be, people would know us by our true name and identity. The Hmong people would have dignity, respect, and justice among peoples and nations of the world, and they would experience joy and happiness in their lives.

My own experience of displacement and alienation in Laos, Thailand, the United States, and China contributed to my interest in studying Hmong transnational politics. As I delved deeper into this study, I realized also that the lived experiences of many Hmong parents, elders and leaders in Southeast Asia and America shaped their desire and dream to return home and their politics. All of our experiences were, in turn, shaped and affected by larger historical, geopolitical, and institutional forces, including the Cold War, regional conflicts in Southeast Asia, and the welfare reform in the United States in the mid-1990s. In the end, therefore, my dissertation has become much more than a study of why some Hmong people still dream of going home and having their own land and what they have done try to achieve that dream. It also considers all the different political and institutional forces that shaped their everyday lives in Southeast Asia and the United States. It analyzes the forces that motivated them to engage in transnational politics or political acts to change the political climate back home so they could go home and the forces that affected the shifting nature of their politics since their exodus from Laos. Simply put, my dissertation is a study of the rise, fall, and resurgence of Hmong engagement with politics in the homeland of Laos from the diaspora since 1975.

I write this dissertation from a specific perspective. It is the perspective of someone who has lived through, seen, and shared much of the agonies of the Hmong people who spent much of their lives searching and struggling for a Hmong homeland as well as those who dedicated their lives to improve the quality of life for the Hmong people all over the world. I sometimes wish I could write this dissertation in Hmong, my native tongue, for Hmong is the language with which I am most comfortable. It is the language dearest and closest to my heart, and it is the language I feel most competent to use to express my deepest thoughts and emotions. However, I recognize that writing this dissertation in Hmong can be disadvantageous, the most conspicuous of which is the

failure to meet the basic requirement for graduation from my graduate program. Beyond this, if I write this dissertation in Hmong, few people will care to pick up and read it. Most Hmong people who read nowadays cannot read and write Hmong. Those who are literate in Hmong do not read but get their history through oral sources. My hope, then, is that I will someday be able to turn this written history into an oral source, not only to keep faith with the best practice of the Hmong tradition but also to be faithful to my commitment to bridge the academy to the community. As a historian grounded in the Hmong experience, I feel that my first obligation is to my community because it is my community that nurtures and sustains me, both spiritually and intellectually. I would not be the historian that I am today without the willingness of the people in my community to share their stories and their lives with me. I am a historian of a fabulous people—the Hmong people.

To say that I write this dissertation from a specific perspective is not to say that it is written chiefly for a Hmong audience. However, it is surely my intention to speak to a certain Hmong audience, particularly the younger generations who, more often than not, lack sufficient understanding of their root and their past. Separated from their past, many young Hmong persons are left with a vast and aching world, often filled with nothing more than the most destructive values of our society. I, too, am still trying to understand my own past and my people's past because the very educational system in which I found myself in America has denied me that history. Considered the best in the world, the U.S. educational system has failed to connect me to my world and help me find my place in that world. Even today, thousands of Hmong students will graduate from high school and even college and university without having read a single book on their own people's history, culture and identity. If in the process of speaking for myself and trying to understand my own history, I should happen to touch the souls of my Hmong brothers and sisters, so much the better. They too need their past, their culture, and their language in order to reclaim their identity and uphold their dignity, and they too need to find their story within the stories of pain and suffering, struggle and resilience, joy and courage of their forebears. One of my hopes is certainly that people of the Hmong diaspora, particularly young people, will be able to take hold of the experience presented in this work and find some way of knowing how it enters their lives and how they enter into that

experience. However confused about their identity and separated from their past they are, young people have a deep hunger and thirst for a just and righteous society and for personal lives filled with truth and integrity. They are also quick and ready to respond to the call to realize their best and most beautiful human possibilities. When they are connected to their forebears who led movements for liberation in history, they not only will find meaning in their own struggle, they will also, I believe, carry on the torch of freedom and struggle for human dignity in today's world. All aspiring Hmong intellectuals must share the task of exploring the history and the legacy of the Hmong freedom struggle of the twentieth century with our young people. We need to share the responsibility of empowering them to seek the wisdom, courage, and energy we all need to move our community forward, and we need to help develop a world in which it is possible for our children, their children, and future generation to nurture and express their best human potentials.

Many people have contributed to my completion of the doctoral program in U.S. History at the University of Minnesota and the dissertation this year. They offered support, encouragement, knowledge, critique, and inspiration. First, I must express my profound gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Erika Lee, for her constant motivation, guidance, critique, and inspiration. I am especially grateful that she placed her faith in me and asked the selection committee to accept me when I applied to the program without previous academic training in U.S. history. The task of completing my coursework, doing the research, and writing the dissertation would not be possible without her guidance. At one point during my study, I felt a bit dejected because no one seemed to care about what I was doing. I also lost sight of the value of my study and my work, but her assurance that I was important and that my work was essential to the department, the academy, and my own community kept me going. In a graduate seminar on Asian American History with Professor Lee, the first of its kind that I ever took since I began my education in America in 1988, I was especially pleased that we were reading some articles on the Hmong experience in America. Besides her constant motivation and intellectual challenge, I am thankful for her many letters of recommendation for all the numerous research grants and fellowships that I received, her careful reading and critique of the dissertation, and her sound advice on future revision.

I am also grateful to Dr. Ann Waltner for her continued support of my education and intellectual development. Because the department lacked a historian of Southeast Asia when I was still doing my coursework, Professor Waltner graciously agreed to allow me to do directed-study with her for two consecutive semesters. In the process, I came to know many of the leading historians and thinkers in the field of Southeast Asia. My reading of Thongchai's *Siam Mapped* and other works on native rebellions and colonial struggles against Western colonialism in Southeast Asia were instrumental in shaping my thinking about the Hmong displacement and resistance against French colonialism from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century and the emergence of modern nation-states in Southeast Asia.

I want to thank Dr. Malinda Lindquist for introducing me to the politics of the African American struggle for freedom in America and to critical analysis on the intertwined relation between race and science. The literatures on race and science, which I read in her graduate seminar, encouraged me to think very deeply about the treatment of Hmong refugees in the refugee camps, particularly on how race and science work together in the birth control campaigns and sterilization practices in the Ban Vinai refugee camp. Professor Lindquist's words of encouragement, sometimes hugs during difficult times, are dearly appreciated.

I also want to thank Dr. Zha Blong Xiong for his support of my own intellectual development into an independent thinker and my quest for a deeper understanding of the "Hmong world." Professor Xiong has been an inspirational mentor, older brother, and friend. He is the first Hmong professor to receive tenure at a major research university. In that spirit, he is an inspiration for all of us, emerging Hmong scholars. Thanks also to Professor Xiong for his willingness to serve on my dissertation committee and especially his careful reading of the dissertation, insightful critiques, and patient explanation for me of how all the different components in the dissertation fit together.

Thanks to Dr. Mai Na Lee and Dr. Jean O'Brien-Kehoe for their willingness to serve on the dissertation committee. I especially appreciate Mai Na's careful reading of the dissertation and knowledge of Hmong history. Even though Professor O'Brien-Kehoe did not see the final product of my research and writing and could not join us for

my final oral defense, I am grateful for her willingness to serve on the committee and her guidance up to the defense.

Besides these professors, I want to remember and express my gratitude to Dr. Vincent Harding and Dr. George E. Tinker of the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. Professor Harding was the first person to introduce me to the river of the Black freedom struggle in America and to encourage me to find my own river and the river of the Hmong struggle in America. He was the person to encourage me to delve deep into the Black experience and especially the Civil Rights Movement. Although I previously encountered Dr. Martin Luther King at Davidson College in North Carolina, I had not developed a deep appreciation for King and Mahatma Gandhi until I studied their thoughts on nonviolence with Professor Harding in Denver. Professor Tinker was the person to introduce me to the struggles and issues of Native Americans in the United States, particularly their intellectual battles against U.S. imperialism and the Euro-American philosophical cannons of civilization, modernity, rationality, science, and national sovereignty. This introduction enabled me to see the different roots of indigenous epistemology and question the superiority of Western intellectual and philosophical tradition. Professor Tinker's *Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* continues to inspire me and inform my understanding of justice.[3] The writings that Professor Tinker introduced to me while I was his student at the seminary, such as those by Vine Deloria and Ward Churchill, continue to inform my intellectual thinking to this day.

I wish to thank the History Department for giving me the opportunity to be a part of it and for providing me with a space to nurture my own intellectual growth and develop my pedagogical skills both as a teaching assistant and as a graduate instructor. I am especially grateful for the fellowship during my first year and other funding that the department had offered me during my years in the program, including a one-semester departmental fellowship and a summer research grant after I became ABD. These small grants enabled me to complete my archival researches in a timely fashion. I am also grateful and happy to be the first Hmong student ever to graduate from this department.

[3] George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

My hope is that I will not be the last Hmong person to graduate from this department, and that many more Hmong will gain acceptance to the program and graduate from it after I have left.

A special gratitude and appreciation goes to the Office of International Programs at the University of Minnesota for awarding me with the OIP International Pre-Dissertation and Small Grant for the summer of 2007. This grant enabled me to travel back to Laos to conduct interviews with Hmong Americans who, after several decades of living in exile, decided to return to live under the same socialist government they once fled. This same grant also enabled me to do archival research at the Thailand Information Center at Thailand's largest university, Chulalongkhorn University, in Bangkok. A much deserved thanks also goes to the Graduate School of Fellowships for awarding me with the Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for the academic year of 2008-09. This award allowed me to devote full time to research and writing. Most of all, a very special thanks goes to Lynet Uttal, Director of Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for granting me a teaching position for the 1009-2010 academic year. My work as the Visiting Instructor in Hmong American Studies at UW-Madison gave me the necessary motivation and enthusiasm to finish writing my dissertation this year.

A special thanks goes to Marlin Heise at the Hmong Archives in St. Paul for spending countless hours with me, digging through their collections and materials, many unorganized and uncategorized, just so I could get the materials I needed. Gratitude also goes to Daniel Necas at the Immigration History Research Center for allowing me to use the materials from the International Institute of Minnesota and the Refugee Studies Center for my dissertation research. I also want to thank Ann Frank at the Southeast Asian Archive at UC-Irvine for giving me access to the library's special collections on Hmong refugees in the Phanat Nikhom processing center.

I want to thank Lisong Liu and Masako Nakamura for their friendship and the many intellectually stimulating conversations we shared about our coursework and the dissertation research and writing. All of us were able to finish our research and writing because of the emotional support that we gave to each other. I also want to thank Yuepheng Xiong, Tzianeng Vang, Long Yang, Xang Vang, Tou Pao Lor, Dr. Shoua Yang at St. Cloud State University, Dr. Chia Youyee Vang at University of Wisconsin-

Milaukee, Chong Moua, Mai Zong Vue, Dr. Prasit (Tsav Txhiaj) Leeprecha at Chiang Mai University in Thailand, and Larry Ashmun for their friendship. I want to thank Ruth Pittard for all the hugs she gave me while I was an undergraduate student at Davidson College and her continued support of my education. I am especially grateful that she continued to encourage me to remain true to my culture, my people, and myself. She remains a great friend and mentor.

I especially want to express my profound gratitude and appreciation for my very best friend and brother, Yia S. Lor. Yia and I have been friends since high school, and we continue to give each other emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and even financial support to this day. Without Yia's friendship, my life in Minnesota would have been very lonely. His friendship made my life in Minnesota, away from my family, more meaningful and whole. In Yia, I found not only a friend but also a brother and a family. His parents, aunts and uncles, and other members of his extended family made me feel like I was a part of their family. I am, therefore, forever thankful for all the conversations we shared about our struggles, dreams, and hopes and for the love he and his extended family had given my wife and me.

I could not have completed this dissertation project without the Hmong people who consented to speak with me and share their lives and stories with me. So a very thanks goes to all the people who shared something of their lives with me. Listening to their stories, I learned about Hmong history, their struggles and sacrifices, their dreams and visions, their hopes and wishes, as well as their pain and agonies. From them, I learned great life lessons about humility, kindness, compassion, and grace of spirit. I am forever indebted to those who welcomed me into their lives and allowed me to become a part of their river of struggle and their journey of life.

I must also express my profound gratitude for my parents and my wife's parents for their love and continued support of my education. Both my father and mother are illiterate. They did not have any opportunity to get an education back in Laos. They could not speak, read or write Lao and Thai, but they were brave enough to take us across the Mekong River to Thailand and later the Pacific Ocean to the United States. I admire their courage and bravery, and I am forever grateful that they brought us to the United States even though they did not and still do not know what America has in store for their

children. Similarly, my wife's parents did not have an opportunity to get an education back in Laos. They only understand enough English to find assembly work in factories in Minnesota. Each has to work two or three jobs to earn enough income to cover all the expenses. For us children, they set good examples. They are good role models. Their hard work ethic teaches us not to be indolent but to work hard to succeed and survive in this country. My wife and I are forever indebted to them for their love and support of our education.

At last, I want to express my deepest gratitude and everlasting appreciation for my wife, Choua Her, the person who most helped me and who more than anyone made the completion of my coursework and dissertation possible. I especially want to thank her for her love, understanding, and continued support of my education. Her understanding enabled me to go to Thailand to study Thai language for three months and travel to Laos, Thailand, and various places in the United States to conduct research. Her love and compassion allowed me to go to California to care for my ailing mother for months at a time. While others criticized that I had been in school too long, she never gave up hope in me. Her faith sustained me, her guidance and wisdom improved me, and her love made me whole. This work belongs to her.

DEDICATION

For my parents, Nao Va Vang and Chao Lee,
who, although illiterate, were brave enough to bring us across the Mekong River
and later the Pacific Ocean to America

For all my siblings, but especially
Sao, Sue, May, and Kou,
in the hope that all Hmong children of their generation
and posterity will read this dissertation and find ways to connect their own struggle
with the river of struggle of their parents and ancestors
and bring their forebears' dream of a more peaceful, just, and democratic world
into reality

For all the Hmong people
who struggled, bled, and died
to bring peace and justice to their people
and put the Hmong name in history books and on the world map

and

For my wife, Choua Her,
for her love, her continued support of my education,
and her understanding of the hard work of research and writing

ABSTRACT

This dissertation documents the historical development of the transnational politics of the Hmong, a people who came to the United States as refugees from the Vietnam War, from 1975 when the Hmong left Laos to 2010 when the Lao PDR government rejected Hmong leader Vang Pao's request to return to Laos. Drawing on archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and oral history interviews in Laos, Thailand, and the United States, it interrogates how and why the Hmong diaspora continued to engage in Lao national politics from exile. What role did the Hmong diaspora play in the ongoing fighting in Laos? In what ways, under what conditions, and to what extent did the Hmong diaspora transcend domestic political systems and engage in non-domestic (i.e. international or transnational) ones? How did the bilateral and multilateral relations between the United States and Asian nation-states, particularly Laos, Vietnam, China, and Thailand, affect Hmong transnational politics and the political, economic, and social status of Hmong Americans? What impact did Hmong transnational politics have on the bilateral relation between the United States and their Asian homeland of Laos? It examines the disparate political and institutional forces that shaped the rise, fall and resurgence of Hmong transnational politics, including the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, the Communist revolution and the Second Secret War in Laos, the Communist insurgency in Thailand, and the Second Cold War, the 1996 Welfare Reform and the War on Terror in the United States. It shows that Hmong transnational politics, as a legacy of the U.S. military intervention in the Secret War in Laos in the 1960s, emerged in part to redress the human rights abuses back home and in part to rebuild broken lives and shattered communities in the diaspora. Ultimately, it argues that the Hmong failed to "liberate" Laos not only because the Hmong were divided and ambiguous about their desired goal in Laos but also because Thailand, China, and the United States solely used the Hmong to protect their own geopolitical interests. They never supported the call of the Hmong for self-determination or intended to save them from communist persecution in Laos.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

In October 1979, Tou Yi Vang, a 35-year-old Hmong man, and his wife immigrated from a small village in northern Laos to the United States. From 1961 to 1971 and 1973 to 1975, Vang was a military officer in a clandestine army in Laos that the United States had supported and funded during the Vietnam War. On December 12, 1979, two months after arriving in America, Tou Yi testified before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that, in August and September of 1977, while he was still in Laos, Pathet Lao forces attacked his village and others "with rockets from small airplanes." Pathet Lao forces, he said, "would see smoke from our cooking fires then attack. The planes came every several days." In one attack, "eight people died from breathing too much gas," by which he meant the chemical poisons that the Pathet Lao allegedly used on the Hmong in his village and in the Lao jungle. "They had heavy bleeding from the nose," he added. "They could not stop their bodies from shaking and died in several hours." After relocating several times inside Laos, Vang escaped to Thailand by crossing the Mekong River in the middle of the night on April 17, 1978. He lived in Nong Khai and Ban Vinai refugee camps until October 1979 when he and his wife came to the United States.[4]

On the Friday morning of January 25, 1991, a group of 250 Lao and Hmong people gathered in bitter cold at the state capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota to protest Thailand's repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos. The protest was a reaction to the news circulating in various large Hmong communities in the United States that the Thai government, backed by the first Bush administration, planned to shut down all refugee camps, namely Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham and Na Pho, by the end of 1992. Fear of possible retaliation and brutality against the forced repatriates proliferated in Hmong communities throughout the United States. "If the Thai government forces all refugees back to Laos, they will be killed. The Lao government doesn't like refugee," exclaimed

[4] Tou Yi Vang, Statement on Chemical Warfare in Indochina, Before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 12 December 1979, in Ogden Williams Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University.

Chao Lee, whose father-in-law and cousin were still in the camp.[5] Five months later, in June of 1991, the Hmong across the United States took the issue of Hmong repatriation to the steps of the capitol in Washington, D.C. Carrying signs that read "Don't trade refugees for money," "We need humanitarian assistance from the U.S.," and "Chemical weapon is being used in Laos," they asked the first Bush administration to end its economic aid to the Lao PDR. For the Hmong in the protests, giving $30 million in aid to the Lao PDR government and Thailand to assist the repatriation of Hmong refugees only served to increase the power of the communist Lao PDR government to acquire guns, ammunitions, and other weapons to decimate the Hmong people in Laos.[6]

Thirteen years later, on the morning of June 15, 2004, twelve Hmong teens gathered at the steps of the state capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota, with Zhong Khang Yang, a local Hmong activist, and their parents. These young activists sought to bring more publicity to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. Many of them held signs that read "Stop Killing the Hmong" and "Save the Hmong People." Like the Hmong who protested the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos in June 1991, these young activists wanted to demonstrate their commitment to freedom both at the state and federal levels, but they wanted to do it not by flying or driving but by walking from St. Paul to Washington, D.C. "Know in your hearts that the Hmong in the jungles of Laos appreciate your compassion and determination to set them free," Mai Sue Xiong, one of the young organizers of the event, said to the crowd of Hmong supporters.[7] "Just remember that while you go on living a decent life, a decent job with a nice family, these Hmong people are dying in Laos," added Amee Xiong, another young women organizer. "These Hmong people are killed because they were part of the 'Secret War' and did not

---

[5] James Walsh, "Laotians, Hmong Protest Camp Closing," *Star Tribune*, 26 January 1991, p. 3A.

[6] See photo in Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos 1942-1992*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993): 322. Hmong protests against the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees in Thailand were continual occurrences throughout the early 1990s. Their protests were widely documented and reported. See, Les Suzukamo, "Hmong Fight Plan to Send Refugee Kin Back to Laos," *Pioneer Press*, 8 June 1991; Wendy S. Tai, "Returning to Laos frightens Hmong: Refugees' Pleas reach Twin Cities," *Star Tribune*, 24 June 1991, p. 1B; Kevin Duchschere, "St. Paul Hmong fear for refugees facing ouster from camps," *Star Tribune*, 24 April 1992, p. 1B; Wendy Tai, "Hmong fear refugees might be forced back to Laos," *Star Tribune*, 18 May 1992, p. 4A; "Hmong Protest Against Repatriation," *Washington Inquirer*, 18 December 1992, p. 4; Louis Galvan The, "Hmong rally in Fresno for U.S. intervention," *Fresno Bee*, 27 April 1994, p. A18; Heron M. Estrada, "Laotians Hope to Halt Repatriation," *Star Tribune*, 28 May 1995, p.1A.

[7] Mai Sue Xiong, prepared statement, speech delivered at state capitol, St. Paul, MN, 15 June 2004, in Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

get the opportunity to come to America, as you and I. These Hmong people are still waiting for all of us to help them from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. I am very disappointed and sad at the lack of awareness in the U.S. Congress of the issue of the suffering Hmong people in the jungles of Laos….I have become very passionate about this issue because *these Hmong people are OUR PEOPLE*."[8] In shorts and T-shirts, they began their "Long Walk for Freedom" passing Senator Betty McCollum's office on Selby and Western Ave and heading east toward Highway 61 into Wisconsin. Three hundred other Hmong people waited for them in Washington, D.C. and walked the last two miles with them to their final destination. By the time they reached the steps of the national capitol on August 18, they had walked through the hottest stretch of the summer for 1,200 miles, survived the torturous rigors of walking up-and-down steep mountainsides, and overcame numerous death threats. Some even managed to burn some calories and shed a few pounds along the way.[9] With this walk, they transcended geographical boundaries and made real the late Dr. Martin Luther King's words that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."[10]

Three years later, on June 4, 2007, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents arrested General Vang Pao, seven Hmong supporters—Lo Chao Thao, Lo Thao, Youa True Vang, Hue Vang, Chong Yang Thao, and Seng Vue, Chue Lo—and a retired U.S. army officer named Harrison Ulrich Jack in California. Vang Pao was the Hmong military leader who, recruited by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), organized a clandestine Hmong guerilla army to fight against communist forces in Laos on behalf of the United States in the 1960s. The jailed conspirators allegedly plotted a violent overthrow of the communist Lao PDR government.[11] Reviewing the case, Tim Weiner of the *New York Times* magazine wrote that Vang Pao was charged as a "Laotian bin-ladin" who plotted to "murder thousands and thousands of people just like Islamic

---

[8] Amee Xiong, prepared statement, speech delivered at state capitol, St. Paul, MN, 15 June 2004, in Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

[9] Wameng Moua, "Arrived! The Long Walk for Freedom reaches Washington D.C." *Hmong Times*, (August 26, 2004): 1 & 10; Ching Lo, "Amee Xiong—Study, Work, Volunteer," *Hmong Today*, (March 10, 2005): 11.

[10] Martin Luther King, "Letters form Birmingham City Jail," The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., edited by James M. Washington, (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), 290.

[11] United States v. Harrison Ulrich Jack, Case No. 207-MJ-0178 (E.D. Cal. Filed June 4, 2007), at http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/press_release/docs/2007/06-04-07JackComplaint.pdf.

fundamentalists did to the United States on September 11, 2001." If convicted, Vang Pao would have spent the rest of his life in prison.[12]

Immediately, Vang Pao's arrest sent thousands of Hmong in the United States scurrying for action to get the United States government to drop the charges against their leader. On September 18, 2009, after more than two years of community outcry and rally, the United States government dropped all the charges against Vang Pao. Federal prosecutors did not explain their decision to drop the charges against Vang Pao other than that, after two years of sifting through the available evidences, they did not have enough proof to prosecute him.[13] On December 22, 2009, three months after U.S. federal authorities dropped the charges against him, Vang Pao announced in Fresno, California, that he wanted to return to Laos after thirty-five years in exile to negotiate for peace. On January 11, 2010, the general said, he would meet with Lao officials at the Friendship Bridge between Nong Khai, Thailand, and Vientiane, Laos, to discuss peace and reconciliation between the Hmong in the diaspora and the Lao government and bring an end to the conflict in Laos. "We have to make a change right now," Vang Pao said to a crowd of Hmong supporters. "The government of Laos has tried to open the door. We should put something on the table and sit down in peace."[14]

The above are disparate and diverse stories of Hmong participation in the political life of the United States. They reveal the rich and complex political world of Hmong Americans—a people who came to the United States as refugees from the Vietnam War. In the 1960s, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency recruited the Hmong to fight against communist forces in Laos. When the communists came to power, they retaliated against the Hmong and targeted them for persecution, forcing hundreds and thousands of Hmong into exile. Since 1975, more than 150,000 Hmong had found refuge in the diaspora,

---

[12] Tim Weiner, "General Vang Pao's Last War," 48.

[13] Stephen Magagnini, "Hmong Express Relief Over End of Case for Vang," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009; Denny Walsh, "Feds Drop Charges Against Hmong Leader Vang Pao," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009; Eric Bailey and My-Thuan Tran, "Charges Against Californian Hmong Leader Accused of Plotting to Overthrow Lao Government Are Dropped," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 2009; Jesse McKinley, "U.S. Drops Case Against Exiled Hmong Leader," *New York Times*, 19 September 2009;

[14] Stephen Magagnini, "Vang Pao Says He's Return to Laos: Ex-General Is Aiming for Reconciliation," Sacramento Bee, 23 December 2009; Kim Briggeman, "General Who Brought Hmong to Bitterroot, Missoula Vows Liberation of Those Left in Laos," The Missoulian, 26 December 2009; Roger Warner, "No Thanks to the State Department, the Last Remnant of the Vietnam War May Be About to End," *The Huntington Post*, 23 December 2009.

including the United States, France, French Guyana, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and Germany. Many Hmong in the United States have become naturalized Americans. Others are citizens by birth. Yet, as the above stories of Hmong political participation in the United States illustrates, the Hmong, despite their naturalized citizenship status, did not completely sever their ties to their homeland of Laos. Their acculturation into American society did not end their interest and involvement in the political affairs in their homeland or country of origin. What all the above stories of Hmong political participation in the United States have in common—whether it was Tou Yi Vang's testimony on chemical warfare in Laos in 1979, the protests against the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos in 1991, the Long Walk For Freedom in 2004, the alleged plot by Vang Pao and his co-conspirators to overthrow the Lao PDR government in 2007, or the proposal by Vang Pao in 2009 to return to Laos to negotiate peace and reconciliation to end the fighting in the Lao jungle—is the intertwined relations of the Hmong in the United States with their homeland of Laos.

The above stories of Hmong political participation in the United States also illustrate that the Hmong in the United States saw that their community is not just a U.S. geographically bounded community but a global community, and that they recognized their community in the United States as an integral part of the "colonized" people at home. They understood that the freedom of the Hmong in the United States was inextricably bound with the freedom of their brethren back in the homeland of Laos. Most of all, these stories suggest that, from the outset, the Hmong continued to build, sustain, and reinforce links from their host country, or the country of settlement, to the homeland through the conflict in the homeland, and that the political world of Hmong Americans always encompassed much more than electoral or ethnic politics alone. While the above political acts transpired in the United States, they carried implications that transcended the U.S. geopolitical border and they intertwined with the Hmong's Asian homeland. They were the transnational political activities of Hmong Americans in relation to Laos. Simply put, they were acts of Hmong transnational politics.

Despite the salience and importance of transnational politics to Hmong life, community development and social organization in the United States, little has been written on the subject. Exploring this important political phenomenon in the Hmong

diasporic community—a phenomenon that invites the perpetual charge of the Hmong as "foreigners" and, as we have seen with Vang Pao and his alleged co-conspirators, as "terrorists," as well as one that makes the political life of Hmong Americans, a stateless people, unique in our multiracial American society—is the purpose of this dissertation.

Why Hmong Transnational Politics?

In the early 1980s, studies on Hmong "politics," understood in its broadest sense of the word, largely focus on Hmong traditional leadership structures, the role of Hmong kinship systems and the impact of their resettlement on their leadership roles and structure. These included, for example, Cheu Thao's 1982 study of Hmong migration and leadership in Laos and the United States and Timothy Dunnigan's 1982 study of kinship system and politics in U.S. urban society.[15] The same interest on Hmong leadership continued to appear in scholarship in the 1990s. In 1994, Jeremy Hein, for example, studied Hmong leaders' responses to experiences of inequality and found that those leaders who perceived themselves as "migrants" in America interpreted experiences of inequality simply as misunderstandings. Meanwhile, Hmong leaders who saw themselves as ethnic "minorities" in America saw experiences of inequality as intentional acts of racial hostility.[16] In a 1997 study of Hmong leadership, Hein found significant continuity in "leadership status" in the Hmong American community but significant changes in "leadership careers." Significant Hmong leaders in the homeland either retained some leadership positions in the community in America or had sons and daughters who were in leadership positions in America. Nevertheless, the leadership positions that their sons and daughters occupied were significantly different from those that they held in the homeland.[17] Distinct from this group of literatures on Hmong leadership and kinship structure was George Scott's important study of Hmong separatist

---

[15] Cheu Thao, "Hmong Migration and Leadership in Laos and the United States," in *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, eds. Bruce Downing and Douglas Olney, (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1982), 99-121; Timothy Dunnigan, "Segmentary Kinship in an Urban Society," Anthropological Quarterly 55, no. 3, (1982): 126-136.
[16] Jeremy Hein, "From Migrants to Minority: Hmong Refugees and the Social Construction of Identity in the U.S.," *Sociological Inquiry* 64, no. 3, (1994): 281-306.
[17] Jeremy Hein, "Leadership Continuity and Change in Hmong American Community," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 6, no. 2, (1997): 213-228.

aspiration and political movement in Laos in 1990.[18] Most studies on Hmong politics in the United States appeared in the 2000s. Given that the Hmong began to gain political recognition only after the mid-1990s when Hmong candidates increasingly won public offices in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California, it is not surprising that most scholarship on Hmong politics appeared after the new millennium. In 2002, Victor Hwang published a study on Hmong Americans' struggle to retain their welfare and Social Security Income (SSI) benefits during welfare reform in the mid-1990s.[19] Taeko Yoshikawa's study four years later explored the political ascendancy of Mee Moua from her years as a refugee in Thailand to becoming the first Hmong state senator in Minnesota.[20] Steven Doherty's 2007 study analyzed Hmong political behaviors and revealed that the Hmong had a cultural affinity for politics. In general, they expressed very favorable opinions about political participation, and many encouraged their children to participate in the political life of the United States.[21] Yang Lor's 2009 comparative analysis of Hmong political involvement in St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California, where he found that the Hmong in St. Paul were more active politically because they had more socioeconomic resources, was the latest study of Hmong politics in the United States.[22]

Except Scott's 1990 study of Hmong separatist aspirations in Laos, all these studies have as their focuses what I call *ethnic politics*, that is, the participation of the Hmong in mainstream U.S. politics as an ethnic or racial minority in the United States. In ethnic politics, the political act transpires in the United States and does not transcend American borders. The focus of the political act is not on the homeland or country of origin but on the hostland or country of settlement. The goal is not to change the political condition in the homeland or to mobilize segments of the diasporic population to return home. It is to encourage the diasporic population to integrate or assimilate into the host

---

[18] George C. Scott, "Hmong Aspirations for A Separate State in Laos," in Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective, eds. Ralph R. Premdas, S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, and Alan B. Anderson, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 111-125.
[19] Victor M. Hwang, "The Hmong Campaign for Justice: A Practitioner's Perspective," Asian Law Journal 9, no. 83, (2002): 83-115.
[20] Taeko Yoshikawa, "From a Refugee Camp to the MN State Senate: A Case Study of a Hmong American Women's Challenge," Hmong Studies Journal 7, (2006): 1-23.
[21] Steven Doherty, "Political Behavior and Candidate Emergence in Hmong-American Community," Hmong Studies Journal 8, (2007): 1-35.
[22] Yang Lor, "Hmong Political Involvement in St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California," Hmong Studies Journal 10, (2009): 1-53.

society. Simply put, studies on Hmong ethnic politics have a domestic focus, and they aim largely at assessing the level of Hmong acculturation into American society. They explore how and whether the Hmong in the United States vote in electoral contests at the local, state, and federal levels, or how and whether they are engaged in civic actions through any of the institutions of U.S. civil society.

Several factors have contributed to this overwhelming emphasis on Hmong ethnic politics. The first has do with the politics and pressures of U.S. refugee settlement policies, the primary objective of which was to assimilate the new arrivals into U.S. society as soon as possible. To assimilate the Hmong, U.S. resettlement agencies dispersed them all over the United States when they began arriving from the refugees camps in Thailand in the 1970s and 1980s. In accordance with U.S. resettlement policies, most studies on the Hmong to the end of the 1980s also had as their focuses the adaptation of the Hmong to America culture and society.[23] Studies on Hmong political life in the United States inevitably followed this liberal integrationist research framework with their emphases on the political participation of the Hmong in relation to American domestic politics. The emphasis on the domestic dimension of Hmong politics in the scholarship also has to do with the increasing visibility and influence of Hmong American voters, campaign organizers, and elected officials at least at the city and state levels in states like Minnesota, Wisconsin and California, and the success and visibility of Hmong civic engagement through the formation of non-profit self-help organizations and mutual aid assistance associations in practically all cities with sizable Hmong populations in the United States. Most of all, the overwhelming emphasis on Hmong ethnic politics in the scholarship is due to the long-standing emphasis placed on electoral politics in research dealing with American racial and immigrant groups by political scientists.[24]

Few studies have focused on political acts by the Hmong that transpired in the United States but transcended national borders, linking the Hmong in the diaspora to their

---

[23] See, for example, Brice T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, eds., *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*, (Minneapolis: Southeast Asian Refugee Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1982); Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, *The Hmong in Transition*, (Minneapolis: Southeast Asian Refugee Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1986).

[24] Don T. Nakanishi, "Forward," in *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans*, edited by Christian Collet and Pei-te Lien, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), ix.

homeland, or what I consider their *transnational politics*. In contrast to ethnic politics, transnational politics focuses on the homeland, rather than the hostland. The goal in transnational politics is to change the political situation back home in order for the diaspora to return home or to advocate for human rights and democracy for their co-ethnics back home. To date, there were Gary Yia Lee's 2000 and 2008 articles that analyzed how the politics of Hmong "messianic freedom fighters" and "exiled politicians" in the diaspora after 1975 intertwined with the politics of other nations, including Vietnam, China, Thailand, and the United States.[25] Noticeably absent from Lee's important studies were the voices of the political actors themselves and, more importantly, the impact of domestic or ethnic politics on the transnational politics of these messianic freedom fighters and exiled politicians. Lee did not explore how domestic politics, such as the welfare reform and Hmong Americans' struggle for naturalization in the United States, affected their transnational politics. Nor did Lee explore how the experiences of displacement and alienation in the diaspora or in their host societies affected their desire to return home and the way that their framed their political engagements with the homeland. Shoua Yang attempted to incorporate the voices of the participants in his 2006 dissertation of Hmong organizations, including the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos and the United Lao National Liberation Front, but he kept "resource mobilization," rather than the political actors themselves, at the center of his study. The relation between domestic politics and transnational politics and the impact of other larger global and historical forces on Hmong transnational politics were also rendered invisible in his study.[26] Chia Y. Vang's 2009 study also incorporated the voices of the Hmong, but her focus was limited largely to the activities of the United Lao National Liberation Front and its cognate, the United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction. Not only did she exclude discussion of Pa Kao Her's Ethic Liberation Organization of Laos and other transnational political organizations, Vang also discussed the activities of the ULNLF and the ULCPFR largely within an anti-

[25] Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits and Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," Indigenous Affairs 4, (2000): 6-15; Gary Yia Lee, "Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims of Totalitarianism or Terrorists," in A Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia, ed. A.T.H. Tan, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2007), 352-373.
[26] Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: Formation and Maintenance of Hmong American Organizations," (Ph.D diss., University of Northern Illinois, 2006).

Communist discourse. She did not explain why Vang Pao supporters received training and arms from Communist China.[27]

To date, the two most comprehensive studies of Hmong political engagement with issues in the homeland were Jane Hamilton-Merritt's *Tragic Mountains* and Keith Quincy's *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*. Each of them offered a starkly different portrait of Hmong engagement with the homeland. At the center of their analyses was General Vang Pao, the Hmong military leader recruited by the CIA to organize and lead a clandestine army to fight against Communist forces in Laos in the 1960s. In *Tragic Mountains*, Hamilton-Merritt, a journalist and photographer who was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1969 for her reporting during the Vietnam War and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998 for her work on behalf of the Hmong, characterized Vang Pao as a Hmong hero who fought hard to bring freedom and justice to his people but was turned away and silenced by the world community, including Thailand, the United States, the United Nations, and most other nations. In contrast, Quincy portrayed Vang Pao as a man who, intent on leaving the fighting in Laos to the Chao Fa, sprang to action in the late 1970s to early 1980s only to compete against the Chao Fa for community resources and loyalty and someone who consequently used the conflict in Laos as a pretense to collect millions of dollars from the Hmong people in the diaspora. While Hamilton-Merritt praised Vang Pao and derided Pa Kao Her, leader of the Chao Fa movement, Quincy criticized Vang Pao while praising the Chao Fa messianic movement.[28]

Their contrasting portraits of Vang Pao and the Chao Fa received different reviews and critiques from scholars of various disciplines. So far, only a few scholarly reviews of Quincy's work exist. Charles W. Hayford of Northwestern University commended Quincy for his portrayal of the Hmong experience and the history of Laos with "deep feeling, telling detail, and occasional dark humor."[29] Meanwhile, another reviewer praised Quincy for his "well-written narrative" that clearly showed that "the secret war's biggest losers were the Hmong, who did most of the fighting—and dying—

---

[27] Chia Youyee Vang, "Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad," in Anti-Communist Minorities in the United States: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees, (New York: Plagrave Macmilan, 2009), 211-231.
[28] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000).
[29] Charles W. Hayford, review of *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*, by Keith Quincy, *Library Journal*, (August 2000): 131.

against the North Vietnamese."[30] There are, however, numerous reviews of Hamilton-Merritt's *Tragic Mountains*, and the reviews were mixed. James Reckner of Texas Tech University, for example, applauded Hamilton-Merritt for "her grave indictment of American policy toward the Hmong since 1975," and Loren Crabtree of Colorado State University praised Hamilton-Merritt for her "fair, accurate account of the Laotian war, of American covert operations there, and the great human tragedy that has overtaken the Hmong."[31] Colonel Darrel Whitcomb of the United States Air Force added that *Tragic Mountains* was a "well-documented and well-written book" and a "necessary reading for anyone desiring a more thorough and complete understanding of the Southeast Asia war."[32] Others, however, described the book as "good journalism," but not "history" and not of good scholarship.[33] Meanwhile, Alfred McCoy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in a patronizing manner, began his review of the book: "Journalist Jane Hamilton-Merritt, who almost won a Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the Vietnam War, has almost written an interesting book on the CIA's secret war in Laos." He challenged the integrity of Hamilton-Merritt's work because of her "intrusive ideological biases and quirky, self-styled advocacy for the Hmong."[34] The harshest and most extensive criticism of Hamilton-Merritt's work came from Frank Proschan who concluded that *Tragic Mountains* was "no more than 'rumor, innuendo, propaganda and disinformation,' no matter how much it pretends to be a work of scholarship."[35] Hence, in spite of its importance to our understanding of the political life of the Hmong in the United States

---

[30] Review of *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*, by Keith Quincy, *Publishers' Weekly*, (26 July 2000): 65.

[31] James R. Reckner, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1, (June 1994): 334-335; Loren Crabtree, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *The History Teacher* 34, no. 1, (Nov. 2000): 132-133.

[32] Darrel Whitcomb, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Military Review* 74, no. 7, (July 1994).

[33] Maris McCrabb, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Journal of Military History* 58, no. 1, (January 1994): 170-171; John Prados, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 2, (April 1994): 530; and Anthony Walker, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, no. 2, (September 1996): 435-438.

[34] Alfred McCoy, review of *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 3, (August 1993): 777-780.

[35] Frank Proschan, "Review Essay: Rumor, Innuendo, Propaganda, and Disinformation," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 28, no. 1, (1996): 52-63.

and elsewhere in the diaspora, Hmong transnational politics is still not fully understood and appreciated. By and large, it remains noticeably absent in existing Hmong political historiography. Ultimately, it is my hope that my account of this complicated Hmong political history will strike a balance between Quincy's *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat* on the one hand and Jane Hamilton-Merritt's *Tragic Mountains* on the other and shed new light on this crucial piece of Hmong political participation in the diaspora after the Secret War.

The ethnic politics of the Hmong in the United States will continue to be important, but the transnational politics of the Hmong also deserves serious scholarly and policy attention. To see the significant ways in which Hmong Americans have engaged and been affected by political activities, processes, relationships, and actors that are non-domestic or transnational in nature, particularly as they relate to their ancestral homeland of Laos, a focus on ethnic politics alone will not suffice. In the twenty first century, the international political dimension of the Hmong political experience in the diaspora may become even more prominent with the endurance and increasing strength of Hmong transnational relations, abetted by globalization and the growth of the internet and other media technologies. The transnational politics of the Hmong also need more engaged scholarly and policy attention because of the continued and growing impact that the Hmong in the diaspora have on the political, economic and social realities of the Hmong both in the United Sates and back in the homeland, the hostland and homeland governments, and the bilateral and multilateral relations between the United States and Asian nation-states, particularly Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and China. To gain a more complete and dynamic understanding of Hmong American politics than is possible by focusing exclusively on ethnic politics, I bring together disparate, diverse, and complex stories of Hmong political experiences in Laos, Thailand, and the United States after 1975 in this dissertation. To that end, I ask:

- What is Hmong transnational politics?
- How and why did it begin?
- Who were the people involved?
- How did they sustain their politics once they started it?

- How did the bilateral and multilateral relations between the United States and Asian nation-states, particularly Laos, Vietnam, China, and Thailand, affect the evolution (the development, growth, even decline) of the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora as well as the political, economic, and social status of Hmong Americans?
- What impact, if any, did the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora have on the bilateral and multilateral relations between the United States and their Asian homeland of Laos?
- How is their transnational politics related to their ethnic politics?
- How are the political behavior and identities of Hmong Americans shaped by their transnational ties?
- What is the future of Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora?

In short, this dissertation analyzes the rise, decline and resurgence, or the shifting nature, of Hmong transnational politics from 1975, when the Hmong left their homeland of Laos into exile as refugees in Thailand, the United States, and other Western nations, to 2010, when Vang Pao announced and the Lao PDR government rejected his request to return to Laos to negotiate peace and negotiation with the Lao PDR government.

In relating the particulars of the story of the political experiences of the Hmong in the diaspora, this dissertation, I hope, partly answers the call for more global, international, and transnational approaches to the politics of Asian Americans that scholars like Don Nakanishi, Christian Collet, and Pei-te Lien have asked us to explore more in the field of Asian American Studies. I envision this dissertation as an addendum to the splendid collection of essays on the transnational politics of Asian Americans in *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans*, edited by Christian Collet and Pei-te Lien, in which the transnational politics of Hmong Americans is conspicuously absent, and to H. Mark Lai's recent study of the transnational politics of Chinese Americans.[36] In what

[36] Christian Collet and Pei-te Lien, eds., *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); H. Mark Lai, *Chinese American Transnational Politics*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Don T. Nakanish, *In Search of a New Paradigm: Minorities in the Context of International Politics*, (Denver: Studies in Race and Nations, Center for International Race Relations, University, 1975); Pei-te Lien, "Transnational Homeland Concerns and Participation in U.S. Politics: A Comparison among Immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong," *Journal of Chinese*

ways, under what conditions, and to what extent do Asian Americans transcend domestic politics and engage in transnational or international politics? In what ways, under what conditions, and to what extent do United States relation with their Asian homelands affect the politics of Asian Americans? How are the political behavior and identities of Asian Americans shaped by their transnational ties? How does the domestic politics of Asian Americans interact with their transnational politics?

In this dissertation, I analyze the relationship between ethnic and transnational politics and show that Hmong ethnic politics and their transnational politics were not completely disconnected from each other. Hmong political leaders often promoted and practiced both forms of politics simultaneously. The interaction between the two varied from time to time. Sometime they complemented each other, but at other times, they countered each other. In the 1970s and 1980s, Hmong ethnic politics and Hmong transnational politics complemented each other. While Hmong ethnic politics helped rebuild the broken lives and the shattered community of the Hmong in the United States, Hmong transnational politics helped rebuild the broken lives and the shattered community of Hmong refugees in Thailand and displaced Hmong people in the jungle of Laos. In the 1990s, however, Hmong ethnic politics seemed to counter the flow of transnational politics. As Hmong leaders fought for Hmong veterans benefits and naturalized citizenship, they inevitably shifted the political focus of the Hmong community away from the homeland. Instead of advocating for the rights of the Hmong people back in Laos and Thailand, those traditionally involved in transnational politics ended up fighting for the immediate needs of the Hmong people in the United States. In the 2000s, Hmong ethnic politics and their transnational politics again converged. As in the 1970s and 1980s, they complemented each other. Both ethnic politicians and transnational politicians promoted and practiced both forms of politics. Senator Mee Moua, for example, promoted Hmong integration into U.S. society while she also advocated for the rights of Hmong families whose members' graves were desecrated at Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand. It was also because of the Hmong participation in ethnic politics in the United States that they were able to get some members of Congress to

---

Overseas 2, no. 1, (May 2006): 56-78; and Linda Trinh Võ, "Vietnamese American Trajectories: Dimensions of Diasporas," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 1, (2003): ix-xviii.

support their transnational political advocacy on behalf of their people back in Laos and Thailand. At the same, transnational politics had become an avenue for some young people, like Amee Xiong and James Chang, to enter into ethnic politics. Xiong, for example, began her entry into politics by organizing the Long Walk for Freedom to bring public attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. She now serves as the Managing Director of the Hmong Organizing Team at Take Action Minnesota, a political organization in St. Paul that organizes people around political issues in the United States. Similarly, James Chang began his entry into politics by founding the Hmong Human Rights at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to promote human rights for the Hmong people in the Lao jungle. He now works as the Policy Associate for Senator Mee Moua of Minnesota.

Hmong Transnational Politics as a U.S. Legacy

By exploring the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora, I also hope to engage in critical discussions about the legacies of the United States intervention in the Vietnam War for all the peoples and countries involved. Many studies have explored the legacies of the war for Americans and U.S. society. The Vietnam War Memorial, the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among American veterans, a culture of American militarism, and the influx of millions of Indochinese refugees to the United States after the war were some of the most salient legacies of U.S. intervention in the war for Americans and U.S. society.[37] To date, however, few have paid attention to the legacies that the U.S. intervention in the war left for the people and societies back in Southeast Asia, such as the Hmong. In this dissertation, I show that one significant but largely overlooked legacy of U.S. military action in Southeast Asia from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s was what I call "the second secret war" in Laos. This was a war that the United States had left for the Hmong to fight. In the 1960s, the United States recruited, trained, armed, funded, and organized the Hmong into a secret army to help the United

[37] See, for example, Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael Shafer, ed., *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

States contain Communism in Laos. Unlike the so-called "U.S. Secret War in Laos" from 1960 to 1973, the second secret war was a war that the Hmong continued to fight against Communist forces in Laos after the Americans had left. It was a war, which the Hmong fought largely without the aid of the United States. Hmong transnational politics emerged in the early 1980s, and it did so in part as an effort to redress the human rights abuses and the Communist persecution of their co-ethnics back in the Lao jungle—the consequences of the continued entanglement of the Hmong with Communist forces in the second secret war. In this sense, therefore, Hmong transnational politics was properly a U.S. legacy.

The other detrimental but also largely overlooked legacy of U.S. military intervention in the Second Indochina War was the displacement of the Hmong from their historical homeland in Laos and their subsequent alienation in exile in both Thailand and the United States. Heavy U.S. bombing during the war forced thousands of Hmong families to leave their homes and villages in northern Laos and caused serious disruption to their agrarian livelihood. After the Communists came to power in 1975, thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand while others retreated to the Lao jungle. Those in the Lao jungle could not farm and grow anything. To survive, they depended entirely on whatever edible roots they could find in the jungle. They had to relocate once every few months, lest Communist soldiers would discover their location and ambush them. Hmong refugees in Thailand did not fare any better. Locked inside the camps, they were unable to go out beyond the fence or barbwire that encircled the camp, not even to gather firewood. They had to depend largely on international aid for their survival. The food rations they received from the United Nations and other aid organizations were never enough. Many Hmong in the camps were also victims of abuses by Thai camp authorities. Displacement and alienation continued to be a part of their lives even after they immigrated to the United States. Told to "go back" to their country, many were victims of racial harassment and nativism. Others were physically assaulted. Because of the U.S. dispersal policy, many families were separated, causing serious destruction to the cohesion of their community and disruption to their religious practice or spirituality. I, thus, argue in this dissertation that Hmong transnational politics developed in Thailand and the United States in the early 1980s in part as a response to their displacement and

alienation in exile. Exiled Hmong politicians and military leaders in Thailand and the United States developed transnational political organizations, such as the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos and the United Lao National Liberation Front, as endeavors to rebuild the broken lives and the shattered communities that Hmong refugees experienced in the refugee camps in Thailand and in urban communities in America.

Hmong Transnational Politics and Return Migration

Aside from documenting the tragic legacies of the U.S. Secret War in Laos for the Hmong, I hope that the transnational political experience of the Hmong in the diaspora can help us to probe broader questions related to international or global migration. For example, why, and under what conditions, are immigrants and refugees choosing to return to their homelands, or countries of origin? Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld have shown that return migration is an integral part of the migration experience. The immigration of refugees and migrants from war-torn countries or economically depressed societies to more prosperous countries is only a part of the story of human migration around the world. "Contrary to widespread perceptions that people want to settle in their new homes, especially in wealthy Western countries," they wrote, "many refugees and migrants want to return eventually, and they lead their lives in the new home always hoping and/or planning for that eventuality."[38] In fact, many diasporas, forced or voluntary, continue to toy with the idea of going home even after years of living abroad, and many have actually returned home.[39] In 1998, the UNHCR estimated that 3.5 million out of 22.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the world returned to their homelands.[40] In 2001, Peter Stalker found that those who lived outside of the country of their birth comprised only three percent of the world's population. Of

---

[38] Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld, Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2.

[39] For studies on the disillusionment of migrants with America upon arrival and their return home because of the harsh realities of American life, see F.P. Cerase, "Migration and Social Change: Expectations and Reality, A Study of Return Migration from the United States to Italy," *International Migration Review* 8, no. 2 (1974): 245-262; and M. Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[40] Ellen Oxfeld and Lynellyn Long, *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*, ed. Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, (Philadelphia: University of University Press, 2004), 1.

the 30 million people admitted to the United States between 1900 and 1980, some 10 million returned to their home countries.[41] From a combination of Census and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) data, George Borjas and Bernt Bratsberg also found that 21.5 percent of all legal immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1970 and 1974 had returned home by 1980.[42] Likewise, Bimal Ghos found that 50 percent of all the immigrants who entered the United States from 1980 to 1990 returned to Mexico after two years and 70 percent after ten years.[43] In 1996 alone, 11,270 Japanese, 7,700 Chinese, and 6,850 Asian Indians returned from the diaspora to their home countries.[44]

Homeland occupies a central role in the consciousness of the diaspora.[45] The desire to return home exists in many dispersed communities, and the idea of return is critical for these communities even if the homeland only exists in memory. At times, the idea of return extends beyond those who personally experience the homeland or have personal memory of it.[46] While a personal experience or the memory of the homeland remains crucial to the idea of return, the experience of the dispersed population in the country of settlement or host society is also an equally powerful factor in their decision to return.[47] Many West Indian migrants, for example, returned to Barbados from Britain and North America because of their encounter with racism in their host countries. Many were shocked when they encountered racial discrimination, especially in their search for employment and housing, in the host societies. They had gone abroad, believing they were going to the "mother country," to a "society they assumed would treat them as

---

[41] Peter Stalker, *The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration*, (London: Verso, 2001), 11 & 114.
[42] George Borjas and Bernt Bratsberg, "Who Leaves? The Outmigration of the Foreign-Born," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 78, no. 1 (1996): 169.
[43] Bimal Ghosh, "Return Migration: Reshaping Policy Approaches," in *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* Edited by Bimal Ghosh, (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations, 2000), 182.
[44] Khalid Koser, "Return, Readmission and Reintegration: Changing Agendas, Policy Frameworks and Operational Programmes," *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* Edited by Bimal Ghosh, (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations, 2000), 64.
[45] Robin Cohen, Global Diasporas: An Introduction, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).
[46] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83-99.
[47] For studies on the disillusionment of migrants with America upon arrival and their return home because of the harsh realities of American life, see F.P. Cerase, "Migration and Social Change: Expectations and Reality, A Study of Return Migration from the United States to Italy," *International Migration Review* 8, no. 2 (1974): 245-262; and M. Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

equals, on the basis of their merit rather than their color." "Encounters with racism," George Gmelch writes, "diminished the migrants' respect for whites and further decreased their interest in identifying with the larger society. What the migrants had learned and experienced overseas was not only important to their adjustment in the host societies, but it also influenced their decision to return and their readjustment in Barbados."[48] The structural racism and personal prejudices that Eritreans encountered in the United States similarly contributed to their desire and decision to return to their African homeland.[49]

The chaos of the refugee experience is also central to fomenting the idea of return among refugees and dispersed communities. As John Janzen has written, "The image of home that grows in refugee is driven by, and seemingly inversely proportional to, the disintegration of the refugee's immediate social surroundings. In other words, the desperation to visualize home compensates for the chaos of the refugee experience."[50] Even if one cannot go home again, the idea of return and the desire to return home live among the dispersed populations in part because of their displacement and continued alienation in the host society. "The strength of imagined home," Janzen adds, "is rooted not in romantic visions but in a sense of injustice, of a personal story of the unfairness of life," which "arose in exile."[51] Sometimes the nostalgia, depression, anxiety, guilty, anger, frustration, and nativism that they experienced in exile became so severe that many refugees desperately wanted to return home even though they feared the consequence.[52]

In a similar sense, I show in this dissertation that Hmong transnational politics was rooted not only in romanticized visions or memories of the homeland but also in a deep sense of injustice, of personal stories of the unfairness of life. The chaos of life in exile, particularly their encounter with Thai nativism in the refugee camps in Thailand and with racial discrimination and personal prejudices in run-down urban communities in America, were central ingredients in the Hmong concept of return. Their desire to return

---

[48] George Gmeich, "West Indian Migrants and Their Rediscovery of Barbados," in *Coming Home?*, 210-211.
[49] Lucia Ann McSpadden, "Contemplating Repatriation to Eritrea," in *Coming Home?*, 34-48.
[50] John Janzen, "Illusions of Home in the Story of a Rwandan Refugee's Return," in Coming Home?, 32.
[51] Ibid., 33.
[52] Barry N. Stein, "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study," *International Migration Review* 15, no.1/2, (Spring-Summer 1981): 320-330.

was augmented by the loss of status, self-esteem, and independence that many of them experienced in exile. This desire appeared especially in Hmong men who plunged downward from a high occupational and social status at home to the lowest class in America—from professional to menial, from elite to an impoverished minority—and those who felt the greatest sense of injustice and unfairness of life. But to return home, radical political changes must take place in the homeland. As former enemies of the communist regime, they were neither wanted in the homeland nor welcomed back to it. Transnational politics was the effort of exiled Hmong politicians and military leaders, who experienced great loss of status and injustices in the new land, to change the political situation back home in order to return home and restore their status and dignity. These leaders built and reinforced links from the host countries back to the homeland and kept the hope of returning, once conditions allow, alive even if this aspiration was remote.

Hmong Transnational Politics, International Relations and Global Security

By relating the particulars of the Hmong story of transnational politics, I also hope to engage in critical discussions about the role of the diaspora in international relations and global security. In what ways, under what conditions, and to what extent do minority groups and stateless peoples, like the Hmong, transcend domestic political systems and engage in non-domestic (i.e., international or transnational) ones? What is and should be the role of the diaspora in the homeland? Do their political activities contribute to resolution of the conflict in the homeland or do they prolong it? In what ways can the diaspora maximize their contribution to peace and minimize their contribution to violence in the homeland in conflict? These are critical questions that still need to be addressed, especially in light of the continued interest and involvement of dispersed communities with homeland issues.

Today, Europe and the United States are homes to multiple diasporic communities, including Chinese, Vietnamese, the Armenians, Palestinians, Jews, Cubans, Kurds, Croatians, and others. In spite of their exodus, many diasporic communities continue to maintain close contact with their homelands. More often than not, changing their legal status from “residents” to citizens has not affected their political allegiance to their

homelands. Many dispersed communities, including the Jewish diaspora, the Armenians, the Palestinians, Colombians, Cubans, Sri Lankan Tamils, the Sikhs, the Kurds, the Croats, the Eritrean, the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, the Tibetans, and the Taiwanese, among others, continue to organize their communities in the diaspora around homeland political issues even after years in their host societies. A growing number of these dispersed communities have been able to secure tangible and intangible resources in support of armed conflicts as well as humanitarian assistance in their homelands and to use various institutional and network structures, along with rapid transnational communication and transportation, to transfer arms and money to state and non-state actors, including terrorist groups, around the world. They have involved in numerous conflicts in all parts of the world. Sometime their involvement contributes to conflict resolution, but at other times, their activities have exacerbated the existing conflict. The diasporic communities are powerful actors in international politics and global security in the world today. Today, as Gisèle Buosquet has written, "homeland politics is an attribute of both immigrants and refugee groups, although it has been more evident among political refugees."[53]

There is already a large body of excellent scholarship on the notion of diaspora, including Nadje Al-Ali, Khalid Koser, Gabriel Sheffer, Zlatko Skrbis and Khaching Tololyan. Others who have made seminal contributions include, for example, Avtar Brah, Robin Cohen, James Clifford, Rogers Brubaker, and William Safran.[54] Except for the work of Yossi Shain, Terrence Lyons, and Paul Collier and his colleagues at the World Bank, few studies are about the role of the diasporic communities in homeland conflicts.[55] Gabriel Sheffer and Robin Cohen, among others, have noted that stateless

---

[53] Gisèle L. Bousequet, *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Homeland Politics in the Parisian Vietnamese Community*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 2.

[54] Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, eds., *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*, (London: Routledge, 2002); Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Zlatko Skrbiš, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999); Khachig Tölöyan, "Rethinking Diasporas: Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1, (1996): 3-36.

[55] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities*, (London: Routlege, 1996); James Clifford, "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, (1994): 302-38; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Roger Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," Ethnic and Racial Studies 28, no. 1, (January 2005): 1-19; William Safran, "Comparing Diasporas: A Review Essay," *Diaspora* 8, no. 3, (1999): 255-292.

and state-linked diasporas employ different political strategies and take different political stances toward the homeland. They acknowledge that more needs to be done to fully explore why stateless but territorially concentrated diasporas tend to pursue separatism and irredentism vis-à-vis the homeland while less concentrated state-linked diasporas tend to pursue assimilation, integration, communalism, or corporatism.[56] Yossi Shain has also examined the relationship between ethnic diasporas and U.S. foreign policy and argued that the diasporic politics of ethnic groups in the United States is not necessarily damaging U.S. image and foreign policy. Their involvement in the politics in the homeland may serve to "market" American values of democracy and pluralism, or the American creed abroad.[57]

In this dissertation, I explore the role of the Hmong in the diaspora in the ongoing conflict between segments of the Hmong populations back home and the Lao PDR government. I examine, in particular, the impact of Hmong transnational politics on the homeland state and government and its treatment of their co-ethnics back home. Like Yossi Shain, I argue that Hmong transnational politics is not necessary unpatriotic or anti-American. Not only did Hmong Americans engage in both ethnic and transnational politics simultaneously, they helped export American values of democracy and pluralism to the homeland when they engaged in politics abroad. Their interest and involvement in transnational politics also helped to stimulate their participation in U.S. mainstream politics. However, because of the way some groups in the diaspora framed and perceived the conflict in the homeland, they sometimes made resolution of the conflict more difficult. The Hmong in the diaspora were by no means unified in their approaches toward the homeland government and the homeland conflict. Some favored the reformation of the existing government from a communist regime to a democratic constitutional monarchy. Others sought ethnic separation, self-determination, and an independent Hmong state. The division among the Hmong in the diaspora and their

---

[56] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000); Yossi Shain, "The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution," *SAIS Review* 22, no. 2, (2002): 116; Terrence Lyons, "Diasporas and Homeland Conflict," in Terroriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization, eds. Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111-129.

[57] Yossi Shain, *Marking the American Dream Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and Their Homelands*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Yossi Shain, "Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 5, (Winter 1994-1995): 811-841.

strong attachment of their identity to a territorially defined homeland complicated the process of conflict resolution in the homeland. Until the homeland Lao government and the Hmong in the diaspora achieve peaceful reconciliation or until the Hmong in the diaspora and in the Lao jungle succeed in gaining self-determination or seceding from the Lao state to form their own state, the conflict will continue in the homeland. Thus, because the Hmong in the diaspora have always enforced and sustained their links to the homeland through the conflict back home, the transnational politics of the Hmong will also persist as long as the fighting in the Lao jungle has not been resolved.

In the dissertation, I also analyze the relationship between Hmong transnational politics and international relations. I examine, in particular, the impact of the shifting relations between different nation-states, specifically Vietnam, China, Laos, Thailand, the Soviet Union, and the United States, and their domestic and foreign policies on the evolution of Hmong transnational politics. I argue that money was not the sole and most important factor in sustaining Hmong transnational politics in the 1980s. The most defining factors, I contend, were what Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley have called the "Third Indochina War," or the conflicts that erupted among Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and China after the three former Indochinese countries fell under communist control in 1975, and what Fred Holliday has called the "Second Cold War," or the continued rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union superpowers from the late 1970s to the end of the 1980s.[58] Because of the Sino-Vietnamese border disputes, both Vang Pao in the United States and Pa Kao Her in Thailand were able to send their fighters to China to receive training and arms in the early 1980s. Because of the communist insurgency in Thailand and the Thai-Lao border conflicts, Pa Kao and Vang Pao found sanctuaries and were able to set up bases in Thailand for their resistance against the Lao PDR government. Because of the Second Cold War, Vang Pao was able to lobby some right-wing conservative Americans and the conservative think-tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation in Washington D.C., to support his political and military program in the homeland, including the claim that the Soviet Union supplied chemical weapons to the Lao PDR government and the Vietnamese government to use against

[58] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos since 1975,* (London: Verso, 1984), xvii; Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War,* (London: Verso, 1983).

Hmong fighters in the Lao jungle. Most of all, because of the Second Cold War, Pa Kao Her was able to go to Angola to join other "freedom fighters" in their fight against Soviet imperialism in September 1985 and to the United States to participate in the 18th Conference of the World Anti-Communist League in Dallas, Texas, three months later. Both Pa Kao and Vang Pao gained arms, training, money, credibility, publicity and power from their alliances with different groups in China, Thailand, and the United States during the 1980s. Hmong transnational politics, however, suffered a decline in the 1990s because the political opportunities that helped to sustain both of their movements in the 1980s had disappeared by the end of the 1980s. Improved relation between Vietnam and China in the mid-1980s, the end of the Cold War in 1989, and improved relation between Thailand and Laos after 1990 negatively affected the momentum and stability of Hmong transnational politics during the 1990s. The emergence of new leaders and ethnic organizations and the welfare reform in the United States in the 1990s also worked against the flow of Hmong transnational politics. They diverted the Hmong diasporic community's political interest away from the human rights violations and the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle to civil, political and economic rights in America. Hmong transnational politics was revitalized in the new millennium because of the omnipresent force of globalization, the rise of the internet and other media technologies, and the endurance of the refugee mess in Thailand and the secret war in the Lao jungle.

Scope and Outline of the Dissertation

Transnational politics is undoubtedly a growing and enduring political phenomenon, especially because of the globalized nature of today's modern societies.[59] Globalization, including the internationalization of labor, migration, transportation and communication, has allowed and will continue to allow dispersed communities around the world to remain connected to their homelands, culturally, economically and politically.[60] Today, the need to fully and carefully explore the roles of the diasporic

[59] Michael S. Laguerre, *Diaspora, Politics, and Globalization*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
[60] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and C. S. Blanz, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, (USA: Gordon and Breach, 1994); Linda

communities in homeland politics and homeland conflicts is greater than before, given the enduring contact between the dispersed communities and their homelands and the increasing interest and involvement by different dispersed communities in homeland issues. At the same time, it is important to recognize that not all peoples in the various dispersed communities maintain strong attachment to their homelands. Not all of them are involved in transnational politics, or what Benedict Anderson has coined "long-distance nationalism," and certainly not all wanted to return home.[61] Even if they continue to maintain close contact with the homelands, they do not necessarily engage in politics to change the situation back home in order for them to return home. No one has pointed this out more poignantly than Oivind Fuglerud in his work on the Tamil diaspora and long-distance nationalism. In *Life on the Outside,* Fuglerud points out that of an estimated 700,000 Tamil refugees, that is one-third of Sri Lanka's entire pre-war Tamil population, only a few have become long-distance nationalists.[62]

In the same manner, *not all the Hmong in the diaspora* became involved in transnational politics. *Not all of them dreamed of returning home,* and not all of them were engaged in political projects aimed at the goal of returning home. Many had completely severed ties with the homeland in order to assimilate completely and live the "American dream." Others had done so simply because they did not have the financial means to maintain such ties. They were unable to travel back and forth between their hostland and their homeland, or they lacked the minimal resources to fulfill their obligations to their homeland and those they left behind.[63] Nevertheless, thousands of Hmong, especially the elder and middle generations, had become involved in transnational politics over the years. They retained strong and vivid memories of the

---

Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and C.S. Blanz, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration," *Anthropological Quarertly* 68, no. 1, (January 1995): 48-64.

[61] Benedict Anderson, "Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics," The Werthem Lecture, Center for Asian Studies Amsterdam (CASA), University of Amsterdam, 1992; Benedict Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World,* (London: Verso, 1998).

[62] Øivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism,* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

[63] Nicholas Tapp, "Hmong Diaspora in Australia," in *The Hmong of Australia: Culture and Diaspora,* edited by Nicholas Tapp and Gary Y. Lee, (Canberra, Australia: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, 2004), 59-96; Nicholas Tapp, "The Hmong Diaspora," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World,* eds. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, and Ian Skoggard, vol. 1, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004), 103-113.

homeland, and they continued to long for the homeland even after years of living abroad.[64] In this dissertation, my focus is primarily on "first generation" and "1.5-generation" Hmong individuals. In this work, I define first generation Hmong as individuals who were born in Laos and fled to Thailand, United States and other Western countries as adults. They were the veterans of the Secret War in Laos. The 1.5-generation, then, are the immediate offspring of the first generation. They are those who were born in Laos or Thailand and immigrated to the United States and other Western countries as adolescents. They are what we might call the "middle generation," that is, individuals born in Laos or Thailand but socialized and educated in America. The "second generation" Hmong are, thus, those who entered the United States as children or were born in the United States as children, had been mainly socialized in the United States, and had no or little memory of Laos or Thailand.

Undeniably, some second-generation Hmong had also become involved in transnational politics. Like their forebears, they had fought and advocated for freedom, democracy and human rights on behalf of their co-ethnics back home. Yet, the desire to return home was noticeably absent in their politics. While the politics that they fashioned did constitute a *turning* toward the homeland and an understanding of their identity in relation to the homeland, the second generation did not posit themselves as members of the homeland or define the focus of their politics as a return to the homeland in the sense of a back-to-Laos movement. Because I am interested in the projects that the Hmong in the diaspora had created to realize the dream of returning home, I focus my analysis on first and 1.5 generation individuals. Because of the crucial role that lived experiences and the memories of past violence and injustice played in the stories and lives of the Hmong involved in transnational politics, an analysis of the first and 1.5 generations will generate a better understanding of the specific makeup of the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora.

---

[64] Louisa Schien, "Homeland Beauty: Transnational Longing and Hmong American Videos," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 2 (2004): 25-58; Kou Yang, "Hmong Diaspora of the Post-War Period," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12, no. 3, (2003): 277; Gary Yia Lee, "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity" *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (1007): 1-30; Gary Y. Lee, "Dreaming Across the Oceans: Media, Globalization, and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7 (2006): 1-33.

This dissertation begins with an overview of Hmong history in China and Laos up to 1975. It highlights key events and issues in Hmong history in China and Laos that I believe are necessary and most germane to the discussion of Hmong transnational politics after 1975. In this first chapter, I show how the history of Hmong encounters with racism and their oppression under Han Chinese rule, French colonial domination, and U.S. tutelage form the background of Hmong transnational politics. Memories of their subjugation and oppression under these more dominant and powerful rulers explain the persistence of the Hmong struggle and cry for independence and self-determination. The clan and ideological rivalries that began under French colonialism and continued under the United States tutelage in the 1960s continued to shape the nature of Hmong transnational politics. Hmong transnational politics after 1975 continued to divide along ideological lines. In the diaspora, Hmong transnational politics divided into a separatist group, under the leadership of Pa Kao Her, on the one hand, and a reformed or restorative group, under General Vang Pao's leader, on the other hand. The former advocated for the separation of the Hmong from the ethnic Lao and the establishment of an autonomous Hmong region or state in northern Laos while the latter sought to reintegrate the Hmong diaspora into a democratic constitutional Lao monarchy.

In Chapter 2, I explore how Hmong transnational politics began and show that, although Hmong politics took on transnational dimensions after 1980, Hmong transnational politics took its root in the U.S. Secret War in the 1960s. Because of the United States clandestine military intervention in the civil war in Laos in the 1960s, the Hmong became targets for retaliation after the communists came to power in 1975. In the aftermath of the war, thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand, but thousands retreated into remote and inaccessible regions in the Lao jungle. In response, the Lao PDR government sent enforcements into the jungle to "pacify" Hmong "rebels." The result was the "second secret war"—a war that continues to be fought between the Hmong in the Lao jungle and the Lao PDR government to the present day. The formation of Hmong transnational political organizations, namely the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos in Thailand in 1980 and the United Lao National Liberation Front in the United States in 1981, was in part the effort of the exiled Hmong politicians and military leaders to redress the communist retaliation against their co-ethnics in the jungle of Laos. In this

sense, Hmong transnational politics was properly a significant but largely overlooked and understudied legacy of the United States military action in Laos.

In Chapter 3, I analyze why the transnational politics of the Hmong emerged in Thailand and the United States in the early 1980s and argue that Hmong transnational politics was rooted in their very experiences of displacement and alienation in exile. Displaced from their historical homeland, they were treated as aliens in Thailand and in the United States. In Thailand, they were subjected to a variety of abuses by Thai camp authorities and Thai border patrols, including rape, torture, imprisonment, and push-back in the Mekong River or across the river to Laos to die at the hands of their communist enemies. In the United States, the Hmong encountered racial discrimination and personal prejudices. Their families were separated, their communities broken, and their religious practices disrupted. In America, the Hmong were repeatedly told by strangers in America to "go back" to their country, and many were physically assaulted. Feeling displaced and homeless in both Thailand and the United States, exiled Hmong politicians and military leaders, who experienced monumental loss of status and acutely felt the pain of injustice and the unfairness of life, developed the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) and the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) to change the political situation back home so they could go home. Hmong families in the United States also overwhelmingly supported the activities of the organizations in the 1980s because they were deeply nostalgic. Feeling unwelcomed in their new land, they missed their homeland. They lived in their new land dreaming, hoping and planning for the return to their native land. At the heart of Hmong transnational politics was a search for home or a safe place and a struggle to recover lost dignity and status and rebuild broken lives and communities in exile as well as back home.

In Chapter 4, I analyze how leaders of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos and the United Lao National Liberation Front sustained their political movements in the 1980s. Undoubtedly, the organizations needed an infrastructure and financial resources to operate and carry out their operations. Contrary to what other analysts have argued, however, I contend in this chapter that money was not the sole and most important source that sustained the political movements of the two organizations during the 1980s and thereafter. Most of the donations that they collected from their members and supporters

in the United States did not reach their supporters in Thailand and their fighters in the Lao jungle. This was particularly the case for the United Lao National Liberation Front. The key factors that sustained the movements during the 1980s, the period when the ULNLF and the ELOL were strongest militarily and diplomatically, were larger regional and global political processes and conflicts. These included the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, the Thai-Lao border conflicts, the communist insurgency in Thailand, and the continued contest for global hegemony between the Soviet Union and the United States superpowers. These various conflicts and rivalries enabled the two organizations to garner critical financial, military, political and moral supports from China, Thailand, and the United States, including arms and training from China, sanctuaries and training from Thailand, and money, publicity, credibility and power from the United States. These resources and supports, in turn, encouraged the Hmong in the diaspora to contribute money to the organizations, all of which helped to sustain their programs and movements throughout the 1980s.

In Chapter 5, I analyze how the river of Hmong transnational politics was disrupted during the 1990s, and I show that this was a period of declension for Hmong transnational politics because of the confluence of different forces and pressures in the United States and Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, Hmong transnational politics suffered from the repeated military defeats by the United Lao National Liberation Front. The repeated failures to liberate Laos dampened support for the organization and its program. In Southeast Asia, the closing of the refugee camps and the military training camp that Pa Kao Her set up in northern Thailand and the aggressive crackdown of Hmong resistance activities and disarmament of Hmong fighters along the Thai-Lao border further weakened Hmong transnational politics. In the United States, the flow of Hmong transnational politics was disrupted by the visibility and influence of emerging new Hmong leaders of the 1.5 generations who pushed the community toward integration into American society rather for a return to the homeland through electoral politics and the development of Hmong mutual associations and self-help ethnic/cultural organizations. In the United States, the flow of Hmong transnational politics was further dislocated by the welfare reform in the mid-1990s. Welfare reform threatened to terminate many elders' welfare and social security benefits unless they became U.S.

citizens. Hmong community leaders and activists, thus, fought hard to get U.S. Congress to relax the requirements for Hmong veterans and their families to become naturalized American citizens. Their efforts finally panned out in 2000 when President Bill Clinton signed the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act into law. However, their emphasis on putting Hmong candidates in public offices, advancing the interests and well-being of the Hmong in America through self-help organizations and mutual aid assistance associations, and on getting Hmong citizenship in the United States ironically shifted their focus and struggle away from homeland politics to domestic politics. The confluence of these various forces and pressures in Southeast Asia and the United States, thus, worked to upset the flow of Hmong transnational politics in the 1990s.

The dissertation closes with an epilogue that explores the revitalization of Hmong transnational politics in the new millennium. Here I chronicle the assassination of Pa Kao Her in late 2002 and show that Hmong transnational politics continued to flow in the diaspora despite his death because the two issues that encouraged the Hmong in the diaspora to engage in transnational politics in the first place had not been resolved. Those two issues were the Hmong refugee mess in Thailand and the ongoing secret war in the Lao jungle. Hmong transnational politics has the inevitable potential to invite the charge of "perpetual foreigners" and "terrorists" to the Hmong in the United States. As an ethnic minority of Asian descent in America, the Hmong, despite their naturalization, will always be tied to their country of origin. Like other Asian Americans, they will perpetually been seen as foreigners in the United States. The charge of "foreigners" turned into the charge of "terrorists" after the United States initiated its war on terrorism. In June 2007, FBI agents arrested Vang Pao and eight other alleged co-conspirators for plotting to overthrow the Lao PDR government and charged them as terrorists. After Vang Pao was arrested in the United States for violating U.S. neutrality law, the Hmong in the diaspora continued to fight for the rights of the refugees in Thailand and the Hmong in the Lao jungle. In fact, the arrest helped revitalize the interest and involvement of the Hmong in the conflict in Laos. The arrest exposed more young people to the suffering of the Hmong in the jungle and the Hmong refugee crisis in Thailand. After the arrest, young people became involved not only in rallies and demonstrations to free Vang Pao but also to free the Hmong people in the jungle and stop

the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos. Soon after federal prosecutors dropped all the charges against him, Vang Pao issued a public statement, declaring that he would return to Laos to negotiate peace and reconciliation. Immediately, the Lao government responded, saying that the government did not welcome him to Laos and that he would be serving his life sentence in prison before any discussion of peace and reconciliation could take place. This response by the Lao PDR government, unfortunately, gave water to segments of the Hmong in the diaspora who claimed that ethnic separation, not peaceful reconciliation, was the only solution to the conflict in Laos. Instead of giving Vang Pao amnesty, which would de-legitimize the cry for secession in Laos by the separatist segments of the Hmong populations in the diaspora, the Lao PDR government had prolonged the involvement of the Hmong in the diaspora in the political and military conflict in Laos—something that will likely not end any time soon.

Overall, I show that rather than seeking to build a transnational virtual community, many Hmong in the diaspora, amplified their attachment to the homeland and reinforced their links to their co-ethnics back home through the conflict in Laos. Those engaged in transnational politics, driven by a desire for transformation and liberation as much as by a profound nostalgia and the trauma of separation from the homeland, romanticized the "old country." They kept past glories, grievances, and the hope of return alive as ways of coping with and justifying their displacement and alienation in exile, and they mobilized support from their co-ethnics in the diaspora for their fight for democratic reform and national sovereignty in the homeland. Moreover, I argue the transnational politics of the Hmong in Thailand and the United States gained global attention in the 1980s because of the Hmong's ability to use the communist insurgency in Thailand, the Thai-Lao border conflicts, the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, and the continued rivalry between the United States and the Soviet superpowers as opportunities to build alliances and garner support, in terms of training, weapons, money, publicity, and power from China, Thailand, and various right-wing anti-Soviet groups and institutions in the United States. Nevertheless, Hmong transnational politics suffered a setback in the 1990s because they lost the support of these more powerful nations. At the end of the Second Cold War, China, Thailand, and the United States all shifted their foreign policies from Cold War

confrontation to rapprochement with the Lao PDR government. In the end, the Hmong ultimately failed to bring about their desired goal of "liberating" Laos because not only were they divided and ambiguous about their desired goal in Laos but also because the nations that they depended on for support, including Thailand, the United States, and China, never supported their call for self-determination or national sovereignty. These nations only used the Hmong to fight for their geopolitical interests, and they discarded and disarmed the Hmong when they no longer needed their men and services. Hmong transnational politics is likely to continue because the fighting in Laos has not ended, but the Hmong, without their own army and government, remain military weak. As such, they are unlikely to achieve anything but reconciliation with the government and reintegration into Lao society. At the same time, the Lao PDR government must take the initiative to negotiate for peace. Otherwise, segments of the Hmong in the diaspora who are engaged in transnational politics, especially those separatist nationalists, will likely to prolong the conflict and push for an independent Hmong state, all of which will result in further deaths and mayhems for both sides of the conflict.

CHAPTER 1

Marginalization, Displacements, and Ambiguities: Hmong History in China and Laos

> How much Hmong history and culture must I provide before we can have a conversation about Hmong literature? This is a question that I as a Hmong writer often contemplate. Sometimes it feels like an added burden, one not imposed on writers who are white and from the majority culture. But as a Hmong writer, I must engage the question in order to have dialogue. How then I do answer it without painting myself and every other Hmong writer with one stroke?

This is how Mai Neng Moua, a Hmong writer in the Twin Cities in Minnesota, begins her introduction to *Bamboo Among the Oaks*, one of the most widely read Hmong literary anthologies to date.[65] I hear and sympathize with her frustration. Sometimes it does feel like an added burden to have to provide the historical and cultural context to any discussion of Hmong contemporary issues. Nevertheless, such a historical context is both desirable and necessary not only because this dissertation is a historical project but also because history is central to the projects of the Hmong involved in transnational politics. Not only have Hmong in the diaspora assumed active roles in producing knowledge regarding their history, culture, and identity, an enterprise traditionally reserved and practiced by non-Hmong writers, all of the Hmong engaged in transnational politics have used history to buttress their claims.[66] Some have used history to create shared memory and develop what Nicholas Tapp has called a "historical consciousness."[67] Others have used it to construct the Hmong in the diaspora as members of what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community."[68] To enforce shared ethnicity and validate claims of indigeneity, some have gone so far as to reinvent history. They interpreted myths as

---

[65] Mai Neng Moua, *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writings by Hmong Americans*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society, 2002), 3.

[66] For discussion on the competing narratives that non-Hmong writers have constructed of Hmong history, see John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community*, (Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press, 2007), 22. For the increasing role that the Hmong diaspora plays in constructing Hmong history, Frank Ng, "Toward A Second Generation Hmong History," *Amerasia Journal* 19, no. 3, (1993): 51-69; and Gary Yia Lee, "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (2007): 1-19.

[67] Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 176.

[68] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

historical facts, and they appropriated non-Hmong history as Hmong history. All of the Hmong engaged in transnational politics have, to varying degree, practiced what Ernest Gellner has called "cultural revivication"—efforts to revive or reconstruct identity through symbolism and historical interpretation.[69]

The goal in this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive history of the Hmong. Hmong history is far too complex to do so in a single chapter. Rather, in what follows, I attempt to highlight what I consider is necessary and most germane to our discussion of Hmong transnational politics. The central premise here is that Hmong transnational politics was not self-contained or autonomous, and it did not unexpectedly emerge in the Hmong community in the United States and other western nations after 1975. Rather, the development of Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora was intimately tied to the history of the Hmong before the diaspora. To understand the rise of Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora after 1975, we have to look back to history: to China, where the Hmong were known as Miao; French Indochina, where they were positioned at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy and the seed of Hmong political division was planted; Laos and Thailand, where the Hmong were racialized as Meo; and the U.S. secret war in Laos in the 1960s where the river of Hmong transnational politics originated.

This overview of Hmong history aims to address several questions: Who are the Hmong? Where did they come from? How did their experience in China and Southeast Asia, particularly their lives under French colonialism from 1893 to 1954 and during the U.S. Secret War in Laos from 1960 to 1975, shape their transnational politics after the war? In this chapter, I show that the ambiguities surrounding Hmong origins and early history in China, their migration to Indochina, and the CIA promises to the Hmong in the 1960s open up a space for the Hmong in the diaspora not only to forge transnational ties with their co-ethnics in China, Southeast Asia, and other nations in the West but to also make certain historical claims to advance their nationalist projects in Laos. At the same time, the Hmong relationship with the French colonial power and late the Americans worked against, rather than, for the cultural, economic, and geopolitical interests of the Hmong. French indirect-rule colonialism brought the seed of political division to the Hmong people, a division that continued to haunt the people in Laos during the U.S.

[69] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Itacha, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 101-109.

Secret War in the 1960s and thereafter in the diaspora. The separation between the Chao Fa messianic fighters and Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers that surfaced in the Lao jungle, Thailand, and the United States after the war took its root in the division that occurred under French colonialism and later American imperialism in Laos.

Origin, Race, and Resistance: Hmong in China

The origin and early history of the Hmong are still obscure and much debated. The Hmong have their own tales to explain their origins. These, however, are mythical more than historical, and they do not point the origin of the Hmong to any particular geographical location. One popular Hmong tale, for instance, speaks of the Hmong as descendants of an incestuous union between a brother and sister after the Great Flood. In this account, the two siblings survived the Great Flood by taking shelter in a hallowed wooden drum. Seeing that they were the sole survivors, the brother insisted that they get married in order to reproduce. The sister objected, and they ended up taking their disagreement to Saub (pronounced as Sho), a benevolent oracle who, in all Hmong myths and legends, is the deity who humans go to for guidance and advice. At Saub's advice, they decided that they would each take a stone up a mountain and roll it down simultaneously. If the stones landed on top of one another, then they would marry each other because their marriage was mandated by Heaven. When they rolled the stones down the mountain, they raced down to check on the result. The brother ran past the sister and got to the bottom of the mountain first. The stones did not land on top of each other, but the brother quickly placed one on top of the other. When the sister reached the bottom and saw that the stones were on top of each other, she had no choice but to agree to the marriage. After they were married, they had a child who was round and smooth like a stone. Not knowing what to do, they again consulted Saub. At Saub's advice, they cut open the stone, broke it into small pieces, and scattered the pieces around their house and various other places. Each piece became a Hmong clan. All the pieces, representing all the clans, made up the Hmong nation.[70]

[70] There are several versions of this story, but the incestuous union between the brother and sister is a common theme in all of them. The story is found among all Hmong communities in China, Southeast Asia,

In an alternative account, one recorded by Father Francois M. Savina, a French missionary who encountered the Hmong in Tonkin and Laos, the Hmong came from a "country of snow, ice and days and nights of six months."[71] From this account and other Hmong tales, including those explained the creation of the first man and woman, the confusion of languages after the Tower of Babel, and the belief in divine intervention and messianic deliverance, Savina, writing in 1924, concluded that the Hmong came from the Mesopotamia region in the Middle East (today's Iraq and Syria). From there, they traveled north through Siberia and Mongolia before migrating south to resettle on the plains of the Yellow River in China, where they occupied before the Chinese.[72] In contrast, D.C. Grahams, writing in 1937, contended that the Hmong originated from a hot climate like "the torrid regions of India, Burma, or Tonkin into China where they migrated as far north as the Yellow River."[73] Hmong anthropologist Gary Yia Lee recently disputed both accounts. According to Lee, "no such stories can be found among today's Hmong." The theories that Hmong came from Siberia or the North Pole (a land of ice and snow) and before that, Mesopotamia in the Middle East or South Asia (a land of burning skies and hot earth), are the results of a mistranslation of Hmong phrases. For Lee, China, where the Hmong are known as the Miao, is the most plausible origin of the Hmong. After all, there are written accounts of the presence of a people known as the Miao who may well be the ancestors of the Hmong in China some 5,000 years ago.[74]

---

and the diaspora. See, for example, Charles Johnson, ed., *Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos,* (St. Paul, MN: Linguistics Department, Macalester College, 1992), 113-120; Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration, and Legitimacy under French Colonialism, 1893-1995," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 12-13; William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 22-23; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, (Cheney: Eastern Washington University, 1988), 18-19; Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 37-38. According to the version narrated by Tougeu Leepaolo of the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, the pieces thrown far from their home became other non-Hmong people. Tougeu Leepaolo, "Hmong Narrative of the Beginning of the World," audiocassette, (n.d.), in author's possession.

[71] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 14; William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 5; Jean Mottin, *The History of the Hmong (Meo)*, (Bangkok, Thailand: Odeon Store LDT, 1980), 15.

[72] John Duffy, "Writing from These Roots: Literacy, Rhetoric, and History in A Hmong-American Community," (Ph.D dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000), 74.

[73] D.C. Graham, "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao," *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* 19, (1937): 18-20, in William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 6.

[74] Gary Yia Lee, "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (2007): 1-19.

Chinese annals traced Miao history to as far back as the 3rd century B.C. when the Miao were said to occupy the wide plains along the reaches of the Yellow River.[75] According to William Hudsbeth, a British missionary who worked with the Miao in Southwest China in the early twentieth century, the Miao had lived along the Yellow River "at a date prior to the days when Abraham went forth from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan."[76] Between 2700 B.C. and 2300 B.C, neighboring Chinese tribes invaded Miao territory along the Yellow Rain. Under the leadership of King Chi You, the Miao, known at the time as the Jiu Li tribe who occupied the basins of the Yellow River, the Miao fought back. At first, the Miao successfully resisted Chinese encroachment. Joining forces, the two Chinese tribes, under General Huan Yon (or Xuan Yuan), however, later defeated the Miao, at which point Xuan Yuan proclaimed himself Huang Ti or the "Yellow Emperor." This defeat forced the Miao to cross the Yellow River valley to the middle reaches of the Yangtze River, where they re-established a kingdom known as San Miao. The San Miao kingdom again came under Chinese attack, forcing the Miao to migrate and settle in the mountainous areas of today's Southwest China.[77]

Today, it is commonly accepted that the history of the Hmong in Southeast Asia, the United States, and other western nations is related to the history of the Miao in China. It is also commonly accepted that the Hmong came from China, and that Chi You was the king of the Miao in ancient China.[78] It is, however, quite a different matter to say that the Hmong and the Maio are the same people; therefore, the Hmong must also be the people of the Jiu Liu Miao under King Chi You or the Miao people of the San Miao kingdom.[79]

---

[75] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 3.

[76] William Hudspeth, *Stone-Gateway and the Flowery Miao*, (London: Cargate Press, 1937), 9-10.

[77] Yang Dao, "Hmong Culture is Hmong Soul," in *The Impact of Globalization and Trans-Nationalism on the Hmong: Selected Presentations from the First International Conference on Hmong Studies*, ed. Gary Yia Lee, (St. Paul: Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University, 2009), 54-55; Wu Dekun, "A Brief Introduction to the Hmong of China," *Hmong Forum* 2 (1991): 6; and William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 3-5; Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong (Meo)*, 7

[78] Christian Culas and Jean Michaud, "A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History," *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, eds. Nicholas Tapp, Jean Michaud, Christian Culas, and Gary Y. Lee, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 63; Wu Dekun, "A Brief Introduction to the Hmong of China," *Hmong Forum* 2 (1991): 1-8; Kou Yang, "Hmong American Contemporary Experience," in *Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 236-7.

[79] Nicolas Tapp, "The State of Hmong Studies (An Essay on Bibliography)," in *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, 18-20; Jacques Lemoine, "To Tell the Truth," *Hmong Studies Journal* 9, (2008): 1-29; Franklin Ng, "From

This is because the word "Hmong" never appeared in Chinese annals. The only word that appeared in classical Chinese texts was "Miao" whose meaning varied across time and often encompassed more than one ethnic group.[80] Even today, the term Miao still refers to a number of disparate groups in China, including the Qhao Xiong in Western Hunan, the Hmub, Gha Ne, or Hmu in Southeastern Guizhou, the A Hmao in Northwest Guizhou and Northeast Yunnan, and the Hmong in South Szechwan, West Guizhou and South Yunnan.[81] The Miao speak three mutually unintelligible dialects, and most of them do not speak the language spoken by the Hmong in Southeast Asia and in the West. Some Miao and the Hmong share the same dialect, but most need an interpreter to communicate with each other.[82]

If the origins and early history of the Hmong are obscure, the suffering of the Miao and the Hmong at the hands of Chinese rulers is less debatable. The Miao were regularly demonized in early Chinese annals. One Chinese chronicle, for example, described the San Miao as "a race who came from the Western wilderness, whose face, eyes, feet, and hands resembled those of other people, but under their arm-pits they had wings, with which, however, they were unable to fly."[83] Comparing the Miao to "dogs," a sixteenth-century statesman Zhang Juzheng remarked that the way to deal with barbarians like the Miao was to beat them again and again until they submitted. "Just like dogs," he said, "if they wag their tails, bones will be thrown to them; if they bark wildly, they will be beaten with sticks; after the beating, if they submit again, bones will be thrown to them again; after the bones, if they bark again, then more beating. How can one argue with them about being crooked or straight or about the observation of the

---

Laos to America: The Hmong Community in the United States," in *Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 21-22.

[80] Norma Diamond, "Defining Miao: Ming, Qing and Contemporary Views," *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers,* ed. Steven Harrell, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 92-116.

[81] Gary Yia Lee, "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (2007), 2.

[82] Louisa Schein, "Hmong/Miao Transnationality: Identity Beyond Culture," in *Hmong/Miao in Asia,* 274.

[83] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 5. Here, Geddes writes: "This quotation occurs in the K'ang-his Dictionary compiled in the reign of the Emperor Sheng-tsu (A.D. 1662-1722), the second emperor of the Ch'ing Dynasty, whose reign title was K'ang-his. The quotation in the Dictionary is taken from the *Shih-chi*, or Historical Records, compiled by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (145-90 B.C.) of the Han dynasty. The reference was first noted in the article in the *Canton Miscellanie*, 1831, p. 199, where it was attributed to the 'She-ke,' a historical work of the 'Hea' dynasty."

laws?"[84] Reference to the Miao having tails also appeared in a dictionary compiled under the direction of the Emperor in the reign Kangxi (A.D. 1662-1722). This belief, according to William Geddes, persisted for a long time. Writing in 1861, W. Lockhart, for example, recalled that the citizens of Canton "firmly believed" that one tribe, "inhabiting Li-po hien," called "yau-jin," definitely had "short tails like monkeys." A little more than three decades later, writing in 1896, E.W. Thwing, said that the Cantonese told him that "Miao children have tails which drop off when they were twenty days old."[85] These descriptions of the Miao reflected, for Geddes, the Chinese belief that "the Miao were a wild species," and for Robert Jenks, "the underlying Chinese conviction that the Miao were, in fact, beyond redemption" and the indication that "many Chinese looked upon barbarians as intellectually inferior and almost subhuman—more like animals in their behavior than like humans."[86]

Many times, Chinese authorities' hostility toward the Miao went beyond mere rhetoric and discourse. During the Qing dynasty, Jenks writes, "discrimination against the Miao and other minorities were institutionalized in laws and regulations. In the eighteenth century, for example, a regulation called for the death of two Miao for every Chinese killed by a Miao, and Miao were not allowed to go to Han towns and markets except under specially prescribed circumstances."[87] Miao licentiates (shengyuan) were also barred from taking the province-level exams to become senior licentiates (gongsheng) or stipendiaries (lingsheng). Separate quotas established later allowed Miao to take the exams at the lower levels. Nonetheless, Miao examiners, after they passed, were still seen as "intellectually inferior people who needed special dispensations to pass the examinations," and the degrees awarded them were considered "second-rate."[88]

In 1728, Chinese Emperor Yongzheng, in an effort to assimilate the Miao into Chinese culture and society, instituted a policy of assimilation.[89] The Miao, as Jenks has

---

[84] Robert Jenks, *Insurgency and Social Disorder in Guizhou: : The "Miao" Rebellion, 1854-1873*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 43-44.
[85] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 14.
[86] Robert D. Jenks, *Insurgency and Disorder in Guizhou*, 44; William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 15.
[87] Robert D. Jenks, *Insurgency and Disorder in Guizhou*, 43.
[88] Ibid..
[89] Geoffrey Gunn, "Shamans and Rebels: The BatChai (Meo) Rebellion of Northern Laos and North-West Vietnam," *Journal of Siam Society* 74, (1986): 110.

written, "were expected to abandon their ethnic heritage entirely, if gradually, and to embrace Chinese culture. They were to dress like the Chinese, act like the Chinese, think like the Chinese, pay taxes like the Chinese, and accept Chinese laws."[90] Some Miao acquiesced and submitted to Chinese authorities, but others vehemently opposed Chinese rule and forced assimilation. Chinese authorities, thus, divided the Miao into two groups, the assimilated and the unassimilated, and called the former "raw" Miao (*sheng Miao*) and the latter "cooked" Miao (*shu Miao*).[91] "By definition," Jenks writes, "the former lived in remote areas, were beyond the pale of Chinese civilization and political control, paid no taxes, and rendered no labor services; the latter lived near Han towns, were under direct or indirect Chinese control, paid taxes and did labor service, and had absorbed some measure of Chinese culture."[92] The *sheng Miao* were further pacified and sinicized under the *Tusi* system, an indirect-rule policy which Chinese authorities implemented to use "barbarians to rule barbarians" (*yizi zhiyi*). Under this system, Chinese recognized some Miao leaders and used them to serve as intermediaries between their Miao villagers and Chinese authorities. The policy allowed Chinese authorities to direct the anger and frustration of the Miao against each other and away from the Chinese.[93]

Despite attempts by Chinese authorities to sinicize the Miao, the raw Miao continued to maintain their autonomy and married solely within their own people.[94] They continued to challenge Chinese laws and domination. A Jesuit missionary, Gabriel de Magaillans, who arrived in China in 1640, traveled all over the country, and remained in the country until his death in Peking in 1677, once observed, for example, that "the independent mountaineers of Sze-Chuen, Yun-nan, Kwei-chau, and Kwang-si, pay no tribute to the emperor, nor yield him any obedience." The Miao so adamantly refused to submit to the Chinese emperor that "the Chinese stand in fear of them; so that after several trials which they have made of their prowess, they have been forced to let them live at their own liberty."[95]

---

[90] Robert Jenks, *Insurgency and Disorder in Guizhou*, 42.
[91] Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 16.
[92] Robert Jenks, *Insurgency and Disorder in Guizhou*, 35.
[93] Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, (New Yori: Harper and Row, 1972), 79-80; and Robert Jenks, *Insurgency and Disorder in Guizhou*, 39-41.
[94] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 11-12.
[95] Ibid., 12.

The Miao opposition to Chinese rule led to countless battles between the Miao and the Chinese over the centuries. The historian Herold J. Weins recorded more than forty Miao uprisings against Chinese authorities between 403 and 561 A.D.[96] Jean Mottin similarly observed that "under the Ming practically not a single year had passed without troubles surging up from one side or the other."[97] In fact, the Miao and the Chinese fought so often through the ages that at the end of the 16th century, the Ming dynasty constructed a Miao Wall, a small version of the Great Wall of China in Beijing that stood teen feet tall and stretched one hundred miles long on the Hunan-Guizhou border, to protect Chinese from Miao incursions.[98] In a military campaign to control the Miao from 1734 to 1737, the Chinese burned down 12,024 Miao villages, sparing only 388; killed 17,00 Miao in action; took 27,00 Miao to prison, half of whom were later executed; and seized 46,00 guns and gave away all the lands that the Miao possessed to Chinese soldiers.[99] It is, thus, not surprising that some half a million Hmong left China in search of freedom and autonomy and of new, fertile, and uninhabited lands in the mountains of Indochina.[100]

Even after centuries have passed, the Chinese persecution of the Hmong remains deeply entrenched in Hmong historical memory. Many Hmong narratives, for example, still commonly point to the Chinese as the main culprits for the loss of the Hmong writing and their kingdom. In these narratives, the Hmong once had their own king, kingdom, and writing, but the Chinese killed their king, destroyed their kingdom, exiled them from their homelands, and forced them to live as stateless minority in China. The Hmong lost their writing as they fled from Chinese persecution. Some narratives say that they lost their writing in the Yellow River as they tried to swim across. Others say that they ate their books because they were so hungry. Still, others indicate that the Chinese burned Hmong books.[101] In fact, Chinese oppression is so central to Hmong historical memory

---

[96] Herold J. Weins, *China's March toward the Tropics,* (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1954), 202; John Duffy, "Writing from These Roots," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000), 78.
[97] Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong,* 31.
[98] Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 52; Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong,* 31; Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 15.
[99] Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong,* 33-35.
[100] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 16.
[101] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 40-41.

of China that their identity in their narratives of literacy, messianism, and geomancy, as Nicholas Tapp has pointed out, is constantly set in opposition to the Chinese. The Hmong, that is, continue to "define their own ethnic identity by contrasting with that of the Chinese through a series of negatives: the *absence* of writing, the *absence* of rulers, the *absence* of land, or states."[102]

Chinese oppression is so profoundly embedded in Hmong historical memory that they continue to reject the term "Miao" as an acceptable identity marker. Today, nearly ten million Miao live in China, most in the provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Sichuan, Yunnan, Hubei and Guangxi.[103] For the Miao in China and for many scholars, Miao is a neutral term that refers to all non-Han peoples of south China generally. It is a term that comes from the Chinese characters "plants" and "fields," connoting "sons of the soil,"[104] and it is a term that means "sprouts," as in young "seedlings."[105] Because of its Chinese etymology, the term can imply that the Miao were the indigenous inhabitants of the land.[106] To the Hmong in Southeast Asia and the diaspora, however, the ethnonym "Miao" is an insult. It signifies barbarianism and savagery. Yang Dao, the first Hmong scholar to receive a doctorate, for example, writes:

> The word "Miao," meaning barbarian, was used originally during the expansionist conquests of the Han dynasty to refer to all peoples of other than Chinese origin. Later, the epithet "Miao" was confined to certain refractory ethnic groups, including the Hmong, who fought against Chinese domination. Introduced in the late nineteenth century to French Indochina, "Miao" degenerated into "Meo," a derogatory term categorically denounced by the Hmong.[107]

The Hmong prefer to call themselves and be called "Hmong" which, according to Yang Dao, means "free" or "free men."[108] Hmong anthropologist Gary Yia Lee, however,

---

[102] Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 126.
[103] Kou Yang, "Hmong Diaspora of the Post-War Period," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12, no. 3 (2003): 274.
[104] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 13.
[105] Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 106-107; J. Enwall, "Miao or Hmong?" *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter* 17, (1992).
[106] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 13.
[107] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, (Minneapolis: Worldbridge Association, Ltd., 1993), xvi.
[108] W.E. Garrett, "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos," *National Geographic* 145, (1974): 78.

recently contended that most Hmong people really do not know the meaning of the word "Hmong," and they hesitate to accept the interpretation that Hmong means free.[109] Meanwhile, Paoze Thao, another Hmong scholar, maintains that the origin of the word 'Mong' or 'Hmong' itself is unknown.[110] In spite of the disagreement over the meaning of the word "Hmong," the Hmong people outside of China unequivocally prefer "Hmong" over "Miao" as their identity marker. Rejecting "Miao" is, thus, a means by which the Hmong seek to resist the legacy of centuries of persecution and oppression at the hands of their Chinese rulers.

Hmong Migration to Indochina

If the origins and early history of the Hmong are obscure and debatable, so is the initial date of the Hmong migration to Indochina. According to Yang Kaiyi, some Hmong people had already left China and entered "the present Indochinese countries" in the thirteenth century when the Mongols established the Yuan Dynasty in China.[111] According to William Geddes, the Hmong arrived in Southeast Asia some four centuries ago, that is, in the sixteenth century.[112] Similarly, French anthropologist Jacques Lemoine indicated that Hmong immigrated to Vietnam as early as the beginning of the Manchu conquest or the end of the Ming dynasty (around 1660).[113] Keith Quincy, meanwhile, contended that Hmong did not arrive in the region until the 18th century after the Guizhou rebellion from 1727 to 1740. After they migrated south, Hmong migrants resettled in two places (Dong Quan and Hoang-Su-Phi) on the northern Vietnamese border. Fifty years later (around 1790), more Hmong migrated south to Vietnam, occupying this time "the mountains of the Tai village of Dong Van, just a few miles from

---

[109] Gary Yia Lee, "Cultural Identity in Post-Modern Society: Reflections on What is A Hmong?" *Hmong Studies Journal* 1, no. 1, (1996): 1-14.
[110] Paoze Thao, *Mong Education at the Crossroads*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 3.
[111] Yang Kaiyi, "Hmong-Mongolian?" *Hmong Forum*, (1996): 54.
[112] William Geddess, *Migrants of the Mountains*,27.
[113] Lemoine, Jacques, "Les Hmong et les Yao," in C. Hemmet (texts réunis par), *Montagnards des Pays d'Indochine dans les collections du Musée de l'Hmme*, (Paris: Ed. Sépia/Ville de Boulogne-Billancourt, 1995), 28, quoted in Christian Culas, "Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers: Origins of the Hmong in Laos and Siam in the Nineteenth and Early Twenties Centuries," *Turbulent Times and Enduring Peoples: Mountain Minorities in the Southeast Asian Massif*, ed. Jean Michaud, (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 33.

the point where the three borders of Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Vietnam intersects."[114] Most Hmong studies scholars, including Jean Mottin, Christian Culas, Jean Michaud, Yang Dao, to name a few, however, argued that the Hmong arrived in Indochina in the 19th century. According to French researcher Jean Mottin, the Hmong migrated to Vietnam after 1800, reaching its peak in 1860.[115] According to Christian Culas and Jean Michaud, the Hmong migrated into the Indochinese peninsula in successive waves. The first wave went there with Chinese Haw (Muslim Chinese caravaneers) around 1850 in search of fertile and uninhabited forested land. Having traded with Chinese Haw, the Hmong's primary suppliers of salt and metals in China, the Hmong migrated to Indochina to live in close proximity to Haw caravan route to continue trading with them. They also migrated there to escape Han Chinese oppression and find better opportunity to cultivate and trade opium in the high mountains of Vietnam and Laos. Another wave went into Indochina during and immediately after the Miao Rebellion (1854-1873), the Muslim Rebellion (1855-1873), and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1872). The rebellions resulted in increased animosity, repression and violence against the Hmong. The confiscation of their land and high taxation after the rebellions left the Hmong hopeless of a decent life in southwest China, which necessitated their migration to Indochina.[116] In another study, Christian Culas noted that in 1874, some Hmong came as part of the runaway troops from China who called themselves "Black Flags" to invade northern Vietnam. The Hmong carried "white flags," signifying that they were the white Hmong.[117]

From Vietnam, the Hmong migrated west to Laos and later to Thailand. Yang Dao estimated that the Hmong first moved into Xieng Khouang province in northern Laos between 1810 and 1820.[118] Sometime around 1815-1818, according to Quincy, the Hmong left Vietnam and entered Laos in search of new land to grow opium. Following

---

[114] Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 60.
[115] Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong (Meo)*, 43.
[116] Christian Culas and Jean Michaud, "A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History," in *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, eds. N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas, and G.Y. Lee, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 61-86.
[117] Christian Culas, "Migrants, Runaways, and Opium Growers," 32.
[118] Yang Dao, "Why did the Hmong leave Laos?" in *The Hmong in the West*, ed. Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, (Minneapolis, MN: Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1982), 6.

Chinese merchants, they resettled in Nong Het province.[119] Around 1848, the White Tai leader in Tonkin, Deo Van Tri, at the age of fifteen, reported witnessing "the passage of the Hmong belonging to the White Flags from Sichuan through Sip Song Chau Tai on their way to Laos."[120] According to the testimony of the Laotians living in Luang Prabang, as recorded by French administrator Paul Le Boulanger, "Large groups of Hmong migrated in this region [Luang Prabang] around 1847-50, and they were called White Flags."[121] By 1850, when the king of Luang Prabang, Souka-Seum, passed away, the "Hmong had already established many isolated villages with some trading contacts with Laotian, Chinese and Shan caravaneers."[122]

A recent study places the Hmong migration into Siam (Thailand) between 1840 and 1870.[123] Hmong authors of a manuscript written in Hmong estimate the Hmong arrival in Thailand between 1844 and 1874.[124] According to Culas, the Hmong fled across the Mekong River towards Sayabury, Nan and Chiang Mai while others rushed southwest toward Loei and Phitsanoulok around 1871-72 after Red Flag pirates invaded their villages and smoldered their houses in Xieng Khouang.[125] Latter waves of Hmong settlers moved into Phitsanoulok, Lomsak, Tak, and Chiang Mai in the early twentieth century in search of fertile lands for opium cultivation.[126] According to Geddes, some Hmong arrived in Northern Siam (Thailand) in 1875 as part of a group of Laotian soldiers who the Siamese had recruited to help them protect the Luang Prabang Kingdom from invasion by the White Tai leader of Tonkin.[127]

In Laos, the Hmong settled in the northern provinces of Sam Neau, Luang Prbabang, Phong Saly, and Xieng Khouang. Keeping to altitudes above 3,000 feet, they tried as much as possible to avoid conflict with the lowlands and other mountaineers.

---

[119] Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 60-61. Jean Mottin agreed with Yang Dao's date that Hmong initially arrived in Laos around 1810-1820. See, Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong (Meo)*, 47.
[120] Christian Culas, "Migrants, Runaways, and Opium Growers," 33-34.
[121] Ibid., 36.
[122] Ibid..
[123] Udom Charoenniyomphrai, et al., *Indigenous Knowledge, Customary Use of Natural Resources and Sustainable Biodiversity Management: Case Study of Hmong and Karen Communities in Thailand*, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Inter Mountain Peoples Education, Education and Cultures in Thailand Association, 2006), 17.
[124] Nyiaj Xeeb Yaj and Tsooj Ceeb Thoj, *Phau Ntawv Txuj Txoog Hmoob*, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: 1998).
[125] Christian Culas, "Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers," 35.
[126] Ibid., 37-38.
[127] William Geddess, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 29.

Except a bloody clash with the Khmu, another ethnic group of highlanders in northern Laos in the early nineteenth century, the Hmong lived a relatively peaceful and autonomous life in the heights with minimal contact with other ethnic groups.[128] They occasionally shifted their residence to accommodate their practice of slash-and-burn agriculture, but the Hmong did not have to leave their homelands until the Communist takeover of Laos in 1975. To understand this development, it is necessary to discuss how they were jolted from their isolation into French colonial politics from the 1ate 19th century to the mid-1950s, how their involvement in French colonialism paved the way to their involvement with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the 1960s, and how their involvement in the U.S. Secret War ultimately led to their exodus and the rise of Hmong transnational politics after 1975.

Prelude to the Secret War: Hmong under French Colonialism

The Catholic Church had sent French missionaries to evangelize in Vietnam and, to a lesser extent, Cambodia and Laos since the 1620s.[129] The France government, however, had little interest in Indochina until the mid-nineteenth century. At the end of the First Opium War in 1842, "China was forced to pay a huge indemnity in silver to the British, open five ports to trade, limit the amount of custom duty it could charge on foreign imports, allow Christian missionaries to proselytize, and cede the island of Hong Kong to Great Britain."[130] After defeating China in the Second Opium War in 1860, France and Great Britain forced China to open its markets for trade and legalize the importation of opium to China. Because of Great Britain's control of Hong Kong, it reaped most of the profits from the triangular French-British-Chinese trade relation. As historian Alfred McCoy noted:

> The French had watched with envy while Britain secured enormous profits through domination of the China trade and with bitterness as they noted that France's consumption of one-half of Shanghai's and one-third of Canton's silk

[128] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, (Minneapolis: Worldbride Associates Ltd., 1993), 36.
[129] Nicola Cooper, *French in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*, (New York: Berg, 2001), 12.
[130] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 12.

> exports in the 1870s (and over one-half of all of China's silk exports in the 1880s) was one of the major reasons that the China trade was so profitable for England. England's control over Hong Kong (Canton) and Shanghai meant that the silk was shipped on British vessels to London before it could be shipped to France—all to England's profit.[131]

To reach China's market, contain British territorial advance in Southeast Asia, and reap its fair share of the profits, France needed a port in Indochina. To this end, the French admiral, Charles Rigault de Genouilly, and his 2,300 men made their first naval expedition to the port city of Tourane (Danang), a port on the eastern seaboard of Vietnam, in 1858. They initially encountered fierce resistance from Vietnamese, including indigenous Christians, but the admiral and his troops later captured Tourane in August 1858 and Saigon in February 1859. After the Treaty of Peking in October 1861, French continued its conquest of Indochina under Admiral Léonard Charner. Under the supervision of a new *Ministre de la Marine et des Colonies*, Prosper de Chasseloup-Laubat, Admiral Charner set out "to gain as much territory as possible before proposing peace terms."[132] The goal was to extend French trading ports to as far as Cambodia and Siam (today's Thailand). Through a treaty, the French acquired Cambodia as a French protectorate in August 1863.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Chasseloup-Laubat, the president of the *Société de géographie*, had sent renowned explorers Ernest Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier to Laos to explore the Mekong River and its plateaus.[133] Like Admiral Charner's mission in Vietnam, the mission of Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier was "to draw up an inventory of the area's natural resources, to create new *currants commerciaux* which would open out onto central China, and to explore unknown regions." It was, Nicola Cooper pointed out, "the actions of these explorers and adventurers which led, ultimately, to the 'Tonkin' crisis of 1873" when Black Flag pirate bandits beheaded Francis Garnier in the war for Tonkin.[134] Francis Garnier's death provided the pretext for

---

[131] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos: 1883-1945," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, ed. Nina S. Adams and Alfred M. McCoy, (New York: Harper and Row, 1970): 69.
[132] Nicola Cooper, *French in Indochina*,13.
[133] Milton Osborne, *River Road to China: The Mekong River Expedition 1866-1873*, (New York: Liveright, 1975).
[134] Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 14.

further military incursion in the region, leading to the French acquisition of Tonkin and Annan as protectorates in 1884. Having conquered Tonkin and Annan, France went on to claim possession and control over the Lao kingdoms, the tributary states of both Hue and Bangkok. The Thai sternly opposed French control, but they failed to protect Luang Prabang from the invasion of the White Tai leader Deo Van Tri. After the war between the White Tai and the Luang Prabang kingdoms broke out, Auguste Pavie successfully rescued King Unkham of Luang Prabang down the Mekong River away from Deo Van Tri's grip. Pavie's action thus persuaded the king to come under French protection. In 1893, France took full control over all three Lao kingdoms, including Luang Prabang in the north, Vientiane in the center, and Champassak in the south.[135]

Of its Indochinese colonies, Laos held the least prospect for the French. The country had few natural resources to exploit, and the French did not think particularly high of the inhabitants of Laos. In their eyes, the native inhabitants of Laos were the very cause of the country's poverty. For the French, the people in Laos, as Quincy observed, were "inferior: not just to Europeans, which was the standard view toward all conquered Asians and Africans, but to the Vietnamese as well. Serious and industrious, the Vietnamese were the object of grudging admiration. By contrast, the ethnic Lao, fun-loving and lethargic, were considered absolutely useless. Even lower in estimation were the Laotian montagnards."[136] The lowland Lao and especially the Laotian Montagnards, for the French, held little promise but posed great obstacles to French civilization. A French official said of the Montagnards, the general rubric under which all non-lowland Lao nations were categorized: "It does not seem…that this savage race, indolent, superstitious, nonprogressive, can be called to play an important role in Indochina. It seems that they will be of no use for our civilizing actions, for which they will create nothing but obstacles."[137] With such a bleak view of the Laotians and with little natural resources to exploit, few French colonial officials viewed a Lao posting as a desirable career move. While some 40,000 French competed for jobs administering the three

---

[135] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration and Legitimacy Under French Colonialism," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005). 42; Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 5-6.
[136] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*: *The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000), 17.
[137] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos,: 1893-1954," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 79.

provinces of Vietnam, only one hundred French officials went to Laos. Those who took a Lao posting went there with the intention of only staying "for a short term." Once there, they spent "most of their time chasing local women, seeking or avoiding addiction to alcohol or opium, and dreaming of their return to Saigon or Hanoi."[138]

It is, thus, hardly a surprise, given the French apathy toward Laos and its inhabitants, that they did little to develop Laos. In the six decades that Laos was under French control, they did not establish a single high school in the entire colony.[139] While a few primary schools were built, almost all the teachers were Vietnamese. In these schools, Vietnamese students outnumbered the Laotians two to one.[140] By 1940, only seven thousand Laotian students in a population of one million attended primary schools in Laos.[141] In 1946, only eight Hmong were exposed to the Lao written language, but only three were literate in the language.[142] In the 1970s, Hmong illiteracy rate remained as high as ninety-nine percent in some provinces in Laos.[143] The elites of Lao society were the only people to have access to a high school education at the Lycee Pavie school in Vientiane under French teachers and to the opportunity to move on to Hanoi and Paris for further education.[144] The result was an aristocracy of people, with highly trained Lao and Vietnamese elites at the top and the mountaineers, including the Hmong, at the bottom in a condition of "intellectual inferiority."[145]

Economically, the French also did little for Laos. They introduced new methods of opium cultivation, and they improved poppy growing in Laos. However, they did so not to improve the lot of the natives but largely to monopolize opium production and trade in the region to sustain the colonial administration.[146] They did not do anything to improve the "self-supporting village agriculture, in which 90 percent of the population engaged. Few attempts were made to improve the production of rice and maize, the

---

[138] Ibid., 67.
[139] John Duffy, "Writing From These Roots," 82; Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 7.
[140] Victor B. Anthony and Richard S. Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos, 1954-1973*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1993), 4.
[141] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 83.
[142] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 322.
[143] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, 83.
[144] Victor Anthony & Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos*, 4.
[145] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, 83.
[146] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 21; Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 84.

country's main's food crops."[147] In the case of the Hmong, the French encouraged the Hmong production of opium at the expense of their main staples—rice and maize. By the early 1940s, Hmong had become the principal opium growers for the French. Their main settlement, Nong Het in Xieng Khoung Province, had become "one of Indochina's most productive opium-growing areas."[148] If there was something the French could claim that they did for Laos, it was the construction of a road network linking Laos to Vietnam.[149] As Victor Anthony and Richard Sexton wrote,

> Using *corvée* labor drawn from the populace, French engineers and Vietnamese technicians built three major "highways." Rout 13 was the chief north-south connection between the major towns along the Mekong. Route 7 was the main east-west road in the north, cutting across the Plain of Jars and entering Vietnam via the Barthelemy Pass. In the panhandle, Route 9 originated at the Mekong town of Savannakhet, ran eastward through Tchepne and Khe Sanh, and ended on the coast of South Vietnam.[150]

In fact, the French did so little for Laos that Anthony and Sexton concluded, "Laos was much the same on the eve of World War II as when Auguste Pavie first set foot on its soil over fifty years earlier. The country was still a backward, inaccessible, and undeveloped hinterland compared to bustling Vietnam, which boasted a costly rail network, an elaborate high system, schools, universities, and impressive colonial administrative centers."[151] Speaking of the French's miniscule contribution to Indochina, President Franklin D. Roosevelt also said at a meeting of the Pacific War Council on July 21, 1943, "The French had been there for nearly one hundred years and had done absolutely nothing with the place to improve the lot of the people…. Probably for every pound they got out of the place they put in only one shilling."[152] In a letter to Secretary of State Cornell Hull in January 1944, Roosevelt reiterated this point, saying, "France has had the

---

[147] Victor Anthony & Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos,* 5.
[148] Alfred McCoy, *Politics of Heroine in Southeast Asia,* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 83-84.
[149] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," in *Laos: War and Revolution,* 83.
[150] Victor Anthony & Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos,* 5.
[151] Ibid..
[152] Quoted in Mark P. Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America*, (Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2000), 76.

country…for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning… The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that."[153]

To maintain its colonial administration in Laos, French authorities raised revenues "by leveling a head tax on all males between the ages of eighteen and sixty; by taxing the sale of opium, alcohol, and salt; by requiring each adult male to perform unpaid *corvée* labor; and by establishing a government monopoly on opium."[154] To ensure that the colonized subjects did not direct their anger and hostility toward the French because of their tax policies, French authorities ruled Laos and its native populations with an indirect-rule colonial system. In this system, the French constructed a racial hierarchy in which the French sat at the top and adroitly elevated some native nations to position of power while suppressing other nations to the bottom. Below the French in this hierarchy were, therefore, the Vietnamese who the French thought were the most diligent and industrious of all their Indochinese colonized subjects. Below the Vietnamese were the Tai and the Lao. The Hmong and other minority highlanders were kept at the very bottom of the colonial hierarchy.[155] French indirect-rule colonialism allowed the French to "exploit extremely independent and volatile groups without ever incurring any direct hostility."[156]

The French colonial hierarchy radically altered existing ethnic relations in Laos, particularly the relationship between the lowland dwellers and the highland tribal peoples. It not only accentuated their ethnic differences, it also racialized them by making some nations superior to the others.[157] After the French racialized Laos with "a system of cross-racial administration which established a brutal ethnic hierarchy, and, especially in northern Laos, pitted the various ethnic groups against each other," as historian Alfred

---

[153] President Frank D. Roosevelt to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, January 24, 1944, in *The Pentagon Papers* (GPO ed.), Bk. 1, V.B. 1, A-14; Marvin Gettlemen, et.al., eds., *Vietnam and America*, (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 41.
[154] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 7.
[155] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 78.
[156] Ibid., 80.
[157] Jamaree Chiengton, "The Politics of Ethnicity, Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Thailand, Vietnam and Lao PDR, " in *Social Challenges for the Mekong Region*, eds, Kaosa-ard Mingsarn and John Dore, (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University, 2003): 148; Charles F. Keyes, "Tribal Peoples and the Nation-State in Mainland Southeast Asia," in *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups and Ethnic Minorities*, A Cultural Survival Report, No. 22, (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1987): 20.

McCoy describes it, the Hmong became the most obvious and proximate victims.[158] The Hmong, along with other highland indigenous nations, were treated as inferior races to the Vietnamese, the lowland Lao, the Tai, and the French. In Laos under French colonialism, the Chinese word "Miao" degenerated into "Meo," and both the lowland Lao and the French called the Hmong the "Meo," a term that, for the Hmong, shared the same pejorative connotation as Miao.[159] "Meo" is a word in Lao and Thai languages that, with a slight change in intonation, can be pronounced to mean "cats." To call the Hmong as "Meo" was an insult because such a signification implied that the Hmong were a group of barbarians living in the mountains like wild cats in the forests. As Father Savina, a French Catholic missionary working in Xieng Khouang province, Laos, in the 1920s, had written:

> Whoever has traveled among the Chinese, the Man, the Thai or the Annamites [Vietnamese], must have heard said several times that the present Miao are still cave-dwellers and cannibals; that they are cruel, ferocious, traitors and thieves; that they eat raw meat and that they are ignorant of the usage of chopsticks and spoons; briefly, that they live secluded in their mountains as true savages, going about daily almost nude, and at night sleeping in the dirt, pell-mell, between niches like animals.[160]

Dehumanized, the Hmong were the object of Lao hostility and cruelty. Jean Lartéguy and Yang Dao recorded:

> In general the Lao were hostile toward the Montagnards. They forbid them from passing through their villages or valleys with an ill person under the pretext that it would contaminate the region. They impose heavy fines upon Hmong who, through carelessness, passed through their land transporting a deer, a stag, or a wild boar. The Lao would claim that they have offended the protecting spirits of the soil, the Phi Moung. As a result, the culprit is exacted a cow or a buffalo which must be sacrificed to the spirits as sacrilegious reparation. The sacrifice

---

[158]Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 80.
[159] W.E. Garrett, "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos," *National Geographic* 145, (Jan. 1974): 78.
[160] F.M. Savina, *Historie des Miao,* (Farnborough: Gregg, 1972): 173, quoted Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 219.

> would never occur, and the Hmong never understood much about these complicated histories of the Phi that never remains in the same place.[161]

Tougea Lypaolo, a former colonel in the United States clandestine army in Laos in the 1960s and the cultural specialist of the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, similarly recalled that the Hmong rarely found justice in Laos. Whenever there was a conflict between a Hmong and a Lao, the Lao always emerged as the victor in the case. "If a Lao stole and butchered a Hmong's pig or cow, he would not be asked to repay the Hmong when they went to court," Col. Lypaolo explained. "In contrast, if a Hmong stole and butchered a Lao's pig or cow, he would be imprisoned and asked to repay the Lao for the butchered pig or cow."[162]

As the intermediaries for the French, the Vietnamese, the Lao, and the Tai exploited the Hmong at will. In Vietnam, Hmong were victims of ethnic Tai exploitation. As French agents, ethnic Tai mandarins demanded that the Hmong pay five Indochinese *piasters* or two hundred grams of opium to the colonial state—amounts greatly in excess of what the French themselves required.[163] The Hmong in Laos suffered the same fate as their co-ethnics in Vietnam. The Lao and the Tai, as tax collectors for the French, demanded that the Hmong pay an additional tax to the collectors beyond the portion of their required tax paid in opium at an assessed value far below the market price to the French.[164] Colonel Tougeu Leepaolo remembered that when the Lao came to collect taxes from the Hmong, they collected 5 kip, but they only collected 2 kip from the Lao. When they brought the collected taxes to the French, they gave the French 2 kip and kept the other 3 kip to themselves.[165] When the Hmong registered their complaints, French authorities either ignored them or asked them to grow more opium to increase their overall profits. By increasing their profits, the French reasoned, the Hmong could save more and pay their taxes to the French. French authorities also offered no compensation for Hmong *corvée* labor, which required each adult male to contribute fifteen to twenty

---

[161] Jean Lartéguy and Yang Dao, *La Fabuleuse Adventure of Peuple de L'opium*, (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1979): 97, quoted in Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 219.
[162] Tougeu Leepaolo, interview with author, St. Paul, MN, 23 April 2007.
[163] Geoffrey Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos: Peasants and Politics in a Colonial Backwater*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 153.
[164] Gary Yia Lee, "Ethnic Minorities and National Building in Laos: The Hmon in the Lao State," *Peninsule* 11/12, (1985/1986), 215-232; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 117.
[165] Tougeu Leepaolo, interview with author, St. Paul, MN, 23 April 2007.

days of work a year and included such work as clearing jungles, removing rocks from rivers, building and repairing roads, and performing other kinds of hard labor.[166]

Resentment over taxation and the unpaid *corvée* labor, which kept the Hmong and other ethnic nations in Laos in conditions that historian Alfred McCoy described as "little better than slavery," provoked numerous Hmong uprisings against French colonialism in Vietnam and Laos.[167] Starting in 1860, a Hmong man named Xiong Tai launched a bloody and protracted revolt against French colonialism in Vietnam. From the mountain of Tang Chang, located between Yen Minh and Quan Ba, where he established his palace, "Long Vei," the Seat of the Dragon, Xiong Tai directed his assaults primarily on the Tho, Tai, Yao, and Nung chiefs and lords who served as French tax collectors. Calling himself an agent of the "Lord of the Sky," who received the support of the four gods of the four corners of the world who reign supreme in Hmong cosmology and a heavenly mandate to liberate the Hmong from foreign oppression, Xiong Tai created tremendous fear among the tax collectors. His revolt abruptly ended in the mid-1870s when his father-in-law hired Chinese assassins to assassinate him because the old man believed Xiong Tai had murdered his daughter.[168]

A little more than a decade later, another revolt erupted in Vietnam. The leader of that revolt was Xiong Mi Chang. Xiong Mi Chang began his anti-French colonial struggle in 1910 in neighboring Tonkin, particularly in Ha Giang province, Vietnam, against Chinese invaders and local corrupted Tai lords who overtaxed and exploited Hmong at will in the province. The son of Xiong Lao Lou and Hang Me Nhoung, Xiong Mi Chang was born and raised in Si Phai, the canton of Quang-Mau (Dong Van), in Ha Giang province. Like his predecessor and cousin, Xiong Tai, Mi Chang claimed to have received a mandate from heaven in a dream to liberate Hmong from foreign oppression. The "King of the Mountains," Xiong Mi Chang possessed extraordinary skills and talents despite his slightly deformed left hand, including the ability to heal various forms of illness, predict the future, and speak several languages, including French, all of which served to legitimize him as an authentic messianic leader. The movement ended in 1912

---

[166] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 7-8.
[167] Alfred McCoy, "French Colonialism in Laos, 1893-1954," *Laos: War and Revolution* , 80& 87-92; Geoffrey Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos,* 101-167.
[168] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 65-66; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People,* 66-69.

because his generals disobeyed his specific dictates to not slaughter animals, pillage and burn the villages, and sabotage the properties of their enemies. The goal of the movement, Xiong Mi Chang later told his interrogators in prison, was the restoration of peaceful order to society, not the destruction of it. Their loss, due to "moral failure" for "tainting the movement with violence," was the price they paid for their violence; it was an act of divine judgment.[169]

The most prominent and widely studied anti-French struggle by the Hmong was the bloody and protracted revolt known as "War of the Insane," or the *La Guerre de Fous*, from 1918-1921. Pa Chai Vue, the son of a notable family from the Hmong village of Na Ou in the Moung Theng (Dien Bien Phu) district, where his uncle, Shong Tou Vue, was the village chief, was the messianic leader of this revolt. From 1918 when Vue Pa Chai gathered three hundred men in Quynn Nihn, a mountain village near Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam to November of 1921, Pa Chai led countless battles against the French army first in Vietnam and later in Laos, particularly in the Hong Het and Phonsavan districts near the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khouang Province. Pa Chai claimed that he had received direct order from the Lord of the Sky, or Chao Fa, to end Hmong oppression. To prove his authenticity as an agent of the Hmong Chao Fa named *Tswb Tshoj*, Pa Chai displayed extraordinary supernatural powers, including the ability to jump over houses and stop eggs from cracking when pounded in a rice grinder.[170] Throughout the movement, Pa Chai sought to unite the Hmong in a common fight for their liberation from foreign rule. He advocated that the key to their liberation was the establishment of a sovereign, just, and autonomous Hmong kingdom, a kingdom covering land areas stretched from Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, where the capital of the Hmong kingdom would be located, to Nong Het district in Xieng Khoung and Phongsavan provinces in northern Laos.[171]

---

[169] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 46-77.

[170] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong and America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Washington University Press, 2000), 24; Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 131-144; Geoffrey Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos: Peasant and Politics in a Colonial Backwater*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 151-160.

[171] Geoffrey Gunn, "Shamans and Rebels: The Batchai (Meo) Rebellion of Northern Laos and North-West Vietnam (1918-1921)," *Journal of the Siam Society* 74, (1986): 114-117; Nicholas Tapp, "The Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20:1, (1989): 70-95.

Based on the account by Txooj Tsab Yaj, which Father Y. Betrais recorded verbatim in 1972, Pa Chai's movement went unbelievably well in spite of their crude and rudimentary weapons. They conquered one village after another. Echoing Yang Txooj Tsab's account, Father Savina declared that "the Meo would have quickly prevailed over the Tai and the Lao" without the French's intervention.[172] Like Xiong Mi Chang's movement, Pa Chai's movement began its descent after some of his soldiers went against his teaching and raped and killed the women and girls of the village *Moos Hwv* that they captured. Because of their sins, they lost the protection of their God, *Tswb Tshoj*, and their invincibility. The French army slaughtered all the sinners in the next battle.[173] Pa Chai was captured and killed on November 7, 1921, but who killed him and how he actually died remains a historical mystery.[174] Some said that the Yao (or Khmu) were Pa Chai's assassins while others alleged that his assassins were Hmong rebels who came to get his head for bounty from the French. Txooj Tsawb Yaj talked as if Pa Chai was never killed; he did not really die. Such an emphasis may be, as Mai Na Lee pointed out, an effort to "demonstrate that the dream of the Hmong kingdom has merely gone latent."[175] The French ultimately crushed the rebellion, but they did not completely extinguish the Hmong fire for autonomy.

To pacify the Hmong, the French maneuvered to establish a system of *tassengs*, or administrative districts, in Nong Het, east of the Plain of Jars near the Laotian-Vietnamese border, to allow the Hmong to govern their people. As a gesture of gratitude for his help in mobilizing Hmong workers to construct Colonial Route 7 and to repress *La Guerre de Fous*, French authorities appointed Lo Bliayao as the first chief of the Hmong in Nong Het.[176] This system of *tassengs* granted the Hmong a degree of autonomy, but it did not end the exploitation of the Hmong altogether. The Hmong had to pay the exorbitant taxes and perform unpaid *corvée* labor. When Hmong complained to Lo Bliayao, he adroitly used the Hmong discontent to his advantage. He convinced the French to pay Hmong laborers and raise their wages by thirty percent. Instead of passing

[172] Yang Dao, *The Hmong at the Turning Point*, 37.
[173] Txooj Tsawb Yaj, *Rog Paj Cai*, recorded by Y. Betrais in Sayaboury (Laos), 1972.
[174] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 138-142,
[175] Ibid., 81.
[176] Ibid., 144-201.

the increase of Hmong wages to them, however, Bliayao kept most of it to himself.[177] During *La Guerre de Fous,* when Pa Chai Vue led the disgruntled Hmong to fight against the French, Lo Bliayao, a loyal servant to French Commissioner de Bartlelemy who appointed him as the *kiatong* in Nong Het, actively aided the French in hunting down Pa Chai. On Bliayao's order, Shong Ger Lo, Bliayao's nephew and former secretary, was also arrested and sent to prison for supporting Pa Chai. Instead of spending a life of suffering in prison, Shong Ger ingested a poisonous plant and died on the way to prison.[178]

After Pa Chai's death in 1921, Bliayao helped the French organize a huge fete in Xieng Khoung to display their power and victory. During the fete, in which all Hmong in the region were invited to attend, Bliayao and the French dragged some of Pa Chai's fighters out and executed them in front of the crowd to cap the day's festivities.[179] Like a row of planted cabbages, other fighters who surrendered or were captured by the French were buried up to their necks, leaving only their heads above ground level, and beheaded always in front of a Hmong crowd assembled by Bliayao and the French. Speaking of the punishments that the French exacted for Pa Chai's fighters, Hmong anthropologist Gary Yia Lee wrote:

> Of those who co-operated with the rebels, the leaders were decapitated at Nong Het in front of hundreds of Hmong spectators forcibly assembled there by the French. Many of the old Hmong who told me of this story when I did my research in 1985 still remember being compelled to watch French swords descending on the necks of these Pa Chay prisoners, when they were only children clinging to the arms of their parents. Those who were not leaders of the revolt had to pay compensation to the French at fifty piasters 'for every Lao or Vietnamese killed, not including compensation for loss of house, cattle and crops.' Altogether, 375 kilograms of silver bars and coins were collected from

[177] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 45.
[178] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 199.
[179] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 42.

the Hmong. Many who could not pay had to sell or pawn their children and possessions.[180]

For his part in quelling the messianic nationalist movement, Bliayao gained direct legal authority over as many as six to seven thousand Hmong and indirect authority over nearly all the villages between Nong Het and Xieng Khouangville. As the only Hmong subdistrict chief, he proceeded to "extort money for the release of captured rebels still in prison. Families paid small fortunes to get sons, husbands, and brothers freed." With this money, he "built a huge European-style, two-story stone residence that housed Lo Bliayao's four wives, close relatives, and many children (about fifty people in all)… [and] purchased additional cattle for his already substantial herd (it would eventually exceed one thousand head) that grazed in the hills near his new home at Pak Lak."[181] When he later became the district chief, Bliayao also received many cattle from the French as rewards. According to Gary Yia Lee, "The cattle given to him as Kiatong filled a valley which took three hours to walk through, and the money he amassed filled a metal trunk which two strong men could not lift."[182]

While the system of *tassengs* that the French created allowed the Hmong to govern their own people, it also encouraged greed, extortions, competitions and rivalries among the Hmong, the result again of the French adroit strategy to indirectly consolidate control over the Hmong. By pitting the Hmong against each other, the French actws as the innocent bystanders to the assassination, rivalry and division for which they were responsible. During the Second World War, the competition and division among the Hmong reached a new height. It pitted the two most powerful clans in Nong Het, the Ly and the Lo, against each other. This feud between the Lo and the Ly clans, albeit by the French, ultimately foreshadowed how the Hmong became entangled on both sides of the U.S. Secret War in Laos in the 1960s.

How the Ly and the Lo clans became divided is a complicated story to tell. In one account, the death of Bliayao's favorite daughter in the Ly family sparked the feud between the two clans. In this account, Ly Foung, an ambitious and bright member of the

---

[180] Gary Yia Lee, "Ethnic Minorities and National Building in Laos: The Hmong in the Lao State," *Peninsula* 11/12, (1985/1986): 220.
[181] Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 45.
[182] Gary Yia Lee, "Ethnic Minorities and National Building in Laos," 222

Ly clan, in an attempt to forge political alliance with the powerful Lo family, captured Bliayao's favorite daughter, Lo Mai, to be his wife. Lo Bliayao clearly disapproved of Ly Foung's method of marriage (through bride capturing) and the marriage in general because Ly Foung had already had a wife and children, but he grudgingly allowed the marriage to save his family's face. To reject the marriage after the daughter had been with Ly Foung for several nights would bring shame and misfortune to the family. After marriage, Ly Foung forced his new wife to do most of the household chores. The relation between Ly Foung and his father-in-law finally ended when Lo Mai committed suicide after her husband beat her twice—the second time in front of a crowd. Bliayao displayed his hostility toward Ly Foung by firing him from his post as Bliayao's secretary.[183]

In an alternative account, the feud began when the French gave the post to Touby Lyfoung rather than Lo Faydang, one of Bliayao's sons. In this account, after Bliayao's death in 1933, the French appointed Lo Song Tou, Bliayao's oldest son, to succeed his father as the district chief in Nong Het. Unlike his father, however, Song Tou was highly undisciplined. He "gambled, womanized, and spent weeks at a stretch in the highlands hunting elephants, tigers, and rhinos," rapidly squandering his father's wealth and leaving little time for administrative duties.[184] Dissatisfied with Song Tou's performance, French authorities replaced him with Ly Foung in 1938. Outraged by the loss of his older brother's position, Lo Faydang took the matter to Prince Phetsarath, the Inspector of Indigenous Affairs, in Luang Prabang. Presenting the Lao prince with "a massive rhinoceros horn, darkened with oil and buffed to an onyx shimmer," Faydang thought the post of *tasseng* was his after Ly Foung. However, after Ly Foung passed away just a few months after taking office, the French did not appoint Faydang to the post. Instead, the French held an election in 1939 to determine the next successor. Touby Lyfoung, the only son born by Lo Bliayao's daughter, Mai Lo, and Ly Foung, ran against his material uncle, Faydang, and won. The French, according to Alfred McCoy, favored Touby over Faydang because of Touby's colonial education.[185] Gary Yia Lee agreed, adding that most people voted for Touby, not only because of his colonial education (he was one of the first Hmong to receive a high school diploma) but also "because Faydang's father had

[183] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 9; Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 223-241.
[184] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 47.
[185] Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 82-85.

alienated many Hmong in the past through his authoritarian leadership."[186] Touby was also "the only Hmong who could speak and think as a French."[187] For this loss, Keith Quincy claims, "Faydang vowed vengeance, not only against the French but against Touby, who in his mind had become his mortal enemy. He would later adopt a rule of life that he would follow relentlessly: whatever Touby did, he would do the opposite."[188] This rule of life led Faydang to support the Japanese during World War II when Touby Lyfoung aided the French and later to fight for the Communist Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese during the Secret War in Laos in the 1960s when Touby sided with the Americans.[189]

Whatever was the cause of the feud, one thing is clear. The wealth and power that came with the post were at the root of their competition for the coveted position. Both Touby and Faydang saw and understood the benefits of siding with the colonizer. They had seen how Bliayao, because of his loyalty to the French, became not just the first Hmong *kiatong* but also the most powerful and wealthiest Hmong person in Nong Het by the time of his death. Boasting of his father's wealth, Lo Nhiavue (Lo Faydang's younger brother) later said, "Our father was the first one to have a two-story house. He was the first one to have a motorcycle and the first Hmong to construct schools for Hmong children."[190] Both Touby and Faydang knew that they could amass the same wealth and power with their post as the new district chief. The chief, after all, was in charge of brokering all the opium sold in the Nong Het region. The opium trade was a rapidly expanding and lucrative industry under French colonialism. In 1899, for example, Xieng Khoung province was the only legal place in Indochina for growing opium, and opium profits accounted for as much as forty percent of the colonial budget at any give time.[191] In fact, after Touby became the district chief, he immediately extracted his share of the colonial wealth from the populace by increasing the annual family tax

---

[186] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 200-201.
[187] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 44.
[188] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 47.
[189] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, 48-49; Chia Youyee Vang, "Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad," *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake, (New York: Plagrave Macmilan, 2009), 212-213.
[190] Yia S. Lor, "Power Struggle between the Lor and Ly Clans, 1900-2000," (BA thesis, CSU-Chico, 2001), 9-10.
[191] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 9.

from three silver *piasters* (coins) to an exorbitant eight *piasters* for the Hmong starting in 1941—just two years after his victory over Faydang. Few people understood Touby's increase; many rejected it, arguing that the increase was an additional burden for them. Given their geographical isolation, they had little means to earn that amount of coins in any given year. Touby ignored most of their complaints and asked the Hmong to increase their opium production.[192] Before Touby came to power in 1939, an average Hmong farmer harvested less than one kilogram of raw opium a year. However, after Touby became the district chief, the French, with Touby's help, turned Nong Het into one of Indochina's most productive opium-growing areas, and Hmong opium harvest increased to forty tons a year.[193]

In the end, the Hmong relationship with the French did not improve the lot of the Hmong in Laos. Instead, it worked against their cultural, economic and geopolitical interests. French colonialism brought the Hmong from isolation into Lao national politics, as Yang Dao has suggested, but it also left the Hmong with a bad name.[194] By the late 1960s, "Hmong poppy harvesting had become so pervasive that the Hmong became known as 'the Opium People' of Southeast Asia and had attracted international criticism."[195] The Hmong, as David Feingold charged, were "easily the largest producers of opium in Laos."[196] The irony in all these is that the Hmong were not the principal beneficiaries of the opium trade. Most of the profits went to Chinese and Lao merchants and the French colonial government.[197] After the French left, the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became the principal beneficiary of the opium trade in the region. In the 1960s, the CIA used the revenues they generated with Hmong opium to fund their own clandestine military activities in Laos and Vietnam.[198] Moreover, although the French tried to promote Hmong autonomy by establishing the *tasseng*

---

[192] Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 149-150.
[193] Alfred McCoy, *Politics of Heroine in Southeast Asia*, 84; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 149.
[194] Yang Dao, "Hmong Refugees from Laos: The Challenge of Social Change," in *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, 477-485.
[195] John Duffy, "Writing From These Roots," 85.
[196] David Feingold, "Opium and Politics in Laos," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 327-328.
[197] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 15
[198] Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroine in Southeast Asia*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) and Nicholas Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand: Opium People of the Golden Triangle*, (London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1986), 230-40.

system in Nong Het and later by making Xieng Khouang province an autonomous Hmong zone with Touby as its ruler in 1946, the Hmong lost all of it after the French suffered their defeat in Dien Bien Phu and abandoned Indochina in 1954.[199] After the French left, the Hmong were forced to become an ethnic minority in the emerging new states of Vietnam and Laos, where they remain a stateless nation today.[200] Most of all, the French left the Hmong deeply divided, first between the messianic leader, Pa Chai Vue, and the political broker, Lo Bliayao, and later between Touby Lyfoung and his maternal uncle, Lo Faydang, and these divisions continued to have dire ramifications for the Hmong long after the French had left. During the Secret War in Laos in the 1960s, the division between Touby and Faydang entangled the Hmong on both sides of the war and the division between Pa Chai and Bliayao resurfaced as the division between Yang Shong Lue, a Hmong prophet, and Vang Pao, the Hmong military leader and political broker for the Royal Lao Government.

The Hmong and the U.S. Secret War

If the French presence in Laos did not improve the lot of the Hmong, the same can be said about the United States military intervention in the civil war in Laos in the 1960s. The United States did not go to Laos to save the Hmong or any other people from genocide. It went merely to promote its geopolitical interests. In the end, like the French, the Americans also left the Hmong in Laos in conditions worse than when they found them. The Secret War that the Americans orchestrated to end the proliferation of communism in Laos pitted the Hmong against each other. They not only fought on both sides of the conflict, they sometimes assassinated people on their own side. General Vang Pao, in particular, because of the war and the Royal Lao Government's anxiety about communist infiltration in the Hmong community, ended up ordering the

[199] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom," 322.
[200] John T. McAlister, Jr., "Mountain Minorites and the Viet Minh: A Key to the Indochina War," in *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations,* vol. 2, ed. Peter Kunstadter, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 771-844; Gary D. Wekkin, "The Rewards of Revolution: Pathet Lao Policy towards the Hill Tribes since 1975," in *Contemporary Laos,* ed. Martin Stuart-Fox, (London: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 181-183.

assassination of Yang Shong Lue, the Hmong messianic leader, whose message of hope, love, and unity the Hmong needed the most.[201]

In fact, a striking resemblance exists between the story of the French in Laos and that of the Americans. Like France, the United States showed no interest in Indochina, not even Vietnam, until World War II. For U.S. diplomats and businesspeople alike, Vietnam held little promise for American entrepreneurial interests and opportunities. Most Americans in Vietnam prior to the Second World War were the hundred or so missionaries from the Christian Missionary and Alliance (CM &A) church who went to Hanoi to evangelize the Vietnamese. Prior to the war, Americans commonly viewed Vietnamese through "the fundamental beliefs in racialized cultural hierarchies that underlay the broader American encounter with nonwhite peoples at home and abroad."[202] They saw the Vietnamese as a primitive, backward, lazy, cowardly, vain, dishonest, unclean, and somnolent people. As a lazy and primitive people, Vietnamese were natural liars. Throughout the decades leading up to World Word II, Americans continued to see Vietnamese as a naïve, passive, corrupted, effeminate, weak and primitive people, reinforcing the "superiority of the Western civilization."[203]

U.S. apathy toward Indochina began to shift only after World War II. By signing the Atlantic Charter, the United States promised to promote the independence and self-determination of colonized nations. Seeing the United States as their hope for liberation—a view that Vietnamese nationalists, including Ho Chi Minh, held since the early twentieth century—Vietnamese nationalists hoped that the United States would support their independence. The United States was not eager to see the French re-colonize Indochina, but it also did not support the independence of the French colonies.[204] The U.S. disapproval of the return of the French to Vietnam was not as much a determination to recognize Vietnamese independence as it was to criticize the French colonial government for its failure to "develop" Vietnam and prepare the Vietnamese people for efficiency, independence, and national sovereignty. Vietnam, for American

---

[201] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of A Hmong Messianic Script*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 37; John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 55.
[202] Mark Phillip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America*, 6.
[203] Ibid., 47-50.
[204] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 19; Anthony Short, *Origins of the Vietnam War*, (New York: Longman, 1989), 48.

policymakers, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, was not ready for self-rule. The Vietnamese needed at least twenty years of tutoring before they could govern their own people and run their own affairs. The weak and primitive minds of the Vietnamese were also too susceptible to less desirable external influences and manipulations, such as the Soviets and the Chinese. Ultimately, between the Soviets and the Chinese on the one hand and the French on the other, the United States opted for the French, reluctantly permitting them to return to Indochina after the Second World War. The failure of the United States to stop the French from re-colonizing Indochina encouraged Vietnamese nationalists, including Ho Chi Minh, to turn to the new communist government that had just come to power in China for guidance and aspiration. By 1950, Vietnamese nationalists had totally left the United States out of their search for independence. Vietnam's future had completely abandoned a postcolonial Vietnam that included the assistance of the United States. It was at this point that the United States could no longer avoid Vietnam. Vietnam's connection to China and the Soviets, the fall of China to communism in 1949, and the rise of communist rebellions in Vietnam itself all made the United States entanglement with Vietnam inevitable.[205]

Americans and policymakers alike also paid no attention to Laos and its people, customs, values, or desires until Viet Minh forces under Ho Chi Minh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu on May 8, 1954.[206] As Len Ackland reported, "Laos was intrinsically important to no one but the people who lived there. The economic interests that spokesmen for three consecutive administrations have mentioned with regard to Southeast Asia do not apply to Laos, a land whose major resource is opium."[207] In 1954, the United States still did not even have a diplomatic mission in Laos.[208] When the French pulled out of Indochina, the only official American presence in Laos was "a lone foreign service officer, who did not even have a secretary to type the reports he sent to

---

[205] Mark P. Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam & America*, 146-176.
[206] For more on the accounts of Dien Bien Phu, see Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); and Jules Roy, *Battle of Dienbienphu*, (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984).
[207] Len E. Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism: The Eisenhower Administration and Laos," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 139.
[208] Charles A. Stevenson, *The End of Nowhere: American Policy toward Laos since 1954*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 28; Len E. Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 139.

the U.S. State Department."[209] It was only after the French had left and after the meeting at the Geneva Conference in 1954 that the United States began to see Laos as a vital battleground for the Free World. By this point, the victors of the Second World War had divided themselves into two camps—a Communist one dominated by the USSR and a capitalist one dominated by the United States. The United States and the USSR were already deeply entangled in a Cold War. By then, Ackland writes, "Americans had already transformed the French colonial war in Indochina into a fight to preserve the 'Free World'."[210] In the spring of 1953, as President Eisenhower later explained in his memoirs, American policymakers were convinced that their "main task was to convince the world that the Southeast Asian war was an aggressive move by the Communists to subjugate the entire area."[211]

Because of U.S. prior apathy toward Laos, it did not fully comprehend and appreciate the complexity of Laotian politics. In January 1961, Prince Souvana Phouma criticized the Eisenhower administration that it "understood nothing about Asia and nothing about Laos."[212] Laos, a landlocked country sharing its mountainous borders with China to the northwest, Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, Thailand to the west, and Myanmar (formerly Burma) to the west, just north of Thailand, was once a united kingdom called Lang Xang, the Land of the Million Elephants and the White Parasol. Because of its geographical location and sparse population, Laos often served as a buffer or battleground for its stronger and more powerful neighbors. Since the kingdom broke up into three separate states—the Kingdoms of Luang Prabang in the north, Champassak in the south, and Vientiane in the center—in the early eighteenth century, Laos had been periodically victims of invasion by its neighbors—Thailand from the west and Vietnam from the east.[213] Its borders had been divided, drawn, and redrawn by these neighbors as well as the French.[214] It had suffered more than six decades of French colonial rule, and it had undergone a tumultuous struggle for independence under Japanese occupation

---

[209] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 23.
[210] Len E. Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 140.
[211] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change 1953-1956*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 168.
[212] *New York Times*, January 20, 1961.
[213] Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1997), 6-19.
[214] Victor Anthony and Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos*, 1-2.

during the Second World War. By the time the United States arrived, Laos, like Vietnam, wanted nothing short of national independence.

After the French pulled out, Laos was to remain a neutral and independent country. The Eisenhower administration, however, would not accept the idea of a neutral Laos in spite of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. It saw Laos as a key "domino" situated between the Communist states of China and North Vietnam and the Free World nations of Thailand, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. President Eisenhower warned that "if Laos were lost, the rest of Southeast Asia would follow and the gateway to India would be opened."[215] The North Vietnamese had secretly stationed their troops in Laos. To save Laos from falling to the communists, President Eisenhower decided to involve the United States directly in Laotian political and military affairs.

At the same time, the United States was cautious in its approach. It did not want to appear blatantly violating the Geneva accord. To circumvent it, the United States built up its military base in Thailand, where American policymakers planned to use as "the focal point of U.S. covert and psychological operations in Southeast Asia."[216] Thailand was a natural and likely ally. Like the United States, Thailand could not conceive of a neutral Laos. Threatened by North Vietnam and China, Thailand had asked the United States to intervene and turn Laos into a non-neutral, pro-Western country.[217] In the meantime, in Laos, the United States quickly expanded its military buildup under the guise of American economic aid—something the United States had provided directly to the Royal Lao Government (RLG) since the signing of an economic cooperation agreement in September 1951.[218] Because the Geneva Agreement prohibited the United States from setting up a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Laos, it created a Program Evaluation Office (PEO) there in 1955. On the surface, the PEO was a neutral administration, but deep down, the program was a military operation. The United States had staffed the PEO entirely with retired military officers and officers temporarily placed on reserve status. The primary purpose of PEO was to administer the military aid

---

[215] Timothy Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: The United States' Military Aids to the Royal Lao Government, 1955-1975,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 10.
[216] Ibid., 12.
[217] Arthur J. Dommen, *Conflict in Laos: The Politics of Neutralization,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 68; Len Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 141.
[218] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 24; Len Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 142-143.

program and develop a covert operation to train the Royal Lao Army to fight against the communist Pathet Lao. As historian Sucheng Chan writes, "Wearing civilian clothes, they [American military officers in PEO] soon began training men from the Laotian police and the Royal Lao Army (RLA). Meanwhile, the United States Operations Missions (USOM) oversaw the disbursal of economic aid."[219] The United States so firmly believed that the best way to save Laos was to build up the RLA that it agreed to pay all the salaries of the troops and officers in that army.[220] In the late fifties, Ackland pointed out, "over 80 percent of the annual American aid to Laos of $40 million went to the Royal Laotian Army (RLA). Laos became the only foreign country in the world where the United States supported 100 percent of the military budget."[221]

By June 1958, the United States had terminated aid to the Royal Lao Army under Prince Souvana Phouma's command. Key American policymakers were unhappy with the coalition that Souvana Phouma—the brother of Prince Phetsarath and the half-brother of Prince Souphanouvong—had put together in November 1957. They felt that Souvana was too sympathetic to the Communists; his coalition government included two ministers from the Pathet Lao: Souphanouvong, as the minister of economy and planning, and Phoumi Vongvichit, as the minister of fine arts and religion. The U.S. was unwilling to accept anything but a strongly pro-American government in Laos. For them, a neutralism meant pro-communist and anti-American.[222] After cutting off aid to Souvana's government, the United States moved quickly to mobilize a group of pro-American military officers and ministers to reject a vote of confidence in Souvana's government, forcing him to resign in July 1958. Taking over his place was the rightist Phoui Sananikone, who immediately arrested and imprisoned Souphanouvong and three other Pathet Lao leaders in Vientiane. These men escaped from custody in May 1960.[223]

Meanwhile, the United States placed their hope for a pro-American government in Laos on General Phoumi Nosavan. In December 1959, Phoumi Nosavan, with CIA aid,

---

[219] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 24.
[220] Ibid..
[221] Len Ackland, "No Place for Neutralism," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 143.
[222] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 25-26; Bounsang Khamkeo, *I Little Slave: A Prison Memoir from Communist Laos,* (Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2006), 10.
[223] MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985,* (Stanford: Hoover Institutional Press, 1986), 68-70; Arthur Dommen, *Conflict in Laos,* 137-39.

marched into Vientiane with his forces and occupied key government buildings. This triumph, however, did not last long. In August 1960, a young paratrooper captain named Kong Le staged his own coup. Taking over Vientiane, he demanded that the different political factions stop fighting, return the country to genuine neutrality, and eliminate all foreign (especially American) interventions in the country's political and military affairs.[224] Thinking that Kong Le was pro-American, this last demand, which he broadcasted from Radio Vientiane, came as a shock to American advisors.[225] In the meantime, the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese continued to make gains in the north, taking more and more of the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khoung province, where most Hmong people lived. Frustrated by these developments, President John F. Kennedy sought actively to find a new strategy to change the wind of Laotian affairs to U.S. side. The new strategy was the development of the so-called "Secret Army" or *armée clandestine* in Laos—a covert operation engineered by the CIA that involved the systematic recruitment, funding, and arming of the Hmong into a secret guerrilla army against Communist forces in Laos.[226]

The relation between the United States and the Hmong began in late 1960 when a 35-year-old CIA case officer to the Thai Police Aerial Recovery Unit (PARU) named Bill Lair went to meet Vang Pao, the Hmong military leader who had been a soldier since his early teens, in the jungle near the Plain of Jars.[227] Author John Prados recorded that another American officer, Stewart Metheven, had met Vang Pao a year earlier in the hut of a Filipino medical staff in Laos and convinced him to support the United States. In 1960, Metheven handed the task of recruiting Vang Pao and the Hmong over to Bill Lair who finalized the deal.[228] What transpired among Vang Pao, Bill Lair, and other Hmong leaders and what Bill Lair promised the Hmong in return for their services remain contraversial. One clan leader, Youa Tong Yang, recalled that Colonel Bill Lair

---

[224] Kenneth Conboy, *War in Laos, 1954-1975*, (Carrollton, TX: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1994), 12.
[225] Victor Anthony and Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos*, 29; Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 27.
[226] Thomas L. Ahern, *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2006); Victor Anthony and Richard Sexton, *The War in Northern Laos*, 44.
[227] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 88-91.
[228] John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dec, 2006), 346-349.

promised the Hmong that the United States would help them as much as possible should they succeed in pushing the North Vietnamese Communist forces back and would "find a new place" for the Hmong to live should they suffer defeat.[229] Alternatively, D. Gareth Porter suggested that the CIA had promised the Hmong an "autonomous Meo state" in return for their help in fighting the Pathet Lao.[230] To the present day, because of the absence of any written document, most Hmong still do not know what was actually promised. Some believe that the CIA had promised nothing more than supplies, weapons and training for the Hmong to fight the Pathet Lao. Others maintain that the CIA had promised them an autonomous Hmong state.

Whatever the promise, as George Scott has pointed out, to gain Hmong support, each side in the war "had to convince their Hmong allies that defeat would bring a complete end to their tribal freedom, while victory would bring, or, more appropriately, *might* bring, an autonomous Hmong state."[231] Whether they were for or against Hmong messianism, Hmong leaders on both sides of the conflict also used their historic desire for an autonomous state as leverage to secure the loyalty of the larger Hmong population to their side. The Hmong on the side of the United States and the Royal Lao Government, for example, reformulated the messianic desire for a Hmong state "in terms of both the war and the Christianity the missionaries had increasingly been propagating among them: Jesus Christ, clad in camouflage army fatigues and driving an army jeep, would soon appear among them not only to lead them to victory over the Communist forces, but to help them depose all local Lao government officials and take over Vientiane, the national capital, as well." For their part, the Communists "used the Hmong messianic theme as the basis for their propaganda message that there is a reincarnated Hmong (Meo) king living in Peking and ('Meo' Tse-tung) who has ordered all Hmong to join him in Peking and all lesser leaders to adopt the Communist system"[232]

---

[229] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 92; Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 30.
[230] D. Gareth Porter, "After Geneva: Subverting Laotian Neutrality," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 183. Porter based his assertion on an interview with a Special Forces officer who was sent to train the Hmong in 1959 and on Bernard Fall, *Anatomy of a Crisis*, 189, and George Lindwood Barney, "Meo of Xieng Khouang Province," 275.
[231] George C. Scott, "Hmong Aspirations For A Separate State in Laos: The Effects of the Indo-China War," in *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Ralph R. Premdas, S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, and Alan B. Anderson, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 117.
[232] Ibid..

Whatever the promise, by the time when Vang Pao and Bill Lair met in late 1960, the United States saw Laos as a key domino in Southeast Asia and U.S. security directly tied to the stability of the region. A day before his inauguration, President Kennedy met President Eisenhower and several cabinet officers at the White House. During the meeting, President Eisenhower reinforced his position on Laos, relaying to Kennedy that if Laos fell to the communists, "it would bring unbelievable pressure to bear on Thailand, Cambodia, and South Vietnam." In fact, Eisenhower considered Laos so important that, in the words of one Kennedy advisor, "he would be willing, as a last desperate hope, to intervene unilaterally," if the United States could not persuade other countries to act with them.[233] After taking office, Kennedy said during his press conference on Laos on March 23, 1961:

> It's quite obvious that if the Communists were able to move in and dominate this country [Laos], it would endanger the security of all of Southeast Asia. And as a member of the United Nations and a signatory to the SEATO pact, and as a country which is concerned with the strength of the cause of freedom around the world, that quite obviously affects the security of the United States.[234]

Senator Thomas J. Dodd agreed and said in a congressional speech on May 21, 1962 that "it is no exaggeration to say that it [the conflict in Laos] represents a crisis of the first magnitude for the world free world…. If the Communists ever succeed in establishing their dominion over the whole of Southeast Asia, they will, in effect, have cut the world in half."[235] In June 1961, Kennedy upgraded the Program Evaluation Office (PEO) in Laos from a civilian organization into the overt Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) and diverted nearly all of its support away from Phoumi Nosavan to the Hmong.[236] By September 1961, 300 military advisors were stationed in Laos, running the program of the MAAG, advising, training, and arming pro-American fighters like the Hmong of the Special Guerrilla Units in the Royal Lao Army.[237]

---

[233] Thomas L. Ahern, *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos*, xiii.
[234] John F. Kennedy, "Statement on Laos, March 23, 1961," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 396.
[235] Senator Thomas J. Dodd, "Laos and the Southeast Asian Crisis, May 21, 1962," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 398.
[236] Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, 189.
[237] Ann Jagodzinksi and James Kegel, *The Hmong and Their Stories: the Secret Wars, Escape to Laos, the Legends*, (D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001), 19.

For some Hmong, it was their desire to protect their homes and families and their dislike of Communism that drove them to fight on the side of the Americans. When asked to fight for the Americans, Vang Pao reportedly pledged his support, saying to Colonel Bill Lair, "For me, I can't live with communism. I must either leave or fight. I prefer to fight."[238] Speaking of why Hmong fought for the Americans, Moua Lia, a Hmong teacher in the 1960s and 1970s, told Hamilton-Merritt:

> Foreigners should know why we fight for so long in Military Region II. We fight not for another country, not for another person. We are not the mercenaries of the Americans or English or French. No! We fight to defend our own freedom. We know that the land belongs to us. We were born there so we fight against the Communists. Who are the communists? The Vietnamese.[239]

For others, according to Gary Yia Lee, they fought because of the "food drops and pots and pans." The French had been in Laos for six decades and never really fed the Hmong. The French "expected Hmong to villagers to butcher their chickens and pigs to feed them." The Americans were different. "They brought their own food. They imported food from Thailand. The only time they would eat is when they came directly to visit you. They did not expect you to collect food to take to them."[240] Others fought for the Americans because of the material goods, ranks, titles, and salaried jobs that came with enlisting in the army. Many Hmong were paid for their services for the first time during the war.[241]

According to a number of observers, the Hmong also fought to achieve their own autonomous Hmong state in northern Laos. Nicholas Tapp, for instance, stated that Vang Pao sought to "establish an independent Hmong state, complete with flag and national anthem" in Laos in 1966.[242] W.E. Garrett, who arrived in Laos in 1973 to gather information for his *National Geographic* article on the Hmong, similarly observed that Vang Pao "once tried, without success, to proclaim an independent Hmong nation—

---

[238] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 89.
[239] Ibid., 130.
[240] Chia Youyee Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora: Narratives of Hmong American/Refugee Resistance and Human Agency," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 2006), 136.
[241] Chia Youyee Vang, "Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad," 215.
[242] Nicholas Tapp, *The Hmong of Thailand: Opium People of the Golden Triangle*, (Cambridge, MA: Anti-Slavery Society, 1986), 43.

anthem, flag, and all."[243] George M. Scott, too, recorded that although "Vang Pao never claimed to be the Hmong messiah, the returned king, he was not averse to having his followers think of him as such…[and] he definitely aspired to the leadership of the new Hmong state, which was promised him by his CIA allies, when their victory was complete. He even went as far as naming his 'cabinet' and designing a flag for this new nation."[244] Meanwhile, John Lewallen observed, "The chief objective of Vang Pao's Clandestine Army is the preservation of Meo tribal integrity and control of tribal land."[245] D. Gareth Porter confirmed that Vang Pao's ultimate goal was "to fight for a *de facto* autonomous Meo kingdom spreading through most of northern Laos."[246] The Americans, according to Gary Wikkin, "were able to use the Hmong to strike aggressively against the Vietminh and Pathet Lao around the Plain of Jars and Ho Chi Minh trail" by showing "support for Hmong aspirations for autonomy"—the autonomy from the Vietminh and Pathet Lao, the Hmong's perennial enemies.[247] John Duffy is probably right: "Ultimately, no single reason emerges for Hmong participation in the war. Rather, their involvement appears to stem from a combination of family grievances, historical alignments, economic necessities, personal ambitions, threats of violence, and the skillful manipulation of all these factors by French and American authorities."[248]

Whatever the motivations, both Hmong leaders and the Americans alike did their parts to inspire anti-Communist sentiments among the Hmong. To win the "hearts and minds" of the Hmong for the Americans, Vang Pao periodically reminded them that the Communists drove the Hmong from their villages, that the Vietnamese soldiers came to their villages to occupy their lands, and that the refusal of the Vietnamese to leave Laos was both a violation of the 1954 Geneva Accord and the cause of the Hmong's deprivation of food and shelter.[249] CIA case officers and Thai paramilitaries also went from village to village, telling Hmong villagers: "The Vietnamese will take your land.

---

[243] W.E. Garrett, "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos," *National Geographic* 145 (January 1974): 89.
[244] George M. Scott, "The Hmong Aspirations for A Separate State in Laos," 118.
[245] John Lewallen, "The Reluctant Counterinsurgents: International Voluntary Services in Laos," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 362.
[246] D. Gareth Porter, "After Geneva: Subverting Laotian Neutrality," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 252.
[247] Gary D. Wikkin, "The Rewards of Revolution: Pathet Lao Policy Towards the Hill Tribes Since 1975," in *Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Society of the Lao PDR*, ed. Martin Stuart-Fox, (London: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 188.
[248] John Duffy, *Writing From these Roots*, 35.
[249] Ibid., 90.

We [the U.S.] will give you the means to fight and defend your homes."[250] A former Hmong soldier and U.S. Aid for International Development (USAID) field assistant recalled that USAID was actively promoting pro-American sentiments and anti-communist propaganda through distributing literatures about America to the Hmong in Phongsavan.[251] One Hmong woman recalled the effects of anti-Communist propaganda: "I don't know but since I can remember, all you hear is that we needed to get away from the Vietnamese…All you knew as that Vietnamese was associated with evil… When you keep hearing these messages associated with Vietnamese, you start to form your own judgment. When you say it enough, it becomes part of your culture."[252] Choua Thao, who worked directly with USAID staff to develop a curriculum and train Hmong nurses, added: "You know, when you're with one group and that group says that the other is bad, then you start to believe that those people are bad too. We didn't really know the difference [between communism and democracy], but what we did know was that the Americans were helping us with a lot of things."[253]

During the Secret War, the Hmong assumed a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Some became pilots and flew on air strike missions. Others served as spies and radio operators gathering critical intelligence on the movement of Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops. Some became medics and nurses delivering food and medical supplies to Hmong displaced persons inside Laos and caring for injured soldiers and civilians. Many rescued U.S. pilots shot down by Laotian or Vietnamese gunners, often at the cost of as many as ten Hmong lives to save one American pilot.[254] Sgt. Moua Paje remembers, "Many Hmong died trying to rescue the American pilots who were shot down. Often the communists had already captured the pilots or killed them. So, the communists hid their positions waiting for Vang Pao's soldiers to come to the area. They knew we would come and then they could kill us. Many Hmong died like this, trying to save the Americans."[255] Most Hmong, however, lost their lives in direct combat with communist forces moving along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As the war in Laos dragged on

---

[250] Timothy Castle, *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam*, 38.
[251] Chia Youyee Vang, "Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad," 215.
[252] Ibid., 216.
[253] Ibid., 119.
[254] Lillian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 6.
[255] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 211.

and the U.S. involvement in the wider war in Southeast Asia escalated, the Hmong secret army grew. By 1969, there were 40,000 Hmong serving in the Royal Lao Army under the direct command of General Vang Pao and the CIA.[256] All in all, 60 percent of the 300,000 Hmong in Laos joined in the war against the communist forces.[257] U.S. strategists regarded the Hmong outposts as "the single most important American program in Laos…[and]…a vital barrier to communist penetration of the Mekong valley; Meo troops are considered the sole ground force of any worth between the Plain of Jars and Vientiane."[258] The United States, nevertheless, kept the Hmong operation a secret from the American public until 1969—a secret which Henry Kissinger was convinced had helped to prevent North Vietnam from overpowering Laos.[259] The top-secret operation in Laos became public knowledge only after *Time* reporter and *Life* correspondent Timothy Allman and a French reporter made an unauthorized visit to Long Cheng and exposed it in early March 1970.[260]

If the French failed to develop Laos, the United States failed to democratize it. On January 27, 1973, the United States signed a cease-fire agreement with North Vietnam and South Vietnam to end the war in Vietnam. By the end of March, the United States pulled all of its troops out of South Vietnam. A month later, on February 21, 1973, the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao signed the Agreement on the Restoration of Peace and Reconciliation in Laos to restore peace and stability to the country with the formation of a provisional coalition government.[261] As American troops pulled out of Laos, four hundred Hmong *naikong* from six provinces in northern Laos went to Long Cheng to participate in a series of workshops on the Lao constitution, the nation's

---

[256] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 32; Joseph Cerquone, *Refugees from Laos in Harm's Ways*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationality Services, 1986), 2; Brian W. Jacobs, "No Win Situation: The Plight of the Hmong—America's Former Ally," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 16, no. 139, (1996): 140; John Prados, *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 355.
[257] Marc Kaufman, "Allies Abandoned: The United States Enlisted the Hmong to Help Fight the Cold War. Now it is Shunning them during the Peace," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 27 February 1994.
[258] Fred Branfman, "Presidential War in Laos," *Laos: War and Revolution*, 252.
[259] Linda McFarland, *Cold War Strategist: Stuart Symington and the Search for National Security*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 153-154; Chia Youyee Vang, "U.S. Cold War Policies in Laos and the Hmong, 1961-1975," in *De-Centering the Cultural Cold War: U.S. and Asia*, (Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin, 2009), 7.
[260] "Laos: Deeper Into the Other War," *Time*, 9 March 1970, http://www.time.com, (accessed February 2, 2010).
[261] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free*, 43.

defense, economic, judicial, education, and public health systems, and the country's international trade and diplomatic policies.[262] The 100,000 Hmong who took refuge in camps set up by USAID in Laos returned to their villages and resumed their agricultural lives, thinking that peace was imminent. A little more than two years later, however, the fear that Eisenhower and Kennedy had about the domino effects in Indochina came true. The Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975. Thirteen days later, on April 30, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese. Fearing a Communist takeover in Laos, General Vang Pao went to see Prince Souvana Phouma at his residence in Vientiane on May 6, 1975. Vang Pao insisted on fighting the Communists in Laos, but the Lao prince wanted to end the war. Accusing Vang Pao of being "too hot-headed," Souvana ordered Vang Pao to withdraw all his troops from Sala Phou Khoune and offered him a position in the Royal Lao Army headquarter in Vientiane. "Highly insulted," Yang Dao wrote, "General Vang Pao refused the offer, resigned his commission as commander of the Second Military Region, tore off his three general stars, handed them back to Prince Souvana Phouma, and returned to his base at Long Cheng."[263] On May 9, 1975, the Pathet Lao Government issued a statement in the *Khaoxane Pathet Lao* newspaper, declaring: "We must eradicate the Meo minority completely."[264] Sensing a trap and the imminent danger, 40,000 Hmong flooded Long Cheng airbase on May 14.[265] Yet, only two airplanes were sent to Long Cheng, and they were there solely to rescue top military officials.[266] According to Captain Jack Knotts, the Bird Air (and former Air America) helicopter who flew Vang Pao and Jerry Daniels (a CIA advisor) out of Long Cheng, "The evacuation was solely as a cover to get Vang Pao and Jerry safely out of Long Tieng [Cheng], and there was no intention of taking thousands and thousands of Hmong out of Laos."[267] As a result, only 2,500 Hmong were able to escape to Thailand with American officials. The rest, a population of more than 250,000 at the time, were left

---

[262] Yang Dao, *Hmong at the Turning Point*, 153.
[263] Ibid., 155.
[264] Yang Dao, "Why did the Hmong Leave Laos?" 13; Brian Jacobs, "No Win Situation," 144; Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 138; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 356.
[265] Lilian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over Again*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 7-8.
[266] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 341-51.
[267] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010), 158.

behind.[268] Most of those who escaped were family members of General Vang Pao and other high-ranking Hmong military officers who worked closely with Vang Pao and the Americans during the war.[269] For Yang Chee, President of Lao-Hmong American Coalition in Colorado, "May 14, 1975 [was] the darkest day in our lives. The Hmong were abandoned by their American allies, all the while being persecuted, and tortured inhumanely by their pursuing enemy."[270] On May 15, Pathet Lao troops and tanks seized Vientiane and took over Laos, putting an end to U.S. military presence and political objective in Laos. On December 2, 1975, the Pathet Lao established the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR).[271]

The U.S. presence in Southeast Asia, like that of the French, did little to improve the lot of the Hmong people. For Charles Davis, an American helicopter pilot working in Laos during the war, it made it worse. "After nearly 15 years of armed conflict," he said, "the people we were supporting [the Hmong] were worse off than in the 60s when our country started its involvement."[272] For their devotion to the Americans, the Hmong paid a terrible price. Their human casualties were enormous. In March 1963, Edgar "Pop" Buell, the farmer from Indiana in charge of USAID in Laos, described the rate of Hmong casualties with these words:

> Vang Pao has lost at least a thousand men since January 1, killed alone, and I don't know how many more wounded. He's lost all but one of his commanders… A short time ago we rounded up three hundred fresh recruits. Thirty percent were fourteen years old or less, and ten of them were only ten years old. Another 30 percent were fifteen or sixteen. The remaining 40 percent were thirty-five or

---

[268] Sucheng Chan, "Scarred yet Undefeated: Hmong and Cambodian Women and Girls in the United States," in *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women,* eds. Shirley Hune and Gail Nomorura, (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 255 & 258.
[269] W. Courtland Robinson, "Laotian Refugees in Thailand," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution,* 215 & 220; Gayle L. Morrison, *Sky is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA's Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos,* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999), 26-28.
[270] Robert Curry, *Whispering Death,* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), 269.
[271] MacAlister Brown, "The Communist Seizure of Power in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos,* 23; Arthur J. Dommen, "Historical Setting," in *Laos: A Country Study,* ed. Andrea Matlas Savada, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), 66-68; and *Far Eastern Economic Review 1976 Yearbook,* 200-203.
[272] Charles Davis, *Across the Mekong: The True Story of An American Helicopter Pilot,* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Hildesigns Press, 1996), 215.

> over. Where were the one between? I'll tell you—they're all dead… and in a few weeks 90 percent of (the new recruits) will be dead.[273]

By one account, 25 percent of the Hmong who enlisted were killed.[274] Between 1963 and 1971, approximately 18,000-20,000 Hmong were killed in combat.[275] According to another estimate, 17,000 Hmong troops and 50,000 Hmong civilians died in the conflict.[276] By the time the Communists took over Laos in 1975, 30,000 Hmong, representing ten percent of the entire Hmong population of 300,000 in Laos, were dead.[277] Half of all males over the age of fifteen were killed.[278]

Like the French, the United States did not form a military alliance with the Hmong to save them from foreign oppression and genocide. Rather, it did so, as Native American scholars Ward Churchill and Glenn Morris pointed out, solely for its own geopolitical needs.[279] The United States recruited the Hmong into an anti-Communist secret army because it sought "to minimize American casualties and shield U.S. involvement from American public scrutiny."[280] The United States displayed little concerns for Hmong lives or their needs in spite of their devotion and sacrifice for U.S. interests.[281] During the war, Hmong soldiers were never treated as equals to American soldiers. Author Anne Fadiman has noted, for example, that American army privates in Vietnam received between $197.50 and $339 a month during the war. Hmong soldiers, in contrast, received an average of only 2,000 *kip* a month. That translated to about $3 a month. "American soldiers in Vietnam ate army field rations (spaghetti, turkey loaf, ham and eggs, frankfurters and beans), with periodical supplements of steak, ice cream, and

---

[273] Quoted in Fred Branfman, "Presidential War in Laos, 1964-1970," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 253.
[274] Charles Stevenson, *End of Nowhere,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 198.
[275] W. Courtland Robinson, "Laotian Refugees in Thailand," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution,* eds. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 220.
[276] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 40; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains,* 334.
[277] Sue Murphy Mote, *Hmong and American: Stories of Transition to a Strange Land,* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004), 110; John Duffy, *The Hmong: An Introduction to their History and Culture*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004), 4; Tou Fu Vang, "The Hmong of Laos," in *Introduction to Indochinese History, Culture, Language and Life*, ed. J. Whitmore, (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, U of Michigan, 1979), 93-192.
[278] Lillian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over,* 7.
[279] Ward Churchill and Glenn T. Morris, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Left-Wing Revolution, Right-Wing Reaction, and the Destruction of Indigenous Peoples," in *Since Predator Came: Notes from the Struggle for American Indian Liberation,* by Ward Churchill, (Littleton, Colorado: Aigis Publications, 1995), 329-330.
[280] Khatharya Um, "The Vietnam War: What's in a Name?" *Amerasia Journal* 31: 2, (2005), p. 136.
[281] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free,* 42.

beers," Fadiman added. "Hmong soldiers in Laos ate rice."[282] Unlike American pilots, Hmong pilots "were expected to fly combat mission after mission." For Hmong pilots, Christopher Robbin wrote, there "was no 'tour' to complete, no rest and recreation… no end in sight to the war." They flew until they were killed.[283] Similarly, Fadiman observed, "American pilots were sent home after a year or, if they flew over North Vietnam, after their hundredth mission; the most famous Hmong pilot, Lieutenant Ly Lue, flew more than five thousand missions before he was shot down."[284] The result of this never-ending tour of duty: "Hmong soldiers died at a rate about ten times as high as that of American soldiers in Vietnam."[285] In 1974, W.E. Garrett likened Hmong casualty to "a holocaust that wiped out 18,000,000 [Americans] and forced the remainder of the population to flee to Mexico."[286]

In 1971, while the war was still going on, Undersecretary of State U. Alexis Johnson testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1971 that the war in Southeast Asia was cheap, leading to the inescapable conclusion that the lives of the people who fought for the United States government in Laos were also judged to be cheap. In his words, Johnson said, "I personally feel that although the way the operation [in Laos] has been run is unorthodox, unprecedented, in many ways I think it is something of which we can be proud as Americans. It has involved virtually no American casualties. What we are getting for our money is, to the old phrase, very 'cost effective'."[287] William Colby, former CIA director, similarly told Stanley Karnow that the clandestine war in Laos was "a cheap enterprise when you think of the billions we squandered in Vietnam."[288] Victor Marchetti and John Marks also wrote, "From the CIA's point of view, the war in Laos was cheap (costing the agency only $20 to $30 million a year) and well managed. The number of Americans involved was small enough that a relatively high degree secrecy could be maintained. In contrast to the tens of thousands of Laotians who died in the war, few Americans were killed… The agency

---

[282] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down,* 128.
[283] Christopher Robbins, *The Ravens: The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos,* (New York: Crown, 1987), 65.
[284] Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down,* 128.
[285] Ibid., 129.
[286] W.E. Garrett, "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos," *National Geographic* 145 (Jan. 1974): 83.
[287] Khatharya Um, "The Vietnam War: What's in a Name?" *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2, (2005): 137.
[288] Stanley Karnow, "Free No More: The Allies American Forgot," *GEO* 2 (1980), 4.

considered Laos to be a very successful operation."[289] For the Cold Warrior Senator Stuart Symington of Missouri, the U.S. Secret War in Laos served an "an example of how the United States could fight the war more cheaply."[290]

After the Communists took over Laos in 1975, the United States insisted that it owed nothing to the Hmong. Former ambassador William Sullivan first espoused this position in a secret meeting before the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee in late October 1969 when he testified that United States had no written, verbal, moral, or other commitments to the Hmong or anyone else in Laos.[291] "After seeking them out, training them, paying them, deploying them in the field, contributing to a buildup that made less and less of their land safe, increasing their dependence on food drops and combat air support," historian Paul Hillmer wrote, "the United States of America, said William Sullivan, owed Hmong nothing."[292]

Like French indirect-rule colonialism, the U.S. Secret War in Laos left the Hmong deeply divided. Vang Pao and Touby Lyfoung supported the United States and the Royal Lao Government, but Faydang and his brother, Lo Nhiavue, the maternal uncles of Touby joined the Communist Pathet Lao. The Hmong were pitted against each other as they fought on opposite sides of the war. Because of the anxiety of Communist insurgency and infiltration in the Hmong community, the Hmong who fought for the United States and the Royal Lao Government were also pitted against one another. During the war, after a Hmong messianic leader named Yang Shong Lue developed a writing system called the *Pahawh* for the Hmong and began attracting a huge following, he became the target of persecution by both the Communist and rightist sides of the conflict. After being exiled from North Vietnam by the Vietminh, who accused him of being a CIA spy, Shong Lue took refuge among the Hmong in northern Laos. Chia Koua Vang was a former soldier of Vang Pao and student of Yang Shong Lue who co-authored the book with William Smalley on his teacher's life and the development of the Pahawh. According to Chia Koua, in early 1964, Vang Pao sent four hundred men from Special

---

[289] Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 245.
[290] Marc Kaufman, "Allies Abandoned," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1994, 18.
[291] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 226-227. See also Roland A. Paul, "Laos: Anatomy of An American Involvement," *Foreign Affairs* 49, no. 3 (April 1971): 533-547.
[292] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society Press, 2010), 137.

Guerrilla Unit 1 under the command of Youa Vang Lee, including Chia Koua, to Pha Bong, Vietnam, to look for Shong Lue. Vang Pao ordered them to go rescue Shong Lue after he had received an appeal for help from Shong Lue toward the end of 1963. The unit successfully brought Shong Lue to Laos and sheltered him in Kiaw Boua, an area under the Royal Lao Government's control.[293]

After Shong Lue began to attract a large following in Laos, he created fear among the political leaders of the Royal Lao Government. In the early 1960s, the Royal Lao Government "banned the printing of any material in the Hmong language, fearing that the possession of their own writing language might become the catalyst for the already strong in-group sentiments of the Hmong."[294] The fear was especially profound for Shong Lue's messianic script because the *Pahawh* was intimately tied to the Hmong ethnic identity. The writing script also aroused profound nationalist fervor among its followers. Alleging that Shong Lue was a spy for the Communists and his Pahawh a Soviet or Chinese invention, the rightist Royal Lao Government ordered Vang Pao to stop Shong Lue from teaching. On September 15, 1967, Shong Lue was arrested and imprisoned for three years in Pha Kao, a Hmong village near the Plain of Jars in Phonsavan. After he escaped from prison, Shong Lue went into hiding in the jungle, where he continued his teaching. In mid-February, 1971, Shong Lue, at the age of forty, was assassinated by members of Vang Pao's forces disguised as communist soldiers.[295] According to Xang Vang, a Vang Pao sympathizer and advisor who I interviewed, Hmong General Vang Pao and other military officers under him believed that Yang Shong Lue was a Communist spy and his script was a Soviet invention.[296] Gue Vang, a former military officer and another Vang Pao sympathizer, similarly told William Smalley that Yang Shong Lue was "eliminated" because he and his writing served communist purposes.[297]

---

[293] Chia Koua Vang, interview with author, 19 March 2009. Chia Koua apparently told the same story to William Smalley, who recorded it in *Mother of Writing*, 29-31.
[294] George M. Scott, "The Hmong Aspirations for A Separate State in Laos," 117.
[295] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing*, 37; and John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 55.
[296] Xang Vang, interview with author, 20 October 2008.
[297] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing*, 167.

Lessons, Ambiguities, and Politics

Reviewing the history of the Hmong in China and Southeast Asia, Fadiman concluded that "the history of the Hmong yields several lessons" for anyone who deals with them. Among these lessons are "that the Hmong do not like to take orders; that they do not like to lose; that they would rather flee, fight, or die than surrender; that they are not intimidated by being outnumbered; that they are rarely persuaded that the customs of other cultures, even those more powerful than their own, are superior; and that they are capable of getting very angry."[298] I do not discount the relevance of these lessons, but I feel that Fadiman's observation needs to be appropriately contextualized lest her observation will work to reinforce negative stereotypes and to essentialize the Hmong as a group of stubborn and unyielding rebels who would disobey any law and fight to their death because "they are capable of getting very angry." It is true that the Hmong could "get very angry," but it is necessary to situate their anger within what Louisa Schein has called "the pain of minoritization," a pain that surges from their long history of marginalization, exploitation, and displacement by more powerful and majority nations around them.[299] Their anger should not be interpreted merely as a symptom of uncontrollable rage. Rather, their anger should be understood as righteous expressions of defiance, moments of resistance, and calls for action in societies that deprived them of truth, justice, and human dignity.

If there is any lesson to be learned from the history of the Hmong in China and Southeast Asia, I suggest that it is that the history of the Hmong in China and Laos is a long and complicated history of political marginalization and resistance. The Hmong suffered political marginalization and displacement in China and Laos, but they were also never passive recipients of Chinese domination, French colonialism, Lao exploitation, and U.S. imperialism. Again and again, the Hmong fought for their autonomy. They challenged exploitative codes and oppressive laws. They fled when military, economic, and political suppressions became intolerable. Only when placed in this context of Hmong marginalization and minoritization under centuries of foreign domination and

---

[298] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 17.
[299] Louisa Schein, "Homeland Beauty: Transnational Longing and Hmong American Video," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 2, (May 2004): 447.

persecution can we begin to appreciate why, as Fadiman suggested, the Hmong did not like to lose or take orders, why they preferred fleeing, fighting and dying rather than surrendering, and why they refused to believe in the superiority of other cultures over their own.

Only when placed in this context of Hmong marginalization and minoritization can we also understand why the Hmong's historical consciousness and shared memories are still filled with tales of foreign oppression and persecution and how this consciousness continues to affect the way that the Hmong conceptualize their identities and their place in the world. The origins and meanings of the term "Miao," for instance, remain obscure and debatable, but the Hmong categorically denounce it. The shared memories of Hmong suffering at the hands of Chinese rulers in China make it absolutely impossible for them to accept Miao as a neutral term. For them, it had always been a derogatory term that dehumanized them as individuals "with tails" and "wings" and signified them as savages and barbarians. Similarly, their shared memory of years of hostility and cruelty by the lowland Lao has made it impossible for them to accept Meo as a neutral identity marker. For the Hmong, to call them "Meo" is an insult.

When I went to Laos to conduct interviews in the summer of 2007, the local Hmong residents told me that the Lao government had officially banned the use of the word "Meo" to refer to the Hmong in Laos. They acknowledged the negative connotation the word had. Anyone caught referring to the Hmong or calling the Hmong a Meo could face prosecution in Laos. In her 1991 study, Wendy Batson also observed that "derogatory labels like Kha [which translates to slave and was used by lowland Lao to refer to a number of highland tribal groups in Laos] and Meo are discouraged and are rarely if ever used by government cadres" after the Pathet Lao came to power in Laos.[300] Along with their Lao neighbors, the Thai used to call the Hmong in Thailand "Meo." In a book on the history and tradition of the Hmong which the Thai author intended to give the readers "a chance to learn about the hill-tribe customs, some of which are interesting and praiseworthy, while some are repugnant and horrible," Thammarot Lae Phumirot

[300] Wendy Batson, "After the Revolution: Ethnic Minorities and the New Lao State," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, eds. Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 153. See also Lilao Bouapao, "Property Relations of the Hmong in Laos," Paper Presented at a Conference on Politics of the Commons, held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, 11-14 July 2003, 3. <http://dlcvm.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00001135/00/Lilao_Bouapao.pdf > (accessed 18 November 2009).

wrote of the prevalence of the use of the word "Meo" and his preference for the term: "The writer would like you to understand the word 'Meo'—actually this word is not familiar to the Meo people themselves. They call themselves 'Mong," but the word 'Meo' is more popular with people with town and the writer prefers using the word 'Meo' to 'Mong'."[301] Nowadays, Thai officials also use "Hmong," rather than "Meo," in official publications and media announcements. Uninformed Thai might still refer to the Hmong as "Meo." Some Thai might still curse the Hmong in Thailand as Meo when venting anger and frustration at them. More and more, however, the Thai are calling the Hmong by their proper name. Still, the Thai continue to lump the Hmong with other ethnic nations and call them collectively as *chao khao*, the Thai word for hilltribe highlanders. *Chao khao* itself carries its own derogatory connotations. Like Miao and Meo, as Aranya Siriphon has argued, *chao khao* implies barbarianism, primitivism, inferiority to Thai, and ultimately non-Thai.[302] The Hmong experiences of political marginalization and dehumanization in China and Laos all worked to encourage the Hmong to resist cultural misrepresentations of them and see themselves as Hmong, a free people.

In this chapter, I also suggest that the ambiguities surrounding the origin and early history of the Hmong in China, the initial date of Hmong emigration and settlement in Southeast Asia, and the CIA promise to the Hmong in the 1960s provided a space for the Hmong in the diaspora not to only forge transnational ties with their co-ethnics in China, Southeast Asia, and other host societies in the West and but to also make certain political claims about Hmong identities and history. The origin and early of the Hmong, for example, remain obscure for many scholars, but the Hmong diaspora have claimed that there is nothing obscure about their origins and early history in China. If there is any obscurity, that obscurity lies in their early history *prior* to their settlement in the plains of the Yellow River some 5,000 years ago. Virtually all Hmong who speak on the subject indicate that they came from China. The proofs include the presence of a sizable Hmong population in China and a variety of traditional Hmong oral folklores, sung poetry,

---

[301] Thammarot Lae Phumirot, *The Historical Background and Tradition of the Meo,* (Bangkok: Chuan Printing Press, n.d.), 2.
[302] Aranya Siriphon, "Local Knowledge, Dynamism and the Politics of Struggle: A Case of the Hmong in Northern Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2006): 70.

proverbs, and religious rituals that point to China as the ancestral home of the Hmong.[303] When conducting their funeral, the Hmong still guide the soul of the deceased to their final, resting place in China before guiding it to the spirit world.[304] The Hmong also have a proverb that still fondly remembers the Yellow River: "One is not satisfied until one has seen the Yellow River."[305] The Hmong in the diaspora are increasingly convinced that Chi You was their ancestral king and, ultimately, like French researcher Jean Mottin, they believe that they were in China long before the Chinese.[306]

Whatever the "truths" of their origin and early history, Hmong increasingly build and reinforce links with the Miao of China and retrace their origins and early history through the history of the Miao. A stateless diaspora, with a long history of oppressions in China and Southeast Asia, the Hmong reclaim this "lost" history in China not only to know their origin but also to locate a place to call "home." Their use of this history is not solely for the sake of knowledge but also "as a useable tool to bring about social change, emancipation and freedom from oppression and injustice, as a means to stimulate new ways of thinking and action." Their connection with the Miao in China, that is, "lends credibility to their political voice when backed up by 9.2 million Miao around the globe, compared to much smaller populations if they are divided into more distinctive ethnic groups with their own origins."[307] The Hmong have been able to reclaim their "lost" history in China largely because of the ambiguity of their origins and early history itself. The ambiguity, particularly that ambiguity around the term "Miao," has provided the Hmong the very space they need to claim their association with King Chi You and plant their roots in the soils of the plains of the Yellow River in ancient China.[308]

---

[303] Maren Tomforde, "The Hmong Mountains: Space and Culture in Northern Thailand," in *The Impact of Globalization and Trans-Nationalism of the Hmong,* ed. Gary Yia Lee, (St. Paul, MN: Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University, 2009), 99.
[304] William Geddes, *Migrants of the Mountains*, 3-15; Prasit Leeprecha, *Kinship and Identity among Hmong in Thailand*, (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Washington, 2001), 70; Louisa Schein, "Diaspora Politics, Homeland Erotics, and the Materializing of Memory," in *Positions* 7, no. 3, (1999): 697-729.
[305] Yang Dao, "The Hmong: Enduring Traditions," in *Minority Cultures of Laos: Kammu, Lua, Lahu, Hmong and Mien*, eds. Judy Lewis and Damrong Tayanin, (Rancho Cordovo: California Southeast Asian Community Resource Center, Folsom Cordova Unified School District, 1992): 258-259.
[306] Jean Mottin, *History of the Hmong*, 16.
[307] Gary Y. Lee, "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins," 17
[308] For places where the Hmong made claims about their association with King Chi You, see, for example, Txong Pao Lee and Mark E. Pfeifer, "Building Bridges: Teaching About the Hmong in Our Communities," Powepoint Presentation, (2005); Yuepheng Xiong, *Taug Txoj Lw Ntshav: Keeb Kwm Hmoob Nyob Suav*

Likewise, the ambiguity over the initial date of their migration to Indochina has opened up a space for the Hmong diaspora, particularly those engaged in transnational politics to make historical claims to advance their political objective in Laos. I was told, for example, at a meeting back in the spring of 2007 with a group of Hmong Chao Fa nationalists in St. Paul that the Hmong were indigenous to the land in Xieng Khoung Province, Laos. They had lived there since time immemorial, and they were the architects of the giant jars at the Plain of Jars.[309] During a recent radio program of which I was one of the discussants on the topic of Hmong origins and early history, Tousoua Yang, the founder of the Chao Fa Foundation, the other special guest on the show, claimed that the Hmong had left China immediately following the destruction of the Miao kingdom under King Chi You in the 2300 B.C.E.[310] Moreover, Yang contended that prior to French colonization of Laos, the Hmong lived as a free and sovereign people in a Hmong kingdom in northern Laos under the rule of King Vang Youa Lor (*Vaj Ncuab Lauj*). Before Vang Youa Lor, Hmong lived under King Yang Tseng Cheng (*Yaj Tseem Ceeb*), the Hmong king who fought against Thai Rama V, King Chulalongkorn, as the Thai Rama expanded his territorial conquest eastward toward Laos and North Vietnam. The French defeated both Hmong kings. King Yang Tseng Cheng was killed in 1879 while King Vang Youa Lor was killed in 1893. The death of King Vang Youa Lor enabled the French to incorporate Hmong historic territory in northern Laos into the French Union of Indochina. After his death, the French resurrected a monument in Xieng Khoung in his memory.[311] The claims reflect the profound desire of the Hmong diaspora, a stateless people, for a homeland, a place to call home, a place to which to return, as well

---

Teb, vol. 1, (St. Paul, MN: Hmong ABC, n.d.), 85 min., DVD; *Taug Txoj Lw Ntshav: Txoj Kev Mus Cuag Huab Tais Hmoob*, vol. 2, (St. Paul, MN: Hmong ABC, n.d.), 90 min., DVD.

[309] This claim is influenced by the Hmong narrative of Ngao Njua and Shee Na, a couple who, a long time ago, fled from a Chinese ruler who tried to make Ngao Njua his wife. The couple eventually resettled in the Plain of Jars. See the story of Ngao Njua and Shee Na in Charles Johnson, *Nkauj Ntsuab thiab Sis Nab: Dag Neeg Tiaj Rhawv Zeb* (Ngao Njua and Shee Na: The Story of the Plain of Jars), (St. Paul, MN: Linguistic Department, Macalister College, 1981); and *Keeb Kwm Neeg Nplog* (History of the Lao People), Part 3, (2004), videocassette.

[310] This is a radio program that people can call to listen and participate in the discussion like a conference call. The program is hosted by Dr. Shoua Yang, an assistant professor in Political Science at St. Cloud State University. The discussion on Hmong origins and early history took place on 12 September 2009, 8-9 PM.

[311] Hmong World Congress, "HWC Officially Recognized Hmong Pahawh Written Language," *Media Newswire Press Release*, 04 March 2009; Cheng (Tousouayeng) Yang, interview with author, 06 March 2009.

as their propensity for Hmong messianism. For the Chao Fa nationalists, the Hmong were the indigenous people of the land because they had settled in the mountains of Laos for decades, if not centuries, before the emergence of modern nation-states in the 19th century.

As of today, no one has been able to produce the CIA contract with the Hmong when the Bill Lair first recruited the Hmong to fight in the secret war. Yet, many Hmong continue to talk about the promise as if there was a real contract between them. A Hmong veteran, for example, told Stephen Reder in an interview: "The Americans in Laos had an agreement, a contract with us: 'You help us fight for your country, and if you can't win, we will take you with us and we will help you live.'…This is true about the contract. I have read it. I was a teacher in Laos, and they gave the paper to every teacher. Vang Pao signed it. It said, You fight, and if we don't win we'll take you with us."[312] Meanwhile, Pa Cha Kong, a radio operator during the war, insisted that there was no formal agreement between Vang Pao and Bill Lair, and there was no promise of an autonomous Hmong state. "My understanding was that…General Vang Pao wanted… more weapons, more ammunition, more medicines, and food—that's it," Pa Cha Kong explained. Bill Lair, too, insisted that he and his government, the United States, did not promise Vang Pao and the Hmong anything. By implication, the United States government simply armed the Hmong to fight their own war for their freedom and country. "We didn't promise them anything," Lair said. "They didn't want to be promised anything. That's what a lot of people miss… [A]ll the Hmong wanted to do was to stay there, and they wanted their freedom, they wouldn't want anybody to bother them, they wanted their own country…They wanted their own country… That's what they were fighting for."[313] The closest written contract between Bill Lair, Vang Pao, and the Hmong to date was a proclamation that General Vang Pao and Bill Lair signed on the 20th of November 2006—a proclamation Xang Vang and other leaders of the Special Guerilla Units (SGU) in St. Paul, Minnesota, helped to draft. The proclamation did not mention any promise of an autonomous Hmong state. It merely acknowledged the

[312] Stephen Reder, *The Hmong Resettlement Study*, Prepared by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1985), 19.
[313] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2010), 84-85.

recruitment, training, arming, and payment of the Hmong to fight in defense of "Lao freedom and independence and in opposition to Communist aggression and tyranny."[314]

John Duffy likened the Hmong memory of the lost CIA contract in Laos to their narratives of the loss of Hmong writings in China. "In both instances," he wrote, "the Hmong linked the loss of writing to the loss of the country: China in the ancient narrative, Laos in the modern version. In China, the lost writing was said to explain why the Hmong are a stateless people in Southeast Asia. In Laos, the lost contract is thought to explain the status of the Hmong as international refugees."[315] The claim of the CIA promise of an autonomous state again has its roots again in the profound desire of the Hmong for a homeland, a place to call home, a state they never had. The desire for a Hmong homeland, in turn, has its roots in the historical experiences of the Hmong with political marginalization and minoritization in China and Laos.

Most of all, in this chapter, I suggest that their relationships with the French colonial power from the late 1800s to the 1950s and with the Americans in the 1960s worked against, rather than, for the cultural, economic, geopolitical, and military interests of the Hmong. The relationship with the French ended Hmong autonomy in northern Laos and forced them to become colonized subjects of French colonial society and later minorities in the new Lao state, and their alliance with the Americans ultimately forced them to leave their homeland altogether. Both powers also left the Hmong divided. The French indirect-rule colonial system pitted the disgruntled Hmong led by the messianic leader, Pa Chai Vue, against the Hmong collaborators led by the French-appointed political broker, Lo Bliayao, from 1918 to 1921 and the French-educated Touby Lyfoung against his maternal uncle, Lo Faydang, during World War II and thereafter. The Royal Lao Government, abetted by the Americans, pitted General Vang Pao of the Royal Lao Army against Yang Shong Lue, the Hmong Mother of Writing, during the Secret War in Laos in the 1960s. The split between Vang Pao and Yang Shong Lue, which ultimately led to Yang Shong Lue's assassination in 1971, foreshadowed how Hmong transnational politics was played in the diaspora. After the war, students of Yang Shong Lue continued

---

[314] The Proclamation is the property of Special Guerilla Units (SGU), a non-profit organization in St. Paul, Minnesota, of which Xang Vang is a Board member. Xang gave me a copy of the Proclamation during our interview in the office of the SGU on 20 April 2007. See Appendix D.
[315] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 36.

to teach and disseminate the Pahawh, and they led their own political and military struggle, with their own vision for the future of the Hmong and their homeland, against the Lao PDR government. Meanwhile, Vang Pao and his supporters had their own separate movement, a subject to which we will now turn.

CHAPTER 2

Hmong Transnational Politics: Its Origins and Streams

One salient legacy of the United States military intervention in the war in Southeast Asia in the 1960s was the influx of millions of Indochinese refugees to the United States. Between 1975 and 2000, more than three million people fled from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and more than 1.5 million of those resettled in the United States.[316] Among those who took refuge in the United States after the war were Hmong refugees who lost 30,000 lives fighting Pathet Lao and Vietminh Communist forces in Laos during the war. Between 1975 and 1996, approximately 130,000 Hmong were resettled in the United States.[317] After 1996, the United States terminated its Hmong refugee resettlement program only to reopen admission for Hmong refugees from Thailand in the early 2000s. Between 2004 and 2008, fifteen thousand additional Hmong refugees arrived in the United States from a Buddhist monastery called Wat Tham Krabok in Phratputtabat district, Sarabouri province, some 132 kilometers northeast of Bangkok.[318] A 2005 American Community Survey put the Hmong population in the United States at 188,900. Hmong leaders and organizations, however, argued that, because many Hmong were not literate in English and did not participate in the census, the Hmong population in the United States was more likely to be between 250,000 and 300,000.[319]

---

[316] UNHCR, *State of the World Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 79; and Jo Ann Koltyk, *New Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong Life in Wisconsin*, (Needham Heights, MA: Ally & Bacon, 1998), 3.

[317] Stacey Lee, *Up Against Whiteness: Race, School, and Immigrant Youth*, (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2002), 12.

[318] Embassy of the United States of America, "The U.S. to Open A Refugee Resettlement Program for Lao/Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok," *Press Release*, 18 December 2003; U.S. Department of State, "Long Wait Is Over: Hmong from Wat Tham Krabok Begin Arriving in U.S.," *U.S. Refugee Admissions Program News* 2, no. 3, (July 23, 2004): 1-2; Mick Elmore, "Yearning to be Hmong," *Irrawaddy*, May 2004; Tunya Sukpanich, "Home At Last?" *Bangkok Post*, 11 January 2004.

[319] The 2000 U.S. Census placed the number of Hmong in the United States at 186,000. See the American Community Survey and the US Census estimates in Mark E. Pfeifer, "Hmong American Socioeconomic Profile," *Asian American Press*, 26 January 2007, and the Hmong community leaders' estimate in Hmong National Development, *Hmong 2000 Census Publication: Data & Analysis*, (Washington, D.C.: Hmong National Development, 2003).

Along with the years of refugee life in Thailand and America, the United States left another legacy for the Hmong. That was the legacy of another secret war—a war that started immediately after the United States withdrew from Laos and persists to the present day. It was "secret" in that, like the U.S. Secret War of the 1960s, this war was not publicized and did not receive international attention until recently. Like the U.S. Secret War of the 1960s, this war, however, was no secret to the Hmong people who fought it. They have been fighting this war for the past 35 years. The only difference between the U.S. Secret War and this second secret war was that the latter was fought largely without the aid of the United States government or any of its political and military organs. It was also largely because of the second secret war that the problem of Hmong refugees lingered on in Thailand for more than three decades. People fighting in this latter secret war continued to flee to Thailand for safety when cornered by Communist forces in the jungles of Laos.

In this chapter, I analyze how and why Hmong transnational politics began. By transnational politics, I mean the type of politics that transpires outside of the historic homeland of the political actors. In transnational politics, the focus is not the country of first asylum or the country of settlement. It is the country of origin or the homeland. In transnational politics, the goal of the political actors is not to integrate the diasporic population into the country of first asylum or the country of settlement. It is to change the homeland government from exile, redefine the relationship between the exiled population and the homeland state, and mobilize segments of the diasporic populations to return home. Here, I show that Hmong transnational politics began with the formation of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) in Thailand and the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) in the United States in 1980 and 1981, respectively. However, the start of Hmong transnational politics was located in the Hmong resistance in the Lao jungle from 1975 to 1979, a resistance facilitated by the Pathet Lao communist revolutions in the 1970s. Hmong transnational politics developed in part as a response to what some observers considered a war of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the rightist (pro-American) Hmong in the jungle of Laos after the communists came to power. As such, Hmong transnational politics was properly a latent legacy of the United States military intervention in the war in Southeast Asia. From the outset, there were two

distinct streams of resistance against the communist Lao PDR government: reformed and separatist long-distance nationalism. Both were political projects that transpired outside of the homeland but were directed at the homeland and aimed at redefining the relationship between the diaspora and the homeland. The former sought to reform the Lao state into a democratic Lao society and restore constitutional monarchy to Laos. Meanwhile, the latter sought to create a separate Hmong state in northern Laos, or at the very least, a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiparty Lao society.

The Second Secret War

Doubtless, Hmong transnational politics began in Thailand and the United States in the early 1980s, but it did not just suddenly emerge in the diaspora. Before the politics of the Hmong became transnational (i.e. occurring across borders), it was local. The transnational was an extrapolation of the local, and it remained intimately connected to the local after it took on transnational dimension. To locate the start of the transnational politics of the Hmong, it is thus necessary to understand their politics at the local level. That politics began with the Hmong resistance against the Lao PDR government in the Lao jungle in the 1970s after the Communists came to power—a resistance that evolved into what I call the "second secret war."

To understand the second secret war, it is important to know the events that led up to it. During the Second World War, the Hmong led by Touby Lyfoung supported the French. After the French withdrew from Laos in 1954, the Hmong became the object of communist hostility. During the Secret War, the Hmong led by General Vang Pao supported the Americans. After the United States withdrew from Laos in 1975, the Hmong became the target of communist retaliation. Five days before the United States flew approximately 2,500 Hmong military officers and their families from Long Chieng airbase in northern Laos to Thailand and six days before the Communists overran Laos, communist Pathet Lao leaders declared their intent to exterminate the Hmong down to the root of their tribe in its official newspaper, the *Khaosane Pathet Lao*.[320] For Yang

[320] Brian Jacobs, "No Win Situation: The Plight of the Hmong—America's Former Ally," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 16, no. 139 (1996): *144*; Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down,*

Dao, the first Hmong to receive a doctoral degree from France in 1972 and former Director of the Human Resource Department within the Ministry of Planning of the Royal Lao Government in Vientiane, the communists made good on their promise. "To suit their actions to their words," Yang Dao wrote, "the Pathet Lao fired on a crowd of men, women, and children estimated at about 40,000 persons, who had participated in the great peace march on Vientiane on May 25, 1975, in order to ask for guarantee of their security from the Prime Minister, Prince Souvana Phouma, leader of the Nationality Government. The massacre killed 120 and 140 people, of which some twenty died on the spot."[321] Grant Evans put the number of the Hmong at the bridge between 20,000 and 30,000 people and the number killed at five and the number wounded around thirty.[322] Speaking on the fate of the Hmong after the massacre, Prince Souvana Phouma said, "The Meo have served me well. It is unfortunate that the price of peace in Laos is their disappearance."[323]

For the Hmong, their choice was either flight or resistance. Those who chose flight walked steadily on foot toward Thailand. One Hmong told a Thai photographer, Anant Chompeun, "I want to stay with my father Vang Pao." Chompeun was on the scene after the shooting and witnessed Pathet Lao soldiers herding Hmong at gunpoint back to the hills.[324] By the end of May 1975, some 25,000 Hmong had fled to Thailand.[325] By the end of the year, Hmong refugees in Thailand had grown to 34,000.[326] In contrast, those who chose resistance moved deep into the jungle. Pa Kao Her, who eventually joined his cousin, Zong Zoua Her, to lead the Hmong resistance against communist forces in the hills, recalled: "In May, 1975, the communists took over Laos.

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 138; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars in Laos, 1942-1992,* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 356; Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten: The Human Rights of Laotian Asylum Seekers in Thailand,* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989): 8.

[321] Yang Dao, "Why did the Hmong Leave Laos?" *The Hmong in the West,* eds. Bruce Downing and Douglas Olney, (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1982), 13.

[322] Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos: The Land In Between,* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 185.

[323] Yang Dao, "Why did the Hmong Leave Laos?" *The Hmong in the West*, 13; Roger Warner, *Back Fire: The CIA's Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 350.

[324] Grant Evans, *Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*, A Writenet Report commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Protection Information Section (DIP), (May 2004): 5.

[325] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Societies of the Lao People's Democratic Republic,* ed. Martin Stuart-Fox, (London: University of Queensland Press, 1982), 215.

[326] Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos,* 185.

About 3,500 Hmong/Highlanders fled immediately to Thailand. The majority of us who were trained by the U.S. military chose to stay behind…. We do not want to leave our own country, for which we shed so much blood during the Vietnam War. We wanted to protect our families and our beloved homeland."[327] Most people gathered around the highest mountain in Laos called Phou Bia and waited for political change in their homeland. They wanted to return to their home villages and resume their old agrarian lives.

Their gathering in the forests of Phou Bia, however, was a threat to communist rule. To "pacify" the pro-American Hmong in the jungle, the Pathet Lao sent a cadre of communist soldiers to round up the Hmong in Pha Ngou, a village located in the mountain range of Phou Bia, in October 1975. Upon seeing the communist soldiers, a group of startled Hmong men, women and children working in the field ran in different directions. The soldiers opened fire, killing several individuals and wounding a number of others. Exasperated by this massacre, several hundred Hmong came down from Phou Bia and retaliated by attacking the Pathet Lao posts in Mouang Cha.[328] This military confrontation, thus, marked the beginning of the "second secret war" in Laos—a war that the Hmong in the jungle has continued to fight against Pathet Lao forces to the present day.[329] Though a legacy of the U.S. military action in Laos, this was a war fought largely by the Hmong without the aid of the U.S. soldiers and military advisors.

Pathet Lao Communist Revolutions

The Hmong in the jungle were not the only security threat to the Pathet Lao government when it came to power in 1975. The communist regime also encountered a variety of economic and political challenges. To start, when the communists came to

---

[327] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, File #: X21.1999.43.27.

[328] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Washington University Press, 2000), 405-6; Yang Dao, "Why Did they Leave Laos?" *The Hmong in the West*, 14.

[329] Gary Yia Lee, "Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims or Terrorists?" in *Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, ed. A.T.H. Tan, (MA: Edward Elgar, 2007), 352-373; Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits and Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs Journal* 4 (October-December 2000); and Roger Arnold, "Still A Secret War," *Digital Journalist*, October 2006, and "Update: Still A Secret War, Part II," *Digital Journalist*, August 2007.

power, Laos was already on its way to become one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. During the war, Laos largely depended on foreign aid for survival. From 1968 to 1973, "an average of US$74.4 million of foreign aid was pumped into Laos every year, making citizens living in the Vientiane-controlled zone among the highest *per capita* recipients of aid in the world…. Nearly 80 percent of Vientiane's budgetary expenditure was covered by bilateral and multilateral aid."[330] By the time the United States withdrew from Laos, the country was but a "bankrupt state." The Royal Lao Government had spent most of the foreign aid before 1975 "not in developing the country but in feeding the refugees generated by the war, and in maintaining a high standard of living for the small expatriate community, consisting of government employees and a small urban middle class."[331]

After the Pathet Lao took over, the United States terminated its aid to Laos. The United States Aid for International Development (USAID) similarly shut down all its operations in the country. In November 1976, the Foreign Exchange Operations Fund also terminated aid to Laos after the Lao PDR government closed its border to Thailand. Most entrepreneurs and traders, branded as "neo-colonialist" and pro-Westerners and enemies of the new Communist regime, also left the country. Forced to shut down their businesses, they took whatever valuables they had with them to Thailand and other Western countries.[332] By mid-1975, some 20-30 percent of Vientiane's traders had left the country.[333] In the end, the Pathet Lao derived its primary assistance from Vietnam, their close ally during the war, whose economy, villages and population centers were also gravely damaged by massive U.S. bombings throughout the war period.

Taking over an impoverished nation, the Pathet Lao government implemented a series of measures that Amhay Doré has called "revolutions" to revitalize Laos' economy and stabilize its political bureau (politburo)—revolutions that facilitated and further aggravated the second secret war.[334] To begin, the government revolutionized the

---

[330] Nayan Chanda, "Economic Changes in Laos, 1975-1980," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, eds. Josheph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 116.
[331] Ibid..
[332] UNDP, "The Economy of Laos: an Overview," *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, 67; Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos*, 187.
[333] Nayan Chanda, "Economic Changes in Laos, 1975-1980," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, 117.
[334] Amhay Doré identified three revolutions in Laos: the revolution in relations to production; the scientific and technical revolution; and the ideological and cultural revolution. The first and third revolutions more

country's production by engaging the people in agricultural collectivization or village cooperative. Under this system, as Gary Yia Lee has described, "Each family still can own its individual plots in all major farming activities such as field-clearing, weeding or harvesting. [Nevertheless], the rice harvest has to be divided into three portions: one for the state tax, one for the village rice bank and one for consumption by the household concerned, based on the ration allow for each household member."[335] To set up agricultural co-operatives, Pathet Lao authorities had to appropriate "the best land of the village" and resettle ethnic nations, like the Hmong, from the highlands to the lowlands.[336]

By relocating minorities to the lowlands, Pathet Lao authorities also hoped to eliminate what they believed were the "superstitions" of tribal cultures, "which led them to kill their livestock as part of their religious rituals, or to refuse to cultivate during certain periods or in certain places." These "surviving backward tendencies," for Lao PDR authorities, constituted "an obstacle to production."[337] To free tribal cultures from their obscure superstitions and dangerous individualistic tribal ways of life, Pathet Lao authorities forced minorities to "abandon slash-and-burn agriculture for irrigated rice cultivation on the plain and …transform individual production into collective production by moving towards co-operativization."[338] Anyone caught practicing slash-and-burn agriculture in the highland was arrested. By relocating ethnic minorities to the plains, Pathe Lao authorities ultimately hoped to "keep the people within the government's reach and isolate them from the undesirable influences of dissidents and foreign agents," including the Hmong in the jungle.[339]

Some welcomed agricultural collectivization, but many vehemently opposed it. Agricultural collectivization reminded ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, of the French's *corvée* labor system, under which they were forced to work without pay and sometimes beaten for noncompliance. In collectivization, peasants received no compensation for the

---

directly impacted the lives of the Hmong in Laos and the Hmong resistance in the jungle. Amhay Doré, "The Three Revolutions in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 104-109.

[335] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos* , 210.

[336] Amphay Doré, "The Three Revolutions in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 105.

[337] Ibid., 108.

[338] Gary D. Wekkin, "The Rewards of Revolution: Pathet Lao Policy Towards the Hill Tribes since 1975," in *Contemporary Laos*, 190.

[339] Gary Yia Lee, "Minorities Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 210.

loss of their land and village or for their labor. Traditionally, the owner of the land provided food to the laborers to work on his farm. However, in collectivization, workers had to bring their own food. People were also only allotted 100 kilograms of rice per person per year.[340] Because of strict food rationing, rice tax, and low agricultural productivity, many farmers did not have sufficient food supplies to feed their families. Discouraged and exploited, many farmers abandoned their farms, turned to other occupations, sold or secretly slaughtered their animals, and fled the country.[341] Collectivization was one of the main reasons that many minorities and even some ethnic Lao cited for their departure to Thailand.[342] One refugee told political scientist Joseph Zasloff: "People feel that the fields and buffaloes don't belong to them but to the community. They grow poorer."[343]

The Hmong, in particular, resented forced relocation. They feared exposure to urban diseases such as malaria, TB, and asthma to which they lacked resistance. Many had died and others injured from unexploded landmines while farming in the hills. They worried that they would suffer more deaths and injuries from unexploded landmines in settlement areas.[344] The Hmong, especially those who fought against the communists during the war, opposed what they viewed was "forced assimilation" into Lao national culture and identity. They feared that the Pathet Lao's relocation program was nothing but "a security system aimed at keeping them in check"—a way to monitor closely their movement and activities.[345] Hmong scholar Yang Dao recalled that after taking power, the Pathet Lao sent communist soldiers to all the villages to spy on the villagers. In his words, Yang Dao said:

> Very politely, one who seemed to be the leader would ask each Hmong family to shelter, by turns, two of their comrades who "only want to serve you." But the Hmong soon realized that the two Pathet Lao placed in their family had as their

---

[340] Amphay Doré, "The Three Revolutions in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 105.
[341] Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos*, 193-194; Nayan Chanda, "Economic Changes in Laos, 1975-1980," in *Contemporary Laos*, 122-23.
[342] Gary D. Wekkin, "The Rewards of Revolution," in *Contemporary Laos*, 191; W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, (New York: Zed Books, Ltd., 1998), 105.
[343] Joseph Zasloff, "The Economy of the New Laos, Part II: Plans and Performance," *AUFS Reports* No. 45 (1981): 3.
[344] Gary D. Wekkin, "The Rewards of Revolution," in *Contemporary Laos*, 191.
[345] Ibid., 192.

> sole mission to watch them night and day. They could go nowhere without being accompanied by the two "guardian angels" who claimed to be assuring their safety against "the terrorist activities of the rightist reactionaries." Soon the husband did not dare to talk to his wife, nor the parents to the children. The two Pathet Lao were listening to every word and spying on every move. Nobody could trust anybody.[346]

Pa Kao Her, a leader of the Hmong fighters in the jungles in the 1970s and later the President of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, similarly recalled: "The Pathet Lao communists came to the Highlander's villages and captured village leaders and other men, taking them into *concentration camps*. They then sent troops to guard the families of those who had been captured."[347] In the lowlands, where the Hmong were forced to work in state-owned collective farms, the fear of the Hmong for lowland diseases was justified. Resettled Hmong families "frequently contracted tropical diseases to which they had not previously been exposed—particularly malaria, which is borne by mosquitoes that cannot survive at high elevations."[348]

To eliminate dissension and achieve political stability in Laos, the Lao PDR government also attempted to revolutionize the country ideologically and culturally. The government took great care to suppress "the ideological and cultural after-effects of the old regime, notably in eradicating the ideological and neocolonialist cultural position which US imperialism and the reactionaries introduced into the land." Concretely, this involved the destruction of "all novels, books, journals, erotic and sexy photos, and photos of cow-boys…and entirely wiping out social plagues such as games of chance, hippies, prostitutes, bars." Moreover, the suppression of the ideology of the old regime and the cultivation of a new culture and character involved rounding up "young men with flared jeans and long hair, and girls using make-up or nail polish—described by the propaganda of the new regime as *yakhini* (ogresses)"—and sending them to Monkey Island, some sixty kilometers from Vientiane, to be re-educated. Between 1975 and 1980, some 3,000 people passed through the re-education on this island. Many suffered hard

---

[346] Yang Dao, "Why Did the Hmong Leave Laos?" *The Hmong in the West*, 10.
[347] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 3.
[348] Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 158.

physical punishment during their stay at the island. Some caught attempting to escape were executed.[349]

Pathet Lao authorities also rounded up officers, soldiers, political and military officials of the Royal Lao Government to the countryside to attend re-education centers, which were prison camps, known euphemistically in Laos as *samana* (seminar) camps. Many voluntarily went, believing that the Pathet Lao would bring peace, keep the Lao monarchy, and help Laos rediscover its traditional culture, unsullied by foreign influence, as the "Red" prince, Souphanouvong, had promised. They later, however, discovered that they had been deceived. One prisoner, Colonel Khamphan Thammakhanthi, for example, recalled: "Believing that they could contribute to peace and national reconciliation, and having confidence in the wisdom of Souvana Phouma, and obeying the orders of their respective ministers, they allowed themselves to be caught up in this funeral proceeding. Quickly, but unfortunately too slowly, they realized their error."[350] Others, however, were arrested and dragged at gunpoint to the camps. For the Hmong, 2,000 to 3,000 were sent to the re-education camps in Xieng Khouang and Sam Neau provinces along with thousands of other Lao rightist "reactionaries," including King Savang Vathana, Queen Khamboui, the Crown Prince Souvana Phouma and Prince Savang.[351] Imprisoned in Camp 01, the crown prince died on May 2, 1978. Eleven days later, the king died of starvation, and on December 12, 1981, the queen died.[352] Rightist prisoners in Lao prison camps numbered between 30,000 and 50,000.[353] In 1980, at least twenty re-education camps still existed in Laos, capable of housing approximately 15,000 inmates.[354] In 1984, Amnesty International reported that between 6,000 and 7,000 prisoners were still detained in the camps even though the Pathet Lao claimed that it had

---

[349] Amphay Doré, "The Three Revolutions in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 107-108.
[350] Grant Evans, *Laos: Situational Analysis and Trend Assessment*, A Writenet Report Commissioned by the UNHCR, Protection Information Section (DIP), May 2004, 2.
[351] John Duffy, *The Hmong: An Introduction to their History and Culture*, (Washington, D.C.: The Cultural Orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004), 8; Grant Evans, *A Short History of Laos*, 183.
[352] Arthur Dommen, "Historical Setting," in *Laos: A Country Study*, ed. Andrea Matlas Savada, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994), 69.
[353] Grant Evans, *Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*, 3.
[354] U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1984*, (Washington: Joint Committee Print, February 1985), 814.

abolished all camps "for members of the former regime."[355] Suspicion of the government's motives and fear of Communist cadres grew when people were arrested and hauled off to reeducation camps and did not return after weeks and months. In 2004, Grant Evans reported for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that "many people did not return from the camps, and to this day relatives have never been informed officially of what happened to fathers, sons, or loved ones. Of those who did return many quickly fled the country."[356] Recalling what life was like after the war, Yang Dao wrote, "All, young and old, men and women lived under the fear of being summoned, at any time, for weeks or even months of forced labor (e.g. transportation of ammunition and rice) far from their family residence or for 'seminar' (classes for political re-education which are in actuality forced labor camps from which no on ever returns)."[357]

To pacify the Hmong, the Pathet Lao took great effort to appeal to them. It went on a national radio broadcast and welcomed the Hmong who had left the country to return to Laos to participate in the reconstruction of the country without retribution. It lifted the regime's 1971 ban against opium production and officially sanctioned Hmong opium production in the country.[358] It also promoted Hmong leaders, such as Lo Faydang and his younger brother, Lo Nyiavue, to prominent positions of authority in the Lao PDR Government. The son of the prominent Hmong political leader, Lo Bliayao, Faydang collaborated with the Japanese against French and Lao guerillas in Xieng Khouang and Phosavan provinces during World War II and joined the Lao Issarra after the Japanese surrendered. Throughout the Secret War for Laos from the 1950s to the 1970s, he helped Prince Souphanouvong fight against the Americans. After the formation of the Laos People's Democratic Republic in 1975, Faydang was named one of the Vice-Presidents of the Supreme People's Assembly, a position he held until his death in 1986. Similarly, Lo Nyiavue was appointed the President of the Nationalities Commission, a position he continued to hold in the 1990s. From 1946 to 1947, Nyiavue was an active member of Lao Isarra ("Free Laos"), an anti-French non-communist

---

[355] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Laos*, (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1986), 162.
[356] Grant Evans, "Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment," 3.
[357] Yang Dao, "Why did the Hmong Leave Laos?" *The Hmong in the West*, 10.
[358] Gary Wekkin, "Rewards of the Revolution," in *Contemporary Laos*, 189; and Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 209.

nationalist movement that Lao Prince Phetsarath formed in 1945. Like his older brother, Nyiavue opposed the French re-occupation of Laos. From the mid-1950s to the 1970s, he presided over the Central Committee of the Lao Patriotic Front and was elected an alternate member of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP).[359]

The Lao PDR government remained ethnically and politically imbalanced and stratified in spite of its effort to placate the Hmong in Laos. To start, *only* people fighting on the side of the Pathet Lao during the war received any promotion and position in the new government. Hmong leaders of the Royal Lao Government did not get any position. Instead, they were sentenced to "re-education" camps, from which the majority did not return. The Hmong leaders sent to prison camps included Touby Lyfoung, the Hmong leader who helped the French fight against the Viet Minh and the Japanese during World War II and four RLA Hmong colonels (Ly Nou, Blong Thao, Moua Pao and Neng Yi). Touby Lyfoung suffered a lonely death from malaria in a re-education camp in Sam Neau in 1978 after spending three years doing hard labor as part of his political reeducation.[360] Even communist sympathizers like Lyteck Lynhiavu and his two brothers did not escape the torture and the fate of death in reeducation camps. "Sadly for Lyteck," Gary Y. Lee wrote, "who eagerly co-operated with the Pathet Lao and who went to his 'seminar' willingly, he is reported to have died after undergoing medical treatment for a minor illness."[361] Most of the key leaders in the Central Committee of the Lao People's Democratic Party and the state were ethnic Lao.[362] Due to the lack of education, the promotion and functions of ethnic minority leaders, including Nyiavu and Faydang, were also "largely ceremonial, without any real administrative or policy-making power."[363]

The Pathet Lao, like their Vietminh counterparts, also broke their promise of ethnic autonomy to minority tribal nations who supported them. "To convince the

---

[359] Martin Stuart-Fox, *Historical Dictionary of Laos*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 104.
[360] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 207.
[361] Ibid..
[362] Wendy Batson, "After the Revolution: Ethnic Minorities and the New Lao State," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, edited by Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 144; and Gary D. Wekkin, "The Rewards of Revolution," in *Contemporary Laos*, 189; and MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, "Laos 1977: The Realities of Independence," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 2, (February 1978), 164.
[363] Gary Y. Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 208.

highland tribes to support the Neo Lao Hak Sat," Gary Wekkin wrote, "PL [Pathet Lao] political agitators pointed to the example of the Tai-Meo and Viet-Bac Autonomous and gave high positions in their visible front organizations to several tribal leaders, including…Faydang Lobliayao of the Hmong in Xieng Khouang and the north-east."[364] Faydang himself also recalled the Pathet Lao's promise of "equality for all races" as a major incentive for him to mobilize the Hmong to fight first against the French and later the Americans. As Faydang explained, "When the program of the front [Pathet Lao] was distributed among our Lao Som people, they saw it answered their deepest wishes. Equality for all races."[365] By "equality for all races," Faydang envisioned the Hmong having their own autonomy. When the Hmong and other Lao Som [highland nations] envisioned their autonomy, "it was not a Lao nation of which they dreamed." At a minimum, as Wendy Batson noted, "hopes of freeing themselves from the nominal rule of Luang Prabang or Vientiane motivated them; at times more ambitious dream of creating a Tai Dam or a Hmong nation drove them."[366] After the Secret War, no single tribal nation was given autonomy. All tribal nations were co-opted to join what the Pathet Lao considered a "multinational" Lao state, to which many tribesmen interpreted as "attempted assimilation" and resented. As such, many Hmong remained deeply suspicious of the government. While the Hmong were happy that they could grow opium again with full official sanction, many suspected that the government permitted them "to engage in opium production again mainly because the LPDR intends to control production in order to early badly-needed foreign exchange by selling opium to Western governments and pharmaceutical companies."[367]

In the end, the fear of arrest and imprisonment, the forced resettlement, and the agricultural collectivization—the results of the communist regime's attempts to revolutionize Laos' economy, politburo, and society—further aggravated the Hmong and forced them to flee the country to Thailand or join the Hmong in the forests of Phou

---

[364] Ibid., 185.
[365] Wilfred G. Burchett, "Dawn of the Laotian National Struggle," in *Conflict in Indochina: A Reader on the Widening War in Laos and Cambodia*, eds. Marvin Gettleman, et.al., (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 30-33; Wilfred G. Burchett, *Mekong Upstream*,(Hanoi: Red River Publishing House, 1959), 264.
[366] Wendy Batson, "After the Revolution: Ethnic Minorities and the New Lao State," in *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, 137.
[367] Gary D. Wekkin, "Rewards of Revolution," in *Contemporary Laos*, 190.

Bia.[368] In the 1970s, as many as 60,000 Hmong took refuge in the Phou Bia Massif south of the Plain of Jars.[369] In the forests, they banded together to defend their lives against communist aggression. As Pathet Lao forces moved in to take control and clear the jungle of dissidents, Hmong fighters fought back to protect their only sanctuaries. As Pa Kao Her, leader of a resistance movement in the 1970s, remembered,

> After the incident at Hin Heup Bridge, the Pathet Lao sent troops to fight against the Highlanders, burned villages, destroyed crops, killed livestock, and raped women. Women were killed after they had been raped and tortured. We have seen many tragic cases where bodies (mostly of men) were tied to the tress. Children had their heads cut off or pierced by sharp sticks. Human rights abuses such as these occurred constantly in the areas controlled by the Pathet Lao. We Highlanders had *no other choice but to organize self-defense*.[370]

Soon, the Hmong in the jungle were embroiled in their own secret war with Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces. The secret war in Laos, thus, continued. According to Martin Stuart-Fox, a few thousand defected Pathet Lao soldiers also joined the people in the jungle in the late 1970s in defiance of the Kaysone government for bringing in an additional 50,000 Vietnamese soldiers to Laos. Pathet Lao defectors were reacting to what they considered as the government's "capitulation to Hanoi" and a concession of the Lao territory to Vietnam.[371]

Chao Fa Messianic Fighters vs. Vang Pao's Guerilla Soldiers

The Hmong in the forests of Phou Bia became known as the Chao Fa. A Laotian term meaning "Lord of the Sky" or "God," Chao Fa had its roots in the Pa Chai Vue struggle against French colonialism in the early twentieth century.[372] "The term,"

---

[368] Gary Y. Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 212.
[369] Donald Renard, et.al., *The Hmong: An Introduction to their History and Culture*, 8; W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: the Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1998), 107.
[370] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 3-4.
[371] Martin Stuart-Fox, "National Defense and Internal Security in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 229.
[372] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 31-49; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 382; Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4 (2007), 8.

William Smalley wrote, "was first applied to the Pa Chai movement because the deity who summoned Pa Chai, and instructed him what to do was, *Lu Ndu Lu Te* 'Lord of the Sky and of the Earth' in Hmong."[373] The term was revitalized in the late 1950s when a Hmong farmer named Yang Shong Lue developed a messianic writing script known as the Pahawh for the Hmong and a separate writing script for the Khmu, another ethnic nation in Laos whose language was different from the Hmong. For his invention of the Pahawh, the Hmong called Yang Shue Lue "Niam Ntawv," which translates to "Mother of Writing."

Born in Fi Tong, a small village in Vietnam, over the border from the Nong Het area of Xieng Khouang Province, Laos, on September 15, 1929, Shua Yang (Yang Shong Lue's birth name) became an orphan at an early age. Raised by his poor peasant grandparents, Yang Shong Lue, the son of Chong Yi Yang (a Hmong) and Kong (a Khmu), no had formal education. For thirty years, the only skills that Yang Shong Lue had were farming, weaving, and selling the baskets that the Hmong utilized to carry their harvests on their back. Few people knew him during those years, but things changed for Shong Lue on May 15, 1959. On that day, Shong Lue later told his followers, he began to receive the Pahawh from two men who God had sent to teach him the Pahawh every night after everyone else was asleep. Like the two men, who were sons of God, Shong Lue explained that he was also a son of God or Chao Fa. Like Jesus Christ, Shong Lue, a son of God, was sent to earth to teach the Hmong the Pahawh, urge them to live in harmony and cooperation, and eliminate the ethnic tension and division among the Hmong, the Khmu, and other ethnic nations. As William Smalley has written, "Acording to Shong Lue Yang, the Hmong lacked two things. They lacked the knowledge of how to live harmoniously, both among themselves and with other people. And they lacked writing to validate their equality with other peoples. Shong Lue Yang, Savior of the People, Mother of Writing, believed he had come from God to meet both of those needs."[374]

Starting in 1959, from the mountains of Fi Tong, Vietnam, to the hillsides of Xieng Khouang, Laos, Shong Lue preached the messages of love, unity as a people, pride

---

[373] William Smalley, with Chia Koua Vang and Gnia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Messianic Script*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 10.
[374] Ibid., 15.

in Hmong heritage, preservation of Hmong culture, and Hmong political autonomy to the Hmong. He taught that only by having their own writing could the Hmong be equal to other races and nations who had writings. He advocated that Hmong cooperation, love, and harmony with each other and the elimination of clan division and rivalry were the key to their political autonomy. As Smalley writes, "the heart of Shong Lue Yang's message was harmony, cooperation, elimination of division among the Hmong people so that their culture could be preserved and their potential could be realized."[375] He also instructed that "the Hmong had to dress as Hmong, not as Lao, to indicate that they were sons of a Hmong king," and he urged his followers "not to assimilate into Lao culture."[376] Because of his invention of the Pahawh and his teaching, Shong Lue became "a messianic figure to many of the poor and uneducated, people whose ethnic memories included centuries of repression as a stateless minority, and who were now suffering from the prolonged disruption of war and other severe cultural dislocation."[377]

Unfortunately, Shong Lue became a threat to the political and military leaders on both the leftist and rightist sides during the Vietnam War, as mentioned in the first chapter. After being exiled from North Vietnam by the Vietminh, who accused him of being a CIA spy, Shong Lue took refuge among the Hmong in northern Laos. After he attracted a large following in Laos, the Royal Lao Government, in turn, ordered General Vang Pao to stop Shong Lue from preaching Hmong unity and teaching the Pahawh. The rightist RLG charged that Shong Lue was a communist agent and that his Pahawh contained Soviet or Chinese influence.[378] On September 15, 1967, Shong Lue was arrested and imprisoned for three years in Pha Kao, a Hmong village near the Plain of Jars in Phonsavan. After he escaped from prison, Shong Lue went into hiding in the jungle, where he continued teaching. In mid-February, 1971, members of Vang Pao's army, disguised as communist soldiers, assassinated Shong Lue in his house.[379]

After the communists took over Laos, the term "Chao Fa" re-emerged and took on a special significance. Only this time, the Pathet Lao government revived the term. In a

---

[375] Ibid., 181.
[376] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains,* 383.
[377] William Smalley, with Chia Koua Vang and Gnia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing,* 2.
[378] Chia Koua Vang, interview with author, 19 March 2009. Chia Koua apparently told the same story to William Smalley, who recorded it in *Mother of Writing,* 29-31.
[379] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing,* 37; and John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots,* 55.

conversation I had with two Hmong leaders in St. Paul, they explained that the Pathet Lao called the Hmong living in the jungle after 1975 the "Chao Fa" to identify them as the loyalists of the Lao monarchy or the Royal Lao Government. Chao Fa, they said, was the Lao term for "king."[380] In Thai, according to William Smalley, Chao Fa meant "prince born to the queen," the highest-ranking level of princes.[381] In Thai, in other words, "Chao Fa" referred to what His Royal Highness Prince Chula Charkabongse of Thailand called "The Lords of Life," by which he meant the princes who later became the kings of Thailand.[382] Alternatively, according to Hmong Chao Fa advocates, the Pathet Lao originally called the Hmong in the jungle the "Chao Fa" to discredit their resistance because implicit in the term was the insinuation of superstition. Sue Her, for example, explained, "In the past, when Shong Ger Lo and Pa Chai Vue fought against the French, they were believed to be crazy. The French called their resistance 'the Crazy War' (*Rog Vwm*). For this reason, the Pathet Lao thought the Hmong in Phou Bia were acting crazy too. The Pathet Lao called them 'Chao Fa" because the Hmong in Phou Bia were praying to God for protection against the enemy just as Shong Ger and Pa Chai were."[383] Gymbay Moua, the spokesperson for a Chao Fa organization known as Congress of World Hmong People, similarly added that the Pathet Lao initially invoked the term to ridicule Chao Fa philosophy, demoralize Chao Fa soldiers, and discredit their struggle against the communist regime.[384] This made sense, given the Pathet Lao government's effort, as part of its cultural revolutions, to eliminate the obscure superstitions of ethnic nations after taking power in Laos.

In spite of the ill intention of the Pathet Lao, Hmong messianic fighters responded by adopting the term for themselves. From the negative insinuation, they transformed it into a positive force. Yang Thao, a Chao Fa military officer, explained, "Though it was the Lao who gave the name 'Chao Fa' to us and though they meant to use it to mock us, we soon accepted the term because we did not see the negative connotation in the term. For us, Chao Fa is a good word. It has a good meaning. Chao Fa, for us, means the God

---

[380] This was made during a casual conversation I had with Long Yang and Nkaujlauj Vang in St. Paul on May 11, 2010.
[381] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing*, 193.
[382] Prince Chula Charkabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand*, (London: Alvin Redman, 1960).
[383] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[384] Gymbay Moua, interview with author, 9 March 2009.

in Heaven, the God we worship and respect."[385] Pa Xe Vang similarly recalled, "Our leaders left, and all we knew how to do was pray, so we prayed to the sky. They [the Pathet Lao] called us the crazy Chao Fa… It was meant to be negative, those who followed the sky instead of the real world, but we accepted that name. It inspired us, so it kind of backfired on them."[386]

While the Pathet Lao used the term to refer to the collective of the Hmong fighters and their families in the jungle of Laos, not all the Hmong fighters in the jungle saw themselves as "Chao Fa." They were sympathetic to the Chao Fa, but many Hmong fighters and their families in the jungle did not necessarily identify with the Chao Fa or subscribe to its religious teachings. These included the men and women under the leadership of Sai Soua Yang, a prominent Hmong *tasseng* of the subdistrict of Muang Pa, a position he initially assumed in 1965 after winning most of the votes cast by sixty *naibang* from the district with the help of his second cousin, Youa Tong Yang.[387] Youa Tong was a well-respected *chao muang* among the Hmong of Xieng Khouang province; he was one of the elders who General Vang Pao had summoned to persuade the Hmong to fight for the Americans after his meeting with Bill Lair in early 1961. Few Hmong knew Vang Pao at the time, but Youa Tong was already well-recognized and trusted by the Hmong in the area. Vang Pao gained the trust of the Hmong people with Youa Tong's rally and support.[388] After the communists came to power in Laos, Youa Tong fled to Thailand with Vang Pao, leaving his post as the *chao muang* of Vangxai open. Immediately, Sai Soua, still in his second term as the *tasseng* of Muang Pa, laid claim to the vacated post by hereditary right. After promoting himself to general, Sai Soua established a military headquarter at Pha Khao and eventually mobilized thousands of Hmong to fight to liberate the entire Xieng Khouang province from communist control. Sai Soua became the leader of the *secular* anti-communist resistance movement after Vang Pao and other leaders had left.[389]

In contrast to Sai Soua's guerilla army, the Chao Fa messianic fighters were, first and foremost, followers of the Hmong prophet and messianic leader, Yang Shong Lue.

---

[385] Yang Thao, interview with author, 13 January 2009.
[386] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society Press, 2010), 183.
[387] Sai Soua Yang, interview with author, 7 July 2010.
[388] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 90-91.
[389] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 407.

As John Duffy has written, "The term *Cob Fab* [Chao Fa] has two meanings, one specific and one general. The specific meaning relates the term to the followers of Shong Lue Yang, the creator of the Phaj Hauj [Pahawh] writing system… Hmong guerrilla soldiers who resisted communist after 1975 and adopted the writing system were called *Cob Fab.* In the general sense, the term refers to anyone who fought in the Hmong resistance after 1975, regardless of whether they knew the Paj Hauj or subscribed to its religious teachings."[390] In the general sense, the men, women, and children under Sai Soua and those under Zong Zoua were all "Chao Fa." Here, I use "Chao Fa" in its specific sense to refer solely to those who knew the Pahawh and subscribed to the religious teachings of Yang Shong Lue. There were, in other words, two groups of Hmong resistance fighters in the jungle in the late 1970s.[391] One group, who I call "Chao Fa messianic fighters," was under the command of Zong Zoua Her. Zong Zoua and his fighters organized themselves under the organization, "Chao Fa Freedom Organization of Laos."[392] The other group, who I call "Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers," was under the leadership of Sai Soua Yang. The latter group did not endorse the Pahawh and the religious teachings of Yang Shong Lue, and they saw themselves largely as remnants of Vang Pao's Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) from the U.S. Secret War in Laos in the 1960s.

Many Chao Fa messianic fighters were also former military officers in Vang Pao's secret army. Zong Zoua Her, the leader of the Chao Fa resistance army, for example, was formerly a sergeant in General Vang Pao's army. In May 1971, he assembled a company of soldiers and asked Vang Pao to authorize him to lead the company against the North Vietnamese Army in the Plain of Jars. Before going to the battlefield, Zong Zoua performed magical rites and religious rituals to ask God to protect his soldiers in the battlefield. His magic and religious rituals did not help. The North Vietnamese Army decimated Zong Zoua's company of soldiers and took several hundred of his men prisoners. According to Quincy, "Vang Pao attributed the poor performance

---

[390] John Duffy, *Writing from these Roots*, 222.

[391] Gary Yia Lee, "Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims of Totalitarianism or Terrorists?" in *A Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia,* ed. A.T.H. Tan, (MA: Edward Edgar, 2007), 352-273. Also available at <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/Hmong%20rebellion%20in%20Laos.html> (November 18, 2009).

[392] Pa Kao Her, "Summary Biography of President Pa Kao Her," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, (File #: X21.1999.43.27); and Yang Thao, "Biography of President Pa Kao Her, Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).

of Tsong Zua's company to the substitution of questionable 'magic' for sound military strategy…[and] retired Tsong Zua from the army with a generous cash bonus and the gift of a small herd of cattle, hoping that he would abandon magic and messianism, become a prosperous farmer and stay clear of the war."[393] Similarly, Pa Kao Her, the second-in-command to Zong Zoua of the messianic Chao Fa army in Phou Bia, was a former military officer in Vang Pao's Special Guerrilla Units. Pa Kao joined the Second Regional Army of the Royal Lao Government under Vang Pao's command in 1961. From 1966 to 1968, Pa Kao received training to be a U.S. Special Guerilla Unit Air Commando in Saigon, South Vietnam. In 1969, Pa Kao was sent to the border of Laos and North Vietnam to sabotage Communist supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail. In 1971, he was promoted to a major in the SGU Military Region 203-3B under the Battalion of Xai Dang Xiong and the 21st Division of Colonel Vang Thai. The Chao Fa messianic fighters were, thus, also "former soldiers who were trained by and who worked for the American CIA to rescue downed pilots, collect information from the North Vietnam, and sabotage Viet Minh supply convoys along the Ho Chi Minh trail."[394]

Nevertheless, the Chao Fa messianic resistance movement drew its political thought and moral vision principally from the Hmong prophet, Yang Shong Lue because of the influence that Shong Lue had on the leaders of the Chao Fa resistance movement, namely Pa Kao Her and Zong Zoua Her. Pa Kao had been a student of Shong Lue in the 1960s. He had studied the Pahawh and Chao Fa philosophy with Shong Lue and even become a scholar at the Pahawh Language Institute in Xieng Khoung province in 1960 before joining the military a year later.[395] After Vang Pao retired him from the army in 1971, Zong Zoua joined other followers of Shong Lue and formed what Gary Yia Lee has called a "Hmong revivalist movement in 1972, which amidst all the suffering sustained by Hmong refugees in the Lao civil war, was advocating the formation of a 'true' Hmong society, in anticipation of the return of a legendary Hmong king who would rescue the

[393] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 403-404.
[394] Pa Kao Her, "Summary Biography of President Pa Kao Her," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 4.
[395] William Smalley, *Mother of Writing*, 28 & 68; Pa Kao Her, "Summary Biography of President Pa Kao Her," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, (File #: X21.1999.43.27); and "Biography of President Pa Kao Her, Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).

movement's followers from oppression by other groups."[396] If Vang Pao furnished Zong Zoua and Pa Kao their military skills, Yang Shong Lue provided them their messianic vision, political strategy, and nationalist aspirations.

Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers under Sai Soua did not believe in what some contemporary students of the Mother of Writing have called "Shongluism," but the Chao Fa messianic fighters were strong proponents and advocates of Shongluism, the political thought and moral vision derived from the teachings and the path of Shong Lue.[397] For Zong Zoua, Pa Kao and other Chao Fa fighters, Shong Lue was a Hmong messiah. He was the savior that God had sent to save the Hmong by giving them the Pahawh, the writing of the Hmong nation, and instructing them to unite and live as a people in their own separate homeland.[398] In this sense, the Chao Fa messianic fighters in Phou Bia were part of a long tradition of Hmong messianism that dated as far back as the 19th century. Zong Zoua, Pa Kao, and their Chao Fa fighters stood in history among the various Hmong messianic fighters that preceded them—fighters who, inspired by visions of liberation through divine intervention and messianic deliverance, sought to bring about an independent Hmong nation.[399] Meanwhile, the soldiers under Sai Soua's command and Sai Soua himself were part of the political tradition of Hmong secular leaders, including Touby Lyfoung and Vang Pao, who sought to achieve greater autonomy and power for the Hmong by building political alliance with external powers, including the French, the Lao monarchy, and the Americans.

Attacks in the Lao Jungle

In the mid-1970s, despite their different ideological and political roots, the relationship between the Chao Fa under Zong Zoua's leadership and the guerilla soldiers

---

[396] Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits and Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," 11.

[397] Cheng (Tousouayeng) Yang, founder of the Chao Fa Foundation, explained in the radio program, "Hmoob Neej Tshiab (Hmong New Life)," dated 11 November 2009, that, just as Buddhism refers to the moral and religious teachings or the way of the Buddha, Shongluism refers to the moral and religious teachings and the path of Yang Shong Lue.

[398] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008; Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; Cheng (Tousouayeng) Yang, interview with author, 6 March 2009.

[399] For Hmong messianic leaders who fought against French colonialism, including Xiong Tai (1860-mid-1870s), Xiong Mi Chang (1910-1912), and Vue Pa Chai (1918-1921), see Chapter 1 of dissertation; and Mai Na Lee, "Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration, and Legitimacy Under French Colonialism, 1893-1955," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 37-143.

under Sai Soua's command was based on cooperation. After the Communists took power in Laos, Chao Fa messianic fighters and Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers fought together against Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces. In the 1970s, Sue Her, who now lives in St. Paul, was a Chao Fa fighter with Zong Zoua and Pa Kao in Phou Bia. According to him, Chao Fa leaders, including Pa Kao and Zong Zoua, never blamed Vang Pao for Shong Lue's death. The Chao Fa reasoned that Vang Pao was not responsible for the death of the Mother of Writing, the progenitor of the Chao Fa. Vang Pao, a general for the Royal Lao Army, simply carried out the order of the Royal Lao Government. The RLG was thus properly responsible for Shong Lue's death. Similarly, the Chao Fa had no enmity toward Sai Soua and his soldiers. More importantly, Pa Kao, Zong Zoua, and Sai Soua were all Hmong, and they had a common vision. All of them wanted to liberate the Hmong and Xieng Khoung province from the communists. Their common ethnic identity, their common vision, and the justification the Chao Fa had for Yang Shong Lue that shifted the blame away from Vang Pao to the Royal Lao Government allowed the Chao Fa under Zong Zoua's leadership and Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers under Sai Soua to fight together against the communist regime.[400] Sai Soua thought that the Chao Fa messianic fighters were "fanatics."[401] He did not believe in Chao Fa "superstitions," but he understood the importance of fighting together with Zong Zoua and Pa Kao against communist forces to protect the lives of Hmong families in the jungle. At times, Sai Soua explained, he and his army even protected Zong Zoua and his fighters. They were typically the first to fight the communists. Before the communists could get to Zong Zoua's posts in the jungle, they had to pass through Sai Soua's posts.[402] During this period, Zong Zoua, Pa Kao and Sai Soua also all fought the communists waiting for Vang Pao's return from exile to join the fighting and lead the Hmong people as he did during the war. Collectively, they formed the Hmong resistance to Communist rule in the second secret war in Laos.[403]

---

[400] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[401] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 407.
[402] Sai Soua Yang, interview with author, 7 July 2010.
[403] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008; Sai Soua Yang, interview with author, 7 July 2010.

In early January 1976, the *Bangkok Post* put the number of Chao Fa messianic freedom fighters at 20,000.[404] Nicholas Auclair confirmed this estimate in a 1995 study of Lao national security, stating that "in the late 1970s, the Chao Fa boasted of having 20,000 members; however, only 2,000 to 4,000 were armed."[405] In the late 1970s, Zong Zoua *alone* was said to have an army of 400 or 500 men, operating in units of 20 to 50 against Pathet Lao forces.[406] Comparing Sai Soua's army to Zong Zoua's fighters, Quincy wrote, "Able to draw from a larger population, his [Sai Soua's] organization dwarfed Tsong Zua Her's guerilla network."[407] Quincy, however, gave no estimate for the number of soldiers under Sai Sai. In a 1977 secret document prepared for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the U.S. State Department, John Pavoni noted that between 5,000 and 7,000 of Vang Pao's irregulars were still fighting the Communists in Laos.[408] Gary Yia Lee added that, after the Communists came to power in Laos, "more than 15,000 Vang Pao followers, ever distrustful of the new authorities, went into hiding with their families deep in the jungles of Phou Bia, the highest mountain of Laos, and other adjacent areas from where they have continued to wage a constricted war of resistance against the Lao PDR government."[409] For Sai Soua, after he established his headquarters in Pha Khao, he had 11,000 soldiers under his command, ready to defend their lives and protect their families and children from the communists.[410]

From 1975 to 1977, a number of attacks occurred between Communist forces and Hmong resistance fighters in Laos. Although vastly outnumbered and poorly armed, Hmong resistance fighters fought with determination and careful planning. They fired only when they were confident it would hit the target. The Chao Fa messianic fighters, in particular, burned incense and paper money to asked God for help and protection.

---

[404] Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in Southeast Asia?* (Verso: The Thetford Press, 1983), 28; Tom Peterson, "Lords of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune*, August 1990, 47; Sam Her, "Chao Fa: An Unending Struggle for Freedom and Democracy," in Special Collections, Hmong Archives, File #: X21.1999.43.27.
[405] Nicholas C. Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 280.
[406] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 213.
[407] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 407.
[408] J. Pavoni, "Anti-Government Resistance in Laos," Report prepared for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, United States Department of State, No. 735, 17 February 1977, in Douglas Pike Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University.
[409] Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4, (2000): 9-10.
[410] Sai Soua Yang, interview with author, 7 July 2010.

Everyday and especially before battles, they prayed to the Lord of the Sky, or Chao Fa, and the spirits of the earth for protection and victory over the Pathet Lao army. By all accounts, Hmong fighters were very successful at defending their territories and attacking Communist soldiers at their posts during 1975-1976.[411] "Refugees who took part in the [Chao Fa] guerilla activities," Gary Yia Lee wrote, "stated that they were amazed how few casualties there were among its members, even when they attacked well-armed enemy troops in the open."[412] A primary school teacher, Soua Yang, described a battle he witnessed between 20 to 30 armed Chao Fa fighters in black and countless number of North Vietnamese forces on a hillside in Muang Cha for journalist Jane Hamilton-Merritt as follow:

> Leading the column was a young Hmong girl carrying a flag with a crescent moon and some animals, including a pig. The soldiers had M-16s, carbines, rifles and one shoulder-held M-72 rocket. I watched, expecting the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] to shoot them down, but they didn't. A Hmong soldier fired his M-72 rocket and it went through the roof of the former mayor's house. Some NVA ran out and were killed. Other NVA ran to gun positions on the higher ground overlooking the valley. They fired their DK-92 mortars on the Hmong soldiers. Their mortars exploded in mid-air instead of on the ground, so not one Hmong was hit. The girl continued to march around with the flag. During this battle many NVA soldiers were killed, including NVA officers in the mayor's house. *It took six trucks to take away the dead Vietnamese soldiers. No Hmong died. No Hmong were wounded. After the battle, we learned that these Hmong were Chao Fa. We asked them how they could kill so many Vietnamese and not lose one Hmong. They said that the god looked after them and that their flag protected them*. They also told us that the mortar that hit the headquarters were fired at Vang Pao's former office, not at the headquarters building, and that it had turned and hit the building with all the Vietnamese in it. This was the power of the Chao Fa, they said.[413]

---

[411] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 405-6.
[412] Gary Yia Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," in *Contemporary Laos*, 213.
[413] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 385. [Italicize—author's emphasis.]

Yuepheng Xiong, the producer of a number of Hmong historical documentaries on the Hmong in China and the Hmong during the Secret War in Laos, similarly told me: "My father also told me incredible story about the strength and power of the Chao Fa. When guns were fired and grenades exploded, Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers sometimes ran and retreated. However, Chao Fa fighters never retreated. They chased Pathet Lao soldiers like they were chasing wild chickens and pheasants. Even when Pathet Lao soldiers hid in the bushes, they still ran after them and sought them out."[414] During this period, so many Pathet Lao soldiers were killed in battles against the Chao Fa fighters that many were terrified of going into the jungle to face Chao Fa fighters. Many fled to Thailand rather than go to the jungle to fight the Chao Fa. Soon, the Pathet Lao government created an army called Kongthat Pa Chai that consisted primarily of Hmong soldiers, and they used the Hmong to fight the Hmong. By early 1977, Hmong resistance fighters had so successfully defended their mountainous hideouts against Pathet Lao soldiers that they were on the verge of liberating the entire Xieng Khoung Province, the historic homeland of the Hmong. There were also talks among Chao Fa leaders and fighters of establishing an independent Hmong state in northern Laos.[415]

No one knows how the Chao Fa had defeated the best forces the communist Lao PDR regime could muster and in six engagements had suffered only light casualties. It may simply be their propaganda to attract more people to the resistance; however, for the Chao Fa, their victories were unambiguous indication of God's miraculous intervention and protection. It was proof of the power of their faith. Sue Her, who fought with Pa Kao and Zong Zoua in Phou Bia for a few years before fleeing to Thailand, for example, recalled:

> At that time, when we prayed to God, it did seem to work. God had surely protected us. Not to talk about someone else, take me, for example. Lao soldiers had fired at me many times, but I was not harmed. Even at close range, I was not once harmed. Many other people also said the same thing. When Pathet Lao soldiers threw grenades at us, those that landed far from us exploded, but none of those that landed near us exploded. Some people said that Pathet Lao soldiers

[414] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[415] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 408.

> already destroyed the grenades before throwing at us. That was why they did not explode. That was not true because some did explode. They just exploded far from us. Some people said that we were delusional to believe that the grenades did not explode because God protected us. But we know that was just politics. The people who were saying this were not with us in the jungle. They were in the city. They never saw what actually took place in the jungle. Some grenades exploded right above us. They blew off branches from the trees, but there was no harm to the people below. All these made us believe that there must be a God. [416]

In the 1970s, Blong Vang, now a resident in northern California, was a Chao Fa fighter in Zong Zoua's army in Phou Bia. Like Sue Her, Blong Vang believed that God was certainly on their side at the time. In fact, for him, God was not the only deity or spirit on their side. All the wild animals in the jungle were also on the Chao Fa side. Not a single Chao Fa was ever bitten and killed by any of the wild animals, including snakes and tigers, but when Pathet Lao soldiers came to kill Chao Fa, many of them were chased after and killed by tigers or bitten by poisonous snakes.[417]

Their initial victories, notwithstanding, the Chao Fa's dream of establishing an independent Hmong state in northern Laos did not materialize. Chao Fa victories during those two years had left Kaysone Phomvihan, the Pathet Lao President, terribly shaken. In 1977, Laos signed the 25-Year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with North Vietnam, transforming Laos into what Arthur Dommen called "a satellite of Vietnam" and giving Vietnamese troops legal sanction "to operate anywhere on the territory of Laos."[418] After they signed the friendship treaty, Kaysone immediately requested additional help from North Vietnam to "pacify" the Hmong resistance in Laos. The strength of Vietnamese troops in Laos varied over the 1977-1980 period, from a low of 30,000 units in 1977 to a high of 50,000 by 1979, with fluctuations during the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the border with China, although estimates as

---

[416] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008. The memory of Chao Fa's apparent invincibility against well-armed Pathet Lao soldiers is recently captured in a 2010 film by Kou Thao of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. See Kou Thao and Dao Xiong, prod., *Jao Fa, Caub Fab 2, Hmong Hero*, (Milwaukee, WI: Hmong Media Production, 2010), film.
[417] Blong Vang, interview with author, 25 September 2008.
[418] Arthur J. Dommen, "Laos: Vietnam's Satellite," *Current History*, (December 1979): 202.

large as 60,000 and even 80,000 had been given.[419] In the same year, the Soviet Union delivered "ten MIG-21 jet fighters, Antonov 24 and 26 transports, civilian aircraft for Lao aviation, which could be turned to military use, and a number of helicopters for the air force" to Vientiane's Wat Tay Airport to provide air support for the campaign to root out the Hmong resistance.[420] In July 1979, Lao Prime Minister and party leader Kaysone Phomviham defended the presence of Vietnamese troops in his country:

> In face of the threat of aggression by big nation expansionist hegemonism and imperialism, on the basis of the said treaty and at the request of the Lao Government, the two governments have agreed to the presence of Vietnamese armed forces in Laos in order to join the Lao people's armed forces in opposing the threat and sabotage against Laos. This is a legitimate measure jointly taken by two sovereign countries aimed at defending the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and the economic and cultural construction in each country. This is also normal practice in international relations.[421]

Together, Lao People's Army and the North Vietnamese Army attacked Hmong resistance fighters in Phou Bia with "aerial reconnaissance by T-28s, followed by deployment of chemical defoliants, napalm, and gas rockets."[422] Hmong survivors described these chemical defoliants and gas rockets as "Yellow Rain." A survivor described an attack by the Communists on the Hmong using "yellow rain" in the following manner:

> Sometimes the planes just observed; other times they dropped poisons. There were three kinds used—yellow, black, and blue, the color of the sky. When the yellow poison like rain came people got dizzy with vomiting. The black one was used more often and it came in big drops, like a drop of oil. If touched or if breathed it could kill you. If you breathed in hard near the black drop, you couldn't breathe in again. It had a vapor, or steam. It seemed that if people breathed in, they died at the scene. But if they could get opium into their bodies, the black poison killed that person within about three hours. We were frightened

---

[419] Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos and Vietnam: The Anatomy of A 'Special Relation'," in *Contemporary Laos*, 255; Martin Stuart-Fox, "National Defense and Internal Security in Laos," in *Contemporary Laos*, 230.
[420] Ibid., 230-231.
[421] Arthur Dommen, "Laos: Vietnam's Satellite," *Current History*, (December 1979): 202.
[422] Geoffrey Gunn, "Resistance Coalition in Laos," *Asian Survey* 23, no. 3, (March 1983): 235.

> and ran away. But we had no safe place to go, so we returned. Still the enemy poisoned us. We had no way to resist their poisons. Next we ran to Yellow Rock on Phou San. We were sick and couldn't farm. The vegetables we ate poisoned us. The water poisoned us. Then there was nothing left to eat that was safe. We would all die.[423]

The attacks of the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese on the Hmong in Phou Bia resulted in the destruction of entire Hmong villages and the massacre of thousands of Hmong inhabitants. Keith Quincy recorded, "A defector from the Lao air force, who later admitted to first gas rockets at Hmong rebels, later reported in Thailand that between 1975 and 1978 up to fifty thousand Hmong were killed by yellow rain."[424] For his part, General Vang Pao also alleged that 50,000 Hmong died from the Pathet Lao's chemical poisoning between 1975 and 1978, a campaign that began as early as August 1975, "at Mung Om and Nam Fen, south of Phu Bia, where 17,000 men, women, and children were killed."[425] The attacks on Chao Fa soldiers in the jungle were so intense that observers classified these attacks as the LPDR government's effort to "exterminate" the Hmong "purely and simply."[426] Lao specialist Grant Evans observes that "the campaign against the Hmong at times degenerated into the savagery we now associate with 'ethnic cleansing.'"[427] For Stanley Karnow, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnam Army's campaign to "pacify" Hmong resisting Communist control in Laos was a war of "genocide."[428] The Pathet Lao, added Vang Pobzeb, the executive director of Lao Human Rights Council, intended to "eradicate the Meo minority completely" as the Communist government declared in its newspaper, the *Khasane Pathet Lao*, on May 9, 1975, and later outlined in Pathet Lao memos in the early 1990s.[429]

---

[423] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 393.
[424] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 410.
[425] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, "Gas Warfare in Laos," 2.
[426] Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Rebellion in Laos: Peasants and Politics in a Colonial Backwater*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 176.
[427] Grant Evans, *Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*, 5.
[428] Stanley Karnow, "U.S. Giving Little Attention to Meos, Once Allies, Now Genocide Target," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1979.
[429] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954: The Theory and Practice of Peaceful Coexistence," (Ph.D dissertation, University of Denver, 1996), 235. Vang Pobzeb based his claims on original documents in the Lao language that the Lao Human Rights Council received and on Khukrit Pramot and Souphasai Souphanouvong, "The Plan for the Liquidation of the Hmong Who Oppose the

By late 1978, the Pathet Lao government, with the help of North Vietnamese troops, had badly broken the strength of the Hmong resistance forces and largely disbanded Zong Zoua's Chao Fa guerrilla network.[430] "For the next six years," Quincy stated, "Tsong Zua remained in hiding in the mountain forests south of the Plain of Jars, living off handouts from fellow clansmen, a hunted man whose only goal was to stay alive."[431] Eight thousand Hmong, many from Phou Bia, fled across the Mekong River to Thailand in 1978. By March 1979, most of the civilians in Phou Bia had either escaped to Thailand or surrendered. In 1979, another 24,000 Hmong entered Thailand. Fifteen thousand more Hmong followed this group to Thailand in 1980.[432] By 1980, the Hmong refugee population in Thailand swelled to more than 110,000.[433] In May 1980, Sai Soua, the leader of Vang Pao's leftover guerilla soldiers in Phou Bia, also gave up the resistance and fled to Thailand. "We tried our best," he later told Stanley Karnow in the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Loei province, Thailand, "but there was nothing we could do without outside help."[434] In fact, the strength of the Hmong resistance was so badly damaged by the additional North Vietnamese and the chemical poisons that the Pathet Lao brought in to crush the resistance after 1977 that by October 1980, Quan Doin Nhan Dan, an official of the Peoples Army of Vietnam, could proudly announce the defeat of the Hmong resistance fighters: "After three years of struggle to crust the Hmong pirates, the solders of the Lao Liberation Army have penetrated the last strongholds of the Phu Bia pirates. Fifteen thousand inhabitants of the region have been liberated."[435] In 1980, the *U.S. News and World Report* estimated that only 3,500 Hmong in Phou Bia were still involved in armed resistance against the government.[436]

Liberation in the Northeast in the Country," *Bangkok Siam Rat*, 7 May 1993; *FBIS Daily Report Asia*, (25 May 1993): 47-48; and "Don't Force Them Back," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 8 June 1993, 6A.

[430] Carlyle A. Thayer, "Laos and Vietnam: The Anatomy of a 'Special Relationship'," in *Contemporary Laos*, 255; Martin Stuart-Fox, "National Defense and Internal Security in Laos," *Contemporary Laos*, 230.

[431] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 418.

[432] Ibid., 418 & 425.

[433] Daphe Winland, "The Role of Religious Affiliation in Refugee Resettlement: The Case of the Hmong," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 24, no. 1, (1992): 3. Robinson puts the number of Hmong refugees in Thailand by the end of 1980 at 100,000. W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 107.

[434] Stanley Karnow, "Free No More: The Allies America Forgot," *GEO* 2, (1980): 21.

[435] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 419.

[436] *U.S. News and World Report*, 2 June 1980.

The ELOL and the ULNLF (Neo Hom)

The Communist suppression of the Hmong resistance in Phou Bia did not end the Hmong aspiration for autonomy and their struggle for the liberation of Laos altogether. Many refused to leave the land for which they had shed so much blood and made so many sacrifices and continued to resist Communist aggression inside Laos. After the defeat in Phou Bia, Hmong resistance fighters scattered to multiple localities within the country. From 1977 to 1990, armed units of Hmong resistance fighters and their families were found in many areas in the northern, central and southern provinces, including Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khoung, Udomxai, Bokeo, Luan Nam Tha, Phong Saly, Sam Neau, Khammoune, and Borikhamsay.[437] From these various locations, they carried out sporadic guerrilla attacks on Pathet Lao troops and posts, but the strength of their attacks was minimal, compared to that in the 1970s.[438] In tandem, exiled Hmong political and military leaders in Thailand and the United States had formed their own anti-Pathet Lao and anti-Vietnamese movements and organizations. Drawing their support largely from Hmong refugees, exiled Hmong leaders exerted political and military pressures on the Pathet Lao from outside the Lao geopolitical border.

One of the resistance groups to form outside of Laos was the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL). Headquartered in Thailand, the ELOL was the offspring of the Chao Fa Freedom Fighters of Laos—the guerilla organization that Zoua Zoua and Pa Kao founded in the forests of Phou Bia. Although the Communists had broken the will of Zong Zoua in Phou Bia, they did not crush Pa Kao's will power and spirit. According to Quincy, after he escaped to Thailand in 1978, Pa Kao contacted former Royal Lao Army General Boonleurt who was exiled in Thailand. Well-connected to the Thai general staff, Boonleurt introduced Pa Kao to the Thai military and eventually

[437] J. Pavoni, "Anti-Government Resistance in Laos," Report prepared for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, No. 735, 17 February 1977, in Douglas Pike Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University; Tom Peterson, "Lords of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune*, (August 1990): 46.

[438] Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4 (2007), 6-15.

"became a conduit for money, supplies, and arms to sustain" Pa Kao's anti-Pathet Lao guerrilla force in Thailand.[439]

Alternatively, based on the interviews I conducted with Pa Kao supporters and the biographical sketch of Pa Kao in a collection of evidences that Yang Thao, the chief military strategist and former secretary general for ELOL, compiled for his application for political asylum in the United States, after Pa Kao escaped to Thailand in 1978, he contacted Luangpho Chamroon Parnchand, the head abbot of Wat Tham Krabok, and took refuge at the Buddhist monastery.[440] According to Bee Moua, a Chao Fa liaison in the United States in the early 1980s, Luangpho Chamroon first initiated contact with the Chao Fa in 1975. Soon after that, Vice-President Moua Lor of the Chao Fa Freedom Fighters of Laos met with Luangpho Chamroon in Thailand.[441] Through Luangpho Chamroon, a former police officer turned monk, Pa Kao contacted the Thai police and army. In 1980, with the Thai military's support and with permission from the King of Thailand, Pa Kao founded the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) and set up a military training camp in Nan province near the Lao-Thai border.[442]

Pa Kao supporters I interviewed also talked about the encounter between Luangpho Chamroon and Pa Kao as if it were predestined. To understand this claim, it is necessary to remember that a central feature of the Chao Fa movement was its propensity to engage in what Ernest Gellner has called "cultural revivication"—efforts to revive or reconstruct identity through symbolism and historical interpretation.[443] Chao Fa leaders and fighters often explained their politics and social relations in mythical terms and created what Stuart Kaufman has called "myth-symbol complexes," which are "a combination of myths, memories, values, and symbols that defines not only who is a member of the group but what it means to be a member."[444] They told the stories they told to make sense of the world and events around them and to create shared memory,

---

[439] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 436.
[440] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; and Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008; "Biography of President Pa Kao Her," in Yang Thao Collection, (private collection).
[441] Bee Moua, notes in Hmong Social and Cultural Forum, 31 January 2008.
[442] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; and Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[443] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Itacha, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 101-109.
[444] Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatred: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 25.

historical consciousness, and ultimately a common Chao Fa identity. For the Chao Fa, the stories they told not myths or imagined realities. They were *real* historical facts.

Despite this propensity, it is important not to dismiss their "cultural revivication." To understand their politics, it is necessary to take the intentions, perceptions, desires, and fantasies of the Chao Fa seriously. Their perceptions, discourses, symbols, and emotions matter as much as the economic, political or structural shifts in the state. Only by taking their goals and intentions, symbols and rhetoric, perceptions and emotions, and desires and fantasies seriously can we appreciate why the Chao Fa fighters were willing to sacrifice the luxury of life to live in rags in the Lao jungle to fight for Hmong ethnic autonomy and self-determination in Laos and why they were so persistent and resilient. The repression and setback that the Chao Fa encountered in their struggle had little or no effect on them because they did not necessarily perceive those setbacks as such. Their perceptions, in other words, matter as much or more than some underlying "reality."[445]

According to a number of Chao Fa informants I interviewed, before Luangmae Mian Parnchand, the founder of Wat Tham Krabok, passed away in 1970, she gave some specific instructions to her nephew and pupil, Luangpho Chamroon Parnchand, one of which was to help the person who would seek out his help in the future. The authenticity of the person, Luangmae said, would be proven by a display of the writing script that she left for Luangpho. Not surprisingly, the script she had left was the same script that Shong Lue had created—the Pahawh; it was the same script that Pa Kao had learned from the Mother of Writing himself in 1960. When Pa Kao met Luangpho for the first time in 1978, he proved his authenticity by displaying knowledge of the Pahawh.[446]

Pa Kao also received permission to stay in Thailand because, although the Thai stopped short of believing that Pa Kao was the reincarnation of the Thai Rama V, King Chulalongkorn of Thailand, they could not help but notice the resemblance between Pa Kao and King Chulalongkorn. Moreover, the Nan-Phayao area was chosen as the place to set up Pa Kao's military training camp because it was once the area from which King

---

[445] For literatures on this cultural approach to social movements, see, for example, Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, eds., *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper and Francesca Polleta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[446] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; and Sue Her, interview with author, 22 October 2008.

Chulalongkorn trained and raised his army.[447] During His Majesty's reign, King Chulalongkorn, according to the account by His Royal Highness Prince Chula Charkabongse of Thailand, worked hard to enlarge and improve the army and more than once called upon it to "put down riots of Chinese secret societies and revolts by Chinese Boxer troopers who escaped into North-Eastern Siam," where today's Nan and Phayao provinces are located. The area was also the area that King Chulalongkorn had fought hard to keep from French annexation in the 19th century.[448]

The ELOL consisted of the officers, including a president (Pa Kao Her), a vice-president (Chong Yang), and a secretary (Teng Yang); country representatives (Bee Moua and Soua Her in the United States and Tou Yia Lee in France); and supporters or members (mostly in Thailand and Laos). Chao Fa officers, like Pa Kao Her, Pa Kao Moua, Yang Thao, and Bee Chou Thao were responsible for training Chao Fa fighters with Thai military officers in Thailand and leading military operations in Laos against the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese armies. They, particularly President Pa Kao Her, served as the link between the country representatives in France and the United States and the Chao Fa fighters in the jungles of Laos. Meanwhile, the country representatives served as the links between the headquarters in Thailand and their supporters in the diaspora. The representatives in the France and the United States were responsible for mobilizing the Hmong refugees in their respective host countries to support, both morally and financially, the nationalist struggle in Laos. They solicited and collected donations from their supporters and remitted them to the headquarters in Thailand. They also worked to secure financial assistance from non-Hmong groups with common political interests, and they lobbied government agencies in their respective countries of resettlement to put in place policies favorable to Chao Fa political interests in Laos. The members, thus, showed their support to Chao Fa nationalism by making financial contributions to the organization.[449]

In the 1970s, some of the fighters under Zong Zoua and Pa Kao's command in the jungle of Laos were Khmu, another ethnic nation in Laos. However, since 1980, when

---

[447] Sue Her, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[448] Prince Chula Charkabongse of Thailand, *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand*, (London: Alvin Redman, 1960), 224 and 248-251.
[449] Bee Moua Papers and Photos, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota; Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009 and August 31, 2009.

Pa Kao established the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos in Thailand, the movement had become a predominantly Hmong movement.[450] All the officers, including the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and country liaisons were Hmong.[451] Like Pa Kao, many of the officers in the ELOL were former military officers of the U.S. Secret War in the 1960s. These ex-military officers who joined the ranks of Chao Fa leadership after the Communist takeover of Laos included Colonel Bee Chou Thao, Colonel Pa Kao Moua, Colonel Chong Chai Kue, Major Chong Yang, Major Lo Moua, Major Wa Seng Yang, and Colonel Bouasi Moua. Yang Thao was the chief military strategist for the ELOL throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. After Pa Kao was assassinated in Thailand in 2002, Thao feared for his life. As the former secretary general for Pa Kao's Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, Thao was convinced that he would also be assassinated if he continued to stay in Thailand. He, thus, sought political asylum in the United States after he helped bring Pa Kao's lifeless body to Fresno, California for burial. Throughout the 1980s, according to Thao, the ELOL's chief military strategist, at least 500 persons with arms were always present at the military training camp in Nan province, Thailand. Supporters moved in and out of the camp and traveled back and forth between the military training camp and their respective refugee camp in Thailand. While at the military camp, the refugees helped with the ELOL military operations. Once they returned to their refugee camp, many continued to support the ELOL through financial donation.[452] In 1990, the organization reported having 3,000 members in armed units and another 6,000 persons trained but without weapons.[453]

Outside of Thailand, there was the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF), better known as Neo Hom. Founded by exiled Lao and Hmong politicians and military officers in the United States in 1981, the ULNLF was the principal rival organization to Pa Kao's ELOL during the 1980s. Like the ELOL, the ULNLF also had officers, political advisors, field organizers, and members/supporters. The officers and political advisors provided the vision for the organization and formulated the issues by

---

[450] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; and Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[451] Bee Moua Papers and Photos, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[452] Yang Thao, interview with author, 1 August 2009.
[453] Nicholas C. Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 280; Tom Peterson, "Lords of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune Magazine*, (August 1990): 48.

which they mobilized the community for moral and financial support. The field organizers acted as intermediaries between the officers and the members/supporters. They collected most of the membership donations. Members, thus, showed their support by donating regularly to the organization and showing up at rallies, demonstrations and protests whenever called upon by the field organizers and officers of the organization.[454]

Unlike the ELOL, however, the ULNLF was not a predominantly Hmong political organization. Its officers and supporters consisted of both Lao and Hmong. In fact, the highest echelon of the organization was occupied by ethnic Lao, including Lao Prince Chao Sisouk na Champassak, Phanga Inpeng Surigyadhad, Ngon Sananikhone, Khamphan Panya, Kouprasith Abhay, Houmphanh Saignasith, and Phoumi Nosavan.[455] According to a top Vang Pao advisor, Dr. Yang Dao, Dr. Vang Shur, and General Vang Pao were notably the only three ethnic Hmong to occupy top positions in the organization.[456] Phoumi Nosavan was the president of the organization while Vang Pao acted as the head of Hmong supporters of the ULNLF. Dr. Yang Dao and Prince Chao Sisouk na Champassak were the organization's principal political advisors and strategists.[457] In spite of this disproportionate representation of leadership at the top echelon of the organization, Hmong were, however, conspicuously the most active participants.

In the absence of party documents, largely due to poor organizational records, getting an accurate count of the number of the members of the ULNLF remains a daunting task. Several sources have estimated that as many as 80 percent of the Hmong in the United States in the early 1980s were Neo Hom members and regularly donating to the organization.[458] It is unclear, however, who were included in this estimate. Did this 80 percent, for example, also include women and children, or did it include solely men

---

[454] Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 160; Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 151-207; Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War: Family Secrets, Part 2," *Twin Cities Readers*, (8-14 November 1980), 8-10 and 12-14; Ruth Hammond, "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, (14 November 1990), 12-13.
[455] ULNLF, Statement on the United Lao National Liberation Front, June 1981; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 427; Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 449-450.
[456] Xang Vang, interview with author, 20 October 2007.
[457] Yang Dao, interview with author, 2 February 2009.
[458] Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*,160; Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 457.

who were also typically the head of household? If this 80 percent also included women and children, did they know they were counted as members in the ULNLF? According to Kao Kalia Yang, the U.S. Census recorded 5,204 Hmong in America in 1980.[459] In the same year, some 27,200 Hmong left Thailand for the United States, placing the combined Hmong population in the United States in 1980 at about 32,400.[460] By December 1980, according to another source, 50,000 Lao hill people were in the United States, 45,000 of them were Hmong.[461] In 1981, the Hmong population in the United States, according to Fass and Hutchison, grew to about 52,000.[462] If we also included women and children in the 80 percent estimate, then Neo Hom members in the United States alone must have numbered at least 41,600 in the early 1980s, which was probably an overestimate.[463] In 1981, when the ULNLF was formed, its leaders also boasted of having two thousand guerilla soldiers in Laos under the leadership of Vang Pao's father-in-law, Cher Pao Moua, and two battalions under the command of former Lao Military Region 5 commander Thonglith Chokbengbou and the son of a former prince Boun Oum, Chao Bouneu Na Champassak.[464]

With the formation of the ELOL in Thailand in 1980 and the ULNLF in the United States in 1981, the resistance against the Lao PDR government continued. By this point, Pa Kao and Vang Pao had officially split. As president of the ELOL, Pa Kao had become the leader of the Chao Fa messianic movement in Thailand. Meanwhile, as an officer of the ULNLF, Vang Pao had become the leader of the Hmong diaspora in the west. Together, however, both Vang Pao and Pa Kao were still fighting for democracy in Laos and for the freedom of the Hmong. They had formed two different organizations, but they were not fighting each other. Instead, they separately fought against Lao PDR

---

[459] Kao Kalia Yang, *The Late Homecomer*, (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2008), 133. Hein puts the number of Hmong in 1980 at 5,000. See Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 48.
[460] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 122.
[461] Keith St. Cartmail, *Exodus Indochina*, (Exeter, New Hampshire: Heinemann Publishers, 1983), 83.
[462] Fass puts the number of Hmong arrivals during the years 1975 to 1978 at about 9,000 and the years 1979 to 1981 at 43,000. Hutchinson records the same number of arrivals during those years. See Simon Fass, "The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency," *Policy Research Institute Report* 4, no. 2, (April 1991): 11; Ray Hutchinson, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, Report published by the Center for Public Affairs (UW-Green Bay) and the Institute on Race and Ethnicity (UW-Milwaukee), 1992, 6.
[463] This number represents 80 % of 52,000 (the Hmong population in the United States in 1981).
[464] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 449-450.

government. In fact, according to Sue Her and Yang Thao, who had lived and worked with Pa Kao throughout the 1980s in Thailand, Pa Kao was still waiting for Vang Pao to return to Thailand to help with the Chao Fa resistance in the early 1980s even after Vang Pao had founded the ULNLF with other exiled Lao and Hmong leaders. Pa Kao, they said, created the military base in Thailand for Vang Pao.[465] Divided yet not antagonistic, Pa Kao and Vang Pao separately contacted remnants of the resistance fighters in the late 1970s in the forests of Phou Bia in Laos. Vang Pao kept contact and funded the remnants of the guerrilla soldiers under Sai Soua Yang's leadership while Pa Kao kept contact and funded the remnants of the Chao Fa messianic fighters under Zong Zoua Her's command. Both Vang Pao and Pa Kao received their supports, both moral and financial, from the Hmong refugees in Thailand and especially from those in the United States.[466] With the formation of the ELOL and the ULNLF, Pa Kao and Vang Pao expanded the local resistance in Laos into a transnational resistance—a resistance carried out from afar and across national borders. In this sense, Hmong leaders and members in the ULNLF and the ELOL were not fighting a new war against the Communist forces in Laos and Vietnam. Rather, they were simply re-engaging the same secret war that they had fought prior to their exodus and resettlement abroad (i.e., during the CIA secret war in the 1960s and the second secret war in the 1970s). The difference was only that, this time, they were fighting the Communists without their CIA advisors and the secret war in Laos not just from Laos' border but also from exile.

Long-Distance Nationalism

The transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora did not fall into the same category as the political struggle of the Tamil diaspora in Norway for a liberated Eelam, the political interconnection between the Haitian overseas settlement in the United States and the Haitian homeland, or the movement of the British Serbs to promote Serbian

[465] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; Sue Her, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[466] Ruth Hammonds, "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 25-31 October 1989; Shoua Yang, "Social and Political Capital," 183-203; Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 160; Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 454.

nationalism in Yugoslavia.[467] Nevertheless, the Hmong and Lao leaders and members in ELOL and ULNLF could also be said to have engaged in a certain strand of transnational politics because of their political interconnection to their land of origin (Laos). That strand is what Benedict Anderson has coined "long-distance nationalism."[468] Long-distance nationalism, as Zlasko Skrbiš has suggested, is still "nationalism but one that is profoundly adapted to the conditions of a modern global system…. [It] is that type of nationalism which crosses neighboring states and/or continents."[469] Nationalism, to borrow Van Evera's definition, refers to "a political movement having two characteristics: (1) individual members give their primary loyalty to their own ethnic or national community; this loyalty supersedes their loyalty to other groups, e.g., those based on common kinship or political ideology; (2) these ethnic or national communities desire their own independent state."[470] As such, long-distance nationalism is a *political movement* having these two characteristics but is organized across states rather than within a state.[471] In long-distance nationalism, members of an ethnic or national

---

[467] Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *George Woke Up Laughing: Long-distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Øivind Fuglerud, *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism*, (London: Pluto Press, 1999); Birgit Bock-Luna, *The Past in Exile: Serbian Long-Distance Nationalism and Identity in the Wake of the Third Balkan War*, (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2007); Sam Pryke, "British Serbs and Long Distance Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2003): 152-172.

[468] Benedict Anderson, "Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics," The Werthem Lecture, Center for Asian Studies Amsterdam (CASA), University of Amsterdam, 1992; Benedict Anderson, *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*, (London: Verso, 1998).

[469] Zlatko Skrbiš, *Long-distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 6.

[470] Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, eds., Michael Brown, Owen R. Coté, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 27.

[471] Nina Glick Schiller defines long-distance nationalism as "a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various geographical locations to a specific territory that they see as their ancestral home." This definition, I agree with Birgit Bock-Luna, is too vague, leading Nina Glick Schiller and George Eugene Fouron to state in another study that "almost everyone spoke to us as nationalists, as persons who identified and loved Haiti." Long-distance nationalists, that is, should remain differentiated from transmigrants and diaspora. While transmigrants live their lives across borders, their transborder connections are not necessarily political. Likewise, as Glick Schiller acknowledges, while "people who see themselves with as members of a diaspora envision a common history with a past shared by those who with a common identity, this kind of belong often exists in the realm of imagination. When people act on these identities, they do not necessarily organize their relationship to a homeland state or efforts to establish a state. They may instead organize common cultural or social projects that promote the interest of the members of the diasporic population wherever they have settled." Thus, long-distance nationalism should, as Birgit Bock-Luna suggests, be understood as "a political principle with underlying *political and historical claims*, not just a marker of national identity." For Glick Schiller's definition, see Nina Glick

community living outside of a specific territory they designate as their ancestral home or their homeland are involved in the same nation-building project that their co-ethnics in the homeland are. In long-distance nationalism, their politics is still, as John Breuilly points out, principally an oppositional politics—politics that presents a serious challenge to the state.[472] Nevertheless, in long-distance nationalism, the state that the nationalist movement opposes is not the country of settlement or hostland; it is the country of origin or the homeland. In long-distance nationalism, the national movement does not orient its politics toward the state where the long-distance nationalists have resettled but to the country of origin.[473]

To start, both the ELOL and the ULNLF had as their targets the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos). Both described the Hmong and the Lao in the homeland as victims of North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao domination and persecutions. In documents compiled and submitted to U.S. Congress in 1994, Pa Kao Her, President of ELOL, for example, recalled:

> On May 9, 1975, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese publicly announced their long-standing genocidal policy against the hill tribes (specially, the Hmong). On May 29, 1975, a crowd of 40,000 Hmong marched peacefully from Bansone to Vientiane to demand protection from Prince Souvanaphouma, President of the Coalition government of Laos. As we approached Hin Beup Bridge, the Pathet Lao and Vietnamese troops opened fire on us. There were more than 1,000 innocent people killed and many others injured. After the massacre, the Prince, interviewed by French diplomats in Vientiane, said "Peace will come when the Hmong are gone." After the incident at Hin Beup Bridge, the Pathet Lao government sent troops to fight against the Highlanders, burned villages,

---

Schiller, "Long-distance Nationalism," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas,* eds. Melvin Ember, Carol Ember, and Ian Skoggard, vol. 1, (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004), 570-571. For Glick Schiller and Fouron's comments on Haitian long-distance nationalists, see Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *George Woke Up Laughing,* 15. For critique of Glick Schiller and Fouron's understanding of long-distance nationalism, see Birgit Bock-Luna, *The Past in Exile: Serbian Long-Distance Nationalism and Identity in the Wake of the Third Balkan War,* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2007), 21-22.

[472] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993), 7-9.

[473] Pryke makes a similar observation and defines long-distance nationalism as "the ideology of a migrant group that does not politically orientate itself to the state in which it is located, but to the country of its origin." For his definition, see Sam Pryke, "British Serbs and Long Distance Nationalism," 155.

> destroyed crops, killed livestock, and raped women. Women were killed after they had been raped and tortured. We have seen many tragic cases where bodies (mostly of men) were tied to the trees. Children had their heads cut off or pierced by sharp sticks. Human rights abuses such as these occurred constantly in the areas controlled by the Pathet Lao. We Highlanders had no other choice but to organize self-defense.[474]

Similarly, General Vang Pao, the Hmong leader in ULNLF, said in a speech he delivered at the Heritage Foundation in 1987:

> Only a few months after the signing of the peace treaty, the Hanoi regime created a new holocaust in Laos by escalating brutalities against the Laotian people. The Hanoi regime rounded up and separated Laotian men from women, husbands from wives, old from young and sent them to different reeducation camps. Laotian women were taken away from their loved ones for the purpose of human reproduction with North Vietnamese men so that the new generation in Laos will be purely Vietnamese. Laotian men were taken away and forced to do heavy and dangerous manual labor. In addition, the Laotian people were poisoned slowly by toxic injections made to look like normal diseases. The Hanoi regime aggressors virtually have emptied Laos of her people through these inhuman terrorist tactics…. In 1976, the Hanoi regime launched a campaign to eliminate the Hmong because they had been strong supporters of the United States during the Vietnam War.[475]

They saw North Vietnam as an imperial power, the presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos as Vietnam's occupation of Laos, and the Pathet Lao as a puppet government of Vietnam. As Pa Kao Her explained, "The Pathet Lao, a puppet government of Vietnam, violated the Vientiane Peace Treaty. They seized the Lao government and took control of the country. The Pathet Lao government then signed an agreement with the Vietnamese government to keep the 65,000 Vietnamese troops inside Laos for 25

---

[474] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 3-4.
[475] Vang Pao, *Against All Odds: The Laotian Freedom Fighters*, (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1987).

years."[476] The presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos, Neo Hom leaders similarly declared, was the "North Vietnamese subtle occupation of Laos." It was a "part of Hanoi's demographic plan to exterminate the Laotian race forever through repopulating Laos with a new generation of mixed Lao-Vietnamese parentage: Laotian women are forced to marry North Vietnamese soldiers, technicians and settlers. In 25 years time, the generation will speak only the Vietnamese language; the Laotian race, as we know it, will no longer exist." For the ULNLF, the presence of "60,000 North Vietnamese occupation forces" in Laos and the "brutal invasion of Kampuchea [in 1979]" were "aimed at the creation of an Indochinese Federation under Hanoi leadership."[477]

As such, both the ELOL and the ULNLF directed their political energies toward Laos, organized their projects to expel the North Vietnamese from Laos, and promoted radical regime change in the homeland. In documents that Soua Her compiled and presented to U.S. Congress in 1994, Pa Kao Her, for example, outlined that the goals of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos (a cognate of the ELOL) were, among other things, (1) to restrict Laos from serving as military or political base for the aggression of any nation or groups against another nation and (2) to amend the Constitution of Laos.[478] In their 1981 manifesto, leaders of the ULNLF outlined the objectives of the ULNLF as (1) to struggle by all possible means against the Vietnamese invaders and force them to withdraw their occupation troops from the country, (2) to mobilize all Laotian people, outside as well as inside the country, to overthrow the puppet regime imposed on the Lao people by Socialist Vietnam, (3) to fight the expansionist policy of Socialist Vietnam and its territorial ambitions in Laos, and (4) to mobilize public opinion in favor of a democratic, neutral and peaceful Laos protected by solid international guarantees.[479]

Once the Vietnamese were expelled from Laos and the Pathet Lao government toppled (i.e, after the liberation), Neo Hom leaders envisioned installing a "constitutional monarchy" in Laos. They sought to reinstate the Lao monarchy that the Pathet Lao Communists abolished after they took power in 1975 and sent the Lao king, queen, and

---

[476] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 9.
[477] United Lao National Liberation Front, "Policies on Internal Affairs and International Relations," (no date), in William Colby Papers, Vietnam War Archive, Texas Tech University.
[478] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 5-6.
[479] ULNLF, "Manifesto of the United Lao National Liberation Front," 7 September 1981.

crown prince to their deaths in the Lao prison camps. After the liberation, the son of the late Lao king, Prince Suriyavong Vongsavang, exiled in France, would resume his reign as the King of Laos, and Prince Phayaluang Outhong Souvanavong would become Laos' prime minister. The king would be the figurehead of the state, but he would have no executive power. That power would rest in the hands of the prime minister, the head of the government. After the liberation, both General Vang Pao and Lao General Tonglith would hold top positions in the Defense Ministry and be responsible for the Lao Liberation Army (LLA). The newly promoted General Cher Pao Moua, Vang Pao's father-in-law, would serve as vice prime minister along with General Sing Manothip, General Thonglit, and Colonel Bounliang Khounsourivong. The newly promoted General Song Lue Xiong would become the military leader of Region 1.[480]

In contrast, after the liberation, the ELOL envisioned at minimum "a free and democratic nation" in Laos. By "a free and democratic nation," the ELOL meant "a democratic, multi-party system" in which "power will be shared by the legislative, the executive, and the judicial branches" of government—a government modeled after the United States government and adopted from the U.S. Constitution.[481] Comparing the Chao Fa vision of their desired form of government to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, a Chao Fa advocate explained:

> Unlike the Communist government of the LPDR that adheres to the dictatorship of the LPRP [Lao People's Revolutionary Party], Chao Fa is committed to a multiparty system. Unlike the LPDR, in which the LPRP dictates power, Chao Fa believes in a political structure that shares power between the executive, the legislative, and the judicial branches. Unlike the LPDR that practices prejudice against minorities in education, employment, land acquisition, and so forth, Chao Fa wants to create a just society based on equality and opportunity. Finally,

---

[480] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 499; Robert Kamiol, "Laotian Resistance Emerges from Mist," *International Defense Review* 3, (1990): 270; Soua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 182; and Lao National Liberation Army, "Proclamation," (1989), Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[481] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 4; Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organization," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 167-168.

> unlike the LPDR that has restricted freedom of religion, of expression, and of association, Chao Fa is committed to establish a democracy where freedom of religious, of expression, and of association will be constitutionally guaranteed.[482]

By "a democratic and free nation," the ELOL did not envision a melting pot society as emphasized in the U.S. motto: "E pluribus unum"—"Out of Many, One." Instead, the ELOL envisioned a multinational state in which the "cultural and religious rights of all ethnic groups" would be upheld and appreciated. In that society, for instance, ethnic Hmong would remain as Hmong, ethnic Khmu would remain as Khmu, ethnic Yao/Mien would remain Yao/Mien, ethnic Lao would remain as Lao, and so on. As followers of Yang Shong Lue, Pa Kao and his officers in ELOL opposed Hmong assimilation into Lao society and culture. They advocated keeping Hmong religion, culture, and language separate from Lao religion, language and culture. Unlike Hmong officers in the ULNLF, Pa Kao and his officers in ELOL rejected the pan-ethnic identity, Laotian, and insisted on maintaining a separate Hmong identity. To accept "Laotian" as their identity would be to deprive them of their ethnic cultural autonomy.[483]

Beyond a collapse of the Communist regime and a replacement of it with a multinational, multiparty Lao state, the ELOL sought Hmong political autonomy in northern Laos. They wanted self-government within a liberated and democratic Lao state, that is, a nation within a nation. As a Chao Fa advocate explained to Hmong political scientist Soua Yang in 2006:

> We [Chao Fa] believe that the best form of government is democracy, but this form of government is rejected by the LPDR. Our policy is to topple the Lao Communist government and to institute a separate autonomous democracy in northern Laos, where we had had our own political autonomy recognized by the French, the RLG [Royal Lao Government], and the USA. Today, a part of northern Laos, the Saysomboun special zone, is still controlled by our resistance forces.[484]

---

[482] Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital," 168.
[483] Pa Kao Her, "Goals and Policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, (File #: X21.1999.43.27), 4-6; Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January and 1 August 2009.
[484] Soua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital," 168.

Like the Chao Fa freedom fighters in the forest of Phou Bia in the 1970s, however, the highest goal of the ELOL was to establish an independent Hmong state, separate and apart from the Lao state. This, according to Yang Thao, the chief military strategist and former secretary general of the ELOL, had always been the vision and the goal of the Chao Fa fighters. "From the beginning," he explained, "we had always wanted to maintain our separation from the Lao. We wanted to keep our language, our culture, and our identity. We felt that we could not do this living in a Lao-dominated state. We had to have our own government and state. It is the only way to keep our language, culture, identity alive. It is the only way to be Hmong."[485] Sue Her, a former Chao Fa fighter in Phou Bia and the military training camp in Thailand, similarly added:

> For us, we cared less whether Laos was democratic or communist. The white Lao and Red Lao are still Lao. What we wanted the most was for the Lao to give us our political autonomy, so that the Hmong can practice their own religion and culture, study their own language and writing. The Lao forbade the Hmong from doing this. Not just the Red Lao, the white Lao were also persecuting the Hmong. Even during the time of Vang Pao in Long Cheng in the early 1970s, white Lao already ordered Vang Pao to bomb the Chao Fa temple. After the Red Lao took over, they continued the suppression. So what Pa Kao did was to fight for justice, so that the Hmong could gain their autonomy and that they could practice their own culture and religion—all that the Lao had prohibited from practicing.[486]

The Chao Fa, in other words, had insisted on keeping the Hmong separate from the Lao from the outset because, for them, the Hmong could never enjoy true freedom and democracy under a Lao-dominated society. The Hmong, they said, were suppressed and persecuted in Lao society, not just because of their ideology but also and largely because of their race or ethnicity. Shong Lue, the Hmong Chao Fa prophet, for example, was despised by both the Pathet Lao Government and the Royal Lao Government for preaching Hmong unity and the preservation of the Hmong culture, language and identity.

In 1992, when John Kreiger interviewed Pa Kao Her for an article in the *U.S. News & World Report*, Pa Kao explained that there were only three solutions to the

[485] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.
[486] Sue Her, interview with author, St. Paul, Minnesota, 10 November 2008.

fighting in Laos. "The first," he said, "was to create an autonomous region in Laos, free from Pathet Lao oppression. The second and most drastic way would be to fight until there are two separate countries, one Lao and Communist, the other Hmong and free." The third was "a complete collapse of the Pathet Lao now that the Soviet supported has ended."[487] For Pa Kao and the Chao Fa fighters, peaceful coexistence with the communist regime was impossible. They wanted at the very least a truly multiparty and multiethnic democratic society, in which they were free to practice their language, culture and religion without fear of imprisonment and persecution. If not, they wanted an autonomous region in Laos, that is, a nation with a nation. Ultimately, however, they wanted a Hmong and free country, separate from the Lao nation-state.

The ELOL and the ULNL had different visions for Laos after the liberation, and they had different political and military strategists to achieve that liberation. Nevertheless, they were not antagonistic to each other. Both wanted to liberate Laos from North Vietnamese imperial control, and both were formed in part as responses to what they perceived was the "genocide" of the Hmong people in the jungle of Laos. The ELOL and the ULNLF, together, represented two separate movements to challenge the power and legitimacy of the Lao state and government from exile. Both sought to overthrow the communist regime in the homeland and form their own form of nation-state in Laos from outside of the homeland.

One way to think about the interaction between the ULNLF and the ELOL was to see them as two separate streams of the same river of the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora. The ELOL or the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos represented the *separatist* long-distance nationalist stream. Meanwhile, the ULNLF the *reformed/restorative* represented the long-distance nationalist stream of Hmong transnational politics. Here I suggest the term *separatist* long-distance nationalist for the people in the ELOL or the Democratic Chao Part of Laos because they sought separatism in the homeland. By separatism, I mean either *self-determination* or *secession*. Self-determination is self-government within the Lao state or a greater measure of political, economic, and cultural autonomy and freedom within the state, not apart from it. This

[487] John Kreiger, "Forgotten U.S. Allies Still Waging the Vietnam War," *U.S. News & World Report*, 14 September 1992, 49.

understanding of self-determination is consistent with its use in international law and with the aim of most indigenous nations who claim the right to self-determination. As Michael Freeman explains, "The indigenous demand for political self-determination is not usually a demand for an independent state, but for self-government within the state in which they live."[488] In contrast, secession is self-government apart from the homeland state. In this case, it is the separation of the Hmong from the Lao state to form a new government and a sovereign and independent state with its own national geopolitical space or boundary. This understanding of separatism is also consistent with the way that it appears in existing literatures. In diaspora studies, for example, separatism refers to the political stance or strategy that the diaspora employs to achieve self-determination or secessionism in the diaspora's former homeland and facilitate the return of all or most segments of its ethno-national diaspora.[489]

In contrast, I suggest the term *restorative* or *reformed* long-distance nationalists for the people in the ULNLF because they advocated regime change or the reconfiguration of the homeland government into a new and different government in the homeland state.[490] The term "restorative" implies that the emphasis of the long-distance nationalists is on the restoration of a lost "glorious" past, a lost homeland, or a lost government or state. Central in the political project of the ULNLF, as I have illustrated, was the reinstallation of the deposed Royal Lao Government in Laos after the liberation—a vision that sought to restore respect, dignity and justice to all "Laotians," inside and outside of Laos, by restoring the glory of the Lao monarch to the country. The term "restorative" also implies the restoration of lost power, status, pride, manhood, and humanity because of their defeat in the war, displacement from the homeland, alienation

---

[488] Michael Freeman, *Human Rights*, (Madlen, MA: Polity Press, 2002), 123.
[489] Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170-173.
[490] I borrow this term from Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*. In this work, Boym contends that there are two forms of nostalgia: "restorative nostalgia" and "reflective nostalgia." Restorative nostalgia, Boym writes, "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps" while reflective nostalgia "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance." The former "manifests itself in total reconstruction of monuments of the past" while the latter "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time." It is restorative nostalgia, Boym says, that "characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories." From Boym's concept of restorative nostalgia, I derive the term *restorative* long-distance nationalists. See Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

and statelessness abroad. Unlike the *separatist* long-distance nationalists, the quarrel that *restorative* or *reformed* long-distance nationalists had with the homeland Lao state and government was not with the Lao ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or territory; it was with the individuals and the political party that controlled it. The goal of restorative or reformed long-distance nationalists was not to break away from the present state; it was, to borrow John Breuilly's words, "to reform it in a nationalist direction."[491] Specifically, the goal of the ULNLF was to reform the Lao communist state into a Lao constitutional monarchy.

In characterizing the ULNLF and the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos (the name the ELOL was given after 1990), Soua Yang, in his 2006 study, wrote that people in the ULNLF were "integrationists" and those in the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos were "nationalists."[492] I concur with Yang that the ULNLF wanted to reintegrate the Hmong in the diaspora into a Lao society, and that the ELOL or the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos sought to keep the Hmong nation separate from Lao society. They wanted ethnic autonomy, if not complete secession from the Lao state itself. Nevertheless, I suggest that "integrationist" and "nationalist" are not the right terms to characterize the people and movements of the ULNLF and the ELOL or the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos. Yang, it seems, had used these terms as if the ULNLF and the ELOL or the Democratic Chao Party of Laos were local organizations with domestic ends and domestic political agenda. As organizations headquartered in Thailand and the United States, the ELOL and the ULNLF were more appropriately understood as transnational political or *long-distance nationalist* organizations. The actors in these organizations were not "nationalists" or "integrationists," per se; they were *long-distance nationalists*. They were people who lived outside of the homeland of Laos but continued to see themselves as part of Laos and identify Laos as their homeland. In fact, all of them, including the people inside Laos, were long-distance nationalists. Not only did they continue to see themselves as part of Laos or think of Laos as their homeland, they also engaged in *transborder* or *transnational* political actions or projects oriented specifically to establish a new state in the territory they designated as their ancestral home.

---

[491] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 9. Also see Breuilly's discussion of reform nationalism on pages 230-254 and 288-318.
[492] Soua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital," 151-207.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the origin of Hmong transnational politics and suggest that Hmong transnational politics was a legacy of the United States military intervention in the war in Southeast Asia in the 1960s. While it took shape in Thailand and the United States in the early 1980s, Hmong transnational politics had its roots in the second secret war in Laos, a by-product or prolongation of the U.S. Secret War in the 1960s during which the United States clandestinely recruited, trained and armed Hmong guerrillas to fight against communist forces in Laos. Without the CIA recruitment and arming of the Hmong to fight against communist forces in Laos, there would not be the U.S. Secret War in the 1960s. Had the Hmong not fought on the U.S. side in the secret war, they would not be targeted for extermination after the Communists came to power. Without the Communist campaign to eliminate Hmong dissents in the jungle, there would not be what I have called in this chapter the "second secret war," as well as the exodus of more than 150,000 Hmong into exile after 1975. Ultimately, had the Hmong not forced to leave their homeland and were there not another secret war in Laos in the 1970s and thereafter, there would be no need for the formation of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos and the United Lao National Liberation Front. In this sense, Hmong transnational politics was yet another legacy of the United States military intervention in the secret war in Laos—a legacy that has occupied a central role in the lives of the Hmong diaspora to the present day and expended millions of dollars and thousands of human lives in the process.

Today, the precise figure of the people who continued to eke out a living in the Lao jungle and of those killed by Pathet Lao soldiers since the Communist regime came to power in 1975 remains unknown. What is clear, however, is that the Communist Pathet Lao has not stopped its campaign to "pacify" the Hmong "rebels" in the jungle even after it had seriously decimated them with the help of North Vietnamese troops and "yellow rain" in the late 1970s. In March 2007, Amnesty International reported that "while the Hmong groups living in the jungle originated as an armed opposition to the LPDR government which came to power in 1975, the remnants over thirty years later are not in a position to carry out anything more sporadic acts of violent opposition to the

government… The military, however, continues to pursue and attack those who formerly belonged to the rebels and their descendants, compelling them to keep on the move, and denying them the opportunity to exercise their human rights."[493] The formation of the ELOL and the ULNLF, and thereby Hmong transnational politics was, thus, in part a legacy of the United States "secret army" of the 1960s and the "second secret war" of the mid to late 1970s, and in part an effort by exiled Lao but particularly Hmong political and military leaders and community members in Thailand and the United States to redress the ongoing human rights abuses and the persecution of their co-ethnics in the Lao jungle. Hmong transnational politics was the continued struggle of the Hmong in the diaspora against the communist forces in Laos, only this time the struggle was waged not only from inside the Lao border. It was also waged from exile. At the same time, unfortunately, it was waged largely without the presence and aid of U.S. military advisors with them inside Laos. The continued fighting in Laos, nevertheless, provided the Hmong a window of opportunity to continue building and reinforcing their links from the diaspora to the homeland, legitimize their resistance against the Lao PDR government, and keep Hmong transnational politics alive.

[493] Amnesty International, *Lao People's Democratic Republic: Hiding in the Jungle: Hmong Under Threat,* 23 March 2007, 7.

CHAPTER 3

"For Me, I'd Prefer to Go Back": Displacements, Nostalgia, and the Search for Home and Community

In a study on the structure and maintenance of Hmong organizations, including the United Lao National Liberation Front (a.k.a. Neo Hom) and the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos (also known as the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos), Shoua Yang documented that Hmong General Vang Pao formed Neo Hom with other exiled Lao leaders with the explicit intent to compete for political and military influence among the Hmong in exile. Yang wrote, "In 1978, Chao Fa was recognized by Thai officials; in 1979, by Chinese officials; and in the 1980s, by U.S. officials. Fearful that Chao Fa, with the help of this international recognition, might succeed in overthrowing the Communist government of the LPDR, exiled Lao leaders and Vang Pao formed the United Lao National Liberation Front or Neo Hom in 1981 to counteract Chao Fa."[494] Keith Quincy similarly observed, "News of the Chao Fa rebellion, passed to him by his agents in Thai refugee camps, convinced Vang Pao that he had to jump on the bandwagon or lose face with the Hmong. To give the impression that he was still in the thick of things, he joined the Free Lao National Liberation Movement, a front organization created by Sisouk Na Champassak, a stalwart of the old Rightist regime and former member of Phoumi's CDNI. Along with Kong Le, Vang Pao wound up on the front's executive committee."[495] In 1981, after the Free Lao National Liberation Movement failed to organize any guerrilla soldier and undertake any military action against the communist Lao PDR government, Vang Pao founded the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) with other Lao politicians in exile. I do not discount their observations, but I suggest that the exclusive focus on "countervailing group formation," a perspective Yang borrowed from David Truman, falls short of capturing the full range of motivations, sentiments, and factors

[494] Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organization," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 179.
[495] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong and America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000), 448-449.

involved in the creation of the ELOL and the ULNLF.[496] By focusing on countervailing group formation alone, Yang treats the ULNLF and the ELOL as bounded entities, conceals the histories of relations among cultures, states, and immigration policies that influenced the development of the organizations, and renders invisible the resilience and agency of the Hmong people.

In this chapter, I continue to analyze why these organizations were developed and what Hmong transnational politics was about. In the previous chapter, I have suggested that the Pathet Lao communist revolutions, particularly its campaigns to resettle tribal minorities from the highland to the lowland, engage the people in agricultural collectivization, promote the eradication of tribal "superstitious" religions, and haul people into prison camps for "reeducation" fueled the rise of the Hmong resistance in Laos in the 1970s, and that the continued persecution of the Hmong in the jungle by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces was instrumental in the formation of ELOL and the ULNLF in the early 1980s. These organizations were developed in part to mobilize support from the Lao and Hmong communities in the diaspora for the resistance movements inside Laos. Here, I contend that the formation of the ELOL and the ULNLF and, thus, Hmong transnational politics, was also about the guilt that Hmong refugees had about leaving their co-ethnics behind in the jungles of Laos, the traumas of refugee life, and the nativism and displacements they encountered in America. The premise here is that the military, political and economic upheavals back in the homeland were not the sole factors to contribute to the rise of Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora. Undoubtedly, leaders of the organizations were concerned about the persecution and the suffering of the Hmong in the jungle of Laos, but they were not wholly altruistic or humanitarian. Their political efforts were also motivated by self-interests and influenced by the Hmong experience as refugees in Thailand and the United States. The alienating experiences in Thailand and the United States aggravated the Hmong nostalgia and their suffering of displacements which, in turn, fueled the fire for Hmong transnational politics in the early 1980s.

---

[496] David B. Truman, *The Government Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

In what follows, I suggest that Hmong transnational politics was about much more than organizational rivalry for community resources, both moral and financial, as Yang has suggested. At the heart of Hmong transnational politics, I argue, was a search for home, a safe place and a place of belonging, and a struggle to rebuild broken lives and shattered communities both in exile and back in the homeland—a search and a struggle facilitated by their displacements and alienation in Thailand and the United States. Hmong transnational politics expressed the spatial, cultural, intellectual, and psychological displacements of a people surrounded by more powerful and dominant nations who possess their own states and a people whose identity, community, and home were devastated by wars and the displacement from home. It represented efforts by a "homeless" people to rebuild their home and community from exile and by a profoundly nostalgic people because of their "homelessness" or alienation abroad to find their way back home again. It displayed the resilience of a people to recover from the traumas of war and displacement and to restore their lost status and human dignity because of their defeat in the war. Ultimately, Hmong transnational politics was about rebuilding community and resurrecting identity in places where the Hmong identity and community were at risk of loss and erosion, and it was about reconstituting home, that which was shattered by the war and their forced displacement from the homeland, both in exile and back home. Only when placed in this context can we begin to understand why their politics was so deeply entrenched in not only romanticized visions of the homeland but also a discourse on historical injustice, pain and suffering, and the righteousness of their struggles.

Wars and Displacements in Laos

To see how Hmong transnational politics was about rebuilding broken lives and shattered communities and about a search for home, it is necessary to understand how the secret wars displaced them and disrupted their lives in Laos, Thailand, and the United States and how their displacements fueled their nostalgia in exile. When we understand how their lives were broken and their communities shattered, we can begin to see what broken lives and communities needed to be reconstituted and how Hmong transnational

politics was about reconstructing those broken lives, identities and communities. And when we understand how their longing for home arose in exile, we can begin to see how Hmong transnational politics was also about their struggle for a place to call home, a place where they feel safe and a place to which they feel they belong.

Long before Hmong became refugees in Thailand, the U.S. Secret War had internally displaced the Hmong in Laos and caused major disruptions to their lives. During the war, the intense U.S. bombing in northern Laos displaced thousands of Hmong from their homes and villages. In fact, by September 1969, the Plain of Jars, located in the center of Xieng Khoung province, home to 40,000 Hmong in the late 1950s, had been "emptied" of its residents. Many survived of this "war of the airplane" because they had left their villages in the Plain of Jars and taken shelter in refugee camps far from their ancestral homes.[497] A 1970 Congressional report confirmed that U.S. bombing in Xieng Khoung "took a heavy toll among civilians" and that the United States was keeping its "large-scale air war over Laos" and its destruction a secret throughout its bombing campaign.[498] A thirteen-year-old child recalled the effect of U.S. bombing on traditional rice farming and the people in his village:

> My village stood on the edge of the road from Xieng Khoung to the Plain of Jars. There were rice fields next to road. At first, the airplanes bombed the road, but not my village. At that time my life was filled with great happiness, for the mountains and forests were beautiful: land, water, and climate were suitable for us. And there were many homes in our little village. But that did not last long, because the airplanes came bombing my rice-field until the bomb craters made farming impossible. And the village was hit and burned. And some relatives working in the fields came running out to the road to return to the village but the airplanes saw and shot them—killing these farmers in a most heart-rending manner. We heard their screams, but could not go to help them. When the airplanes left, we went out to help them, but they were already dead.[499]

---

[497] Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life Under An Air War,* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 3-4. The statistic on the Hmong in Plain of Jars in Xieng Khoung in the late 1950s is found on page 8.
[498] U.S. Congress, Senate, *A Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Subcommittee on the Judiciary,* 28 September 1970, 19.
[499] Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars,* 45.

Because of the bombings, the Hmong had to abandon their slash-and-burn agriculture in the mountains and take shelter elsewhere. Yang Pao Moua, a soldier for General Vang Pao and the CIA from 1960 to 1975, recalled: "Before the war started, our life was good. We could find food for ourselves, and we had our own place to live with our people. There was a home to live in and everything. When we became soldiers, all our homes and everything got burnt. Then, we would run to go sleep somewhere else. We would always be running every year or every month to a new place because there would be no place to stay. We stayed in every mountain and hill."[500] Similarly, Ku Thao recalled, "During the war, we were very poor and scared. We moved place to place and never had time to watch our corn and rice fields grow. Right when it started to grow, we would have to move or run away to a different place already."[501]

By the time the United States stopped bombing Laos in 1973, the historical homeland of the Hmong in northern Laos around the Plain of Jars in Phonsavan, Xieng Khoung Province, had been the principal target of U.S. bombing for more than a decade. Historian Alfred McCoy describes U.S. bombing in Laos as follow:

> Between 1965 and 1971, 1,600,000 tons of bombs—10 times the 160,000 tons dropped on Japan throughout WWII—were dropped on Laos. By the time the bombing stopped in February 1973, the U.S. Air Force had dropped nearly 2.1 million tons of bombs on Laos—equal to the total Allied tonnage of 2.1 million tons of bombs dropped on both Germany and Japan in World War II. But what defies all imagination is the 500,000 tons, nearly a third of the U.S. Air Force total bombing, concentrated within a narrow, hundred-mile corridor in northern Laos from North Vietnam's border to the Plain of Jars. This region, with poor highland farms and no infrastructure, received over three times the total tonnage dropped on industrial Japan, becoming the most intensely bombarded on the face of the planet.[502]

U.S. bombings left no village or town in Xieng Khoung untouched. By 1973, most of the 120,000 residents in Xieng Khoung had left their homes and taken refuge in the refugee

---

[500] Anne Jagodzinksi and James Kegel, eds., *The Hmong and their Stories*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001), 71.
[501] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul,: MN Historical Society Press, 2010), 122.
[502] Anne Jaqodzinski and James Kegel, eds., *The Hmong and Their Stories*, 28.

camps that General Vang Pao and USAID had set up in Laos.[503] Describing what it was like to live in the refugee camp, a Hmong woman wrote:

> There is much to regret; such as our house, villages, and many other belongings, which have all been lost in the war. To come to this region is not like being in our village. Although our village is in the countryside, although it is small, we are accustomed to living there. It is not like here, where everything is already owned by others. We refugees who have come here are poor, and although their government has given us as much help as it can, we still feel a lack. Those of us who are refugees here, we all think this way now: we pray that the war will end, that our parents and relatives and brothers and sisters who have been separated from us may all meet again—that we may again farm in happiness and live as we wish. That is all we want.[504]

Unable to grow their own food, many Hmong internally displaced persons had to depend on American airdrops of food and other necessities for their survival.[505] Still, U.S. aid was conditional. As Chai Her recalled, "Before the war, life was good. There wasn't a lot of hardship… [During the war,] if you didn't have a son or a husband in the military, it was very hard for you. Only those with registered names were allowed any aid from the Americans… [They] did drop rice to the village. We lived like that for about six or seven years."[506] This dependency was corrosive to the Hmong people's identity, community, and autonomy. A free, proud, independent, and self-sufficient people, they were reduced to displaced persons susceptible to malnutrition, starvation, disease, abuse and violence.

After the Communists took over Laos in 1975, the Hmong continued to suffer major disruptions in their lives. To escape persecution and imprisonment, thousands fled

---

[503] Gary Y. Lee, "Minority Policies and the Hmong," 202; Fred Branfman, "Presidential War in Laos," in *Laos: War and Revolution*, 251; UNHCR, *The State of the World Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 97; and W.C. Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and International Response*, (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1998), 13.
[504] Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars*, 43-44.
[505] George C. Scott, "Migrants Without Mountains: The Politics of Socio-cultural Adjustment among the Lao Hmong Refugees in San Diego," (Ph.D dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1986), 119-22; Robert Cooper, "The Hmong of Laos: Economic Factors in Refugee Exodus and Return," in Glenn L. Hendircks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, eds., The Hmong in Transition, (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1986), 23.
[506] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 122.

to Phou Bia Mountain in the Lao jungle. Unable to return to their village, they had to survive on whatever edible roots they could forage in the jungle. They could not continue their practice of slash-and-burn agriculture in the forests, lest the smoke from the fire would give away their location to the enemy. Recalling the hardship of living in the jungle as Chao Fa (in the general sense of the term) in the mid-1970s, Goua Lee, whose mother died during the war and who fled to the jungle with her two brothers and father, recalled:

> As long as I could remember, we were always running from the Vietnamese. After the war was lost and General Vang Pao went into exile, we had no place to go so we became Chao Fa. We could not farm when we became Chao Fa. The Vietnamese would burn our farms down. We had no food to eat so we ate anything that could be eaten. We ate many types of roots. Some were called "pig potatoes." All these roots were very bitter and we only ate them to survive. For most of the roots, we would take the skin off first, then boil them down and then tried to eat them. We also ate the branches of certain types of tropical trees that grew along rivers and streams. Some trees we had to cut down and eat the soft tissues inside. For these inner tree tissues, we sun-dried it first and then pounded it and mixed it with water. You took the liquid formed by the mixing and baked it till it became mushy starch. If we had rice with us, we would not have eaten these types of things.[507]

Mee Vue, a sixty-five-year-old woman also recalled the harsh life of eating roots to survive in the jungle as Chao Fa:

> When we were Chao Fa, hiding in the jungle—I cannot think of any other way we could have been poorer than that. Ever since I was born into this world, my life has never been as bad as being a Chao Fa. There was no food to eat, especially for the little children. Mostly we ate *txoob*—like palm trees but much bigger; you chop the tree down and scoop out the part in the center that you can eat. In the beginning we had a *vab* to separate what we could eat out of the *txoob* because there are two layers. You have to separate out the hard layer of *txoob* and eat the

[507] Hmong Oral History Project, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. [http://homepages.csp.edu/hillmer/Hmong_OHP.html]

> soft part. But later on, when we kept running and hiding, our *vab* got old and all torn apart, so we had to use our hands to separate the two layers and it was very hard. Many of the children could not eat it. Many of them, because they could not eat anything, there was no bowel movement at all for them. A lot of them got very sick and didn't make it.[508]

Fear, starvation, sickness and death filled their lives in the forests of Phou Bia. A woman who eventually sought refuge in Thailand after living in Phou Bia added:

> When Vang Pao evacuated Long Cheng, there were not enough airplanes to transport all of us with him. He told us, 'You know all the birds and squirrels have lived all their lives in the jungle, but they do not die. If you can't live in your village, you can go to live in the jungle…. That's why when the communists started to arrest our men and sent them to re-education camps, we fled to the Phu Bia forest. We hid and hid. We had no salt to eat, no rice to eat. If we built a fire to cook food, the communists would see smoke and attack us. We fled from place to place. When we tried to make some rice fields, the communists came and burned them all. My children started to die of starvation. Eight died. Now I have only six children living.[509]

The Hmong suffered more hardships in Phou Bia Mountain after the Lao PDR signed the 25-year treaty of friendship with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in July 1977. In addition to bringing some 50,000 additional Vietnamese troops to Laos, the Pathet Lao government sprayed the forests and water sources where Hmong were hiding with chemical poisons which, according to Keith Quincy, was "no hoax," making life in the forests that much more difficult and incessantly peripatetic. "Several hundred technicians from the Soviet's Chemical Welfare Division were in the country training LPLA personnel," Quincy writes. "Vientiane maintained four warehouses for chemical and biological agents at Pakse and Seno. Dr. Khamseng Keo Sengsathit, the regime's Director of Public Health, later revealed after his defection to China that his government had indeed used chemical weapons against the Hmong, killing thousands."[510] Vang Seng

---

[508] Lillian Faderman, with Ghia Xiong, *I Begin My Life All Over*, 52-53.
[509] Dia Cha and Jacquelyn Chagnon, *Farmer, War-Wife, Refugee, Repatriate: A Needs Assessment of Women Repatriating to Laos,* (Washington, D.C.: Asia Resource Center, 1993), 27.
[510] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 410.

Vang, a former intelligence officer in Vang Pao's army whose family was captured and infant son maimed by the Pathet Lao in 1975, told journalist and author Jane Hamilton-Merritt in Ban Vinai refugee camp in 1980: "Since early 1980, people in my area are so hungry that they eat leaves exposed to the chemicals—715 have died. I dig in the ground for roots and water. But many are too weak to do this."[511] Pa Chao Lor, a former sergeant of the U.S. secret army in Laos who went into hiding in the jungle in 1977 after the Communists arrested many close relatives in his village, recalled, "We went and lived in that jungle [Ha Na Te] for a year, eating bamboo sprouts and tree buds, roots and tubers. We could not work the fields or raise farm animals. At that time, many people died of starvation. People were buried wherever they died."[512] Unable to find enough edible food, the death toll mounted and the suffering from starvation and illness became intolerable. "Children stopped growing," Quincy writes, "and their skin turned chalky white. Some even shrank, loosing an inch or two in height, and remaining stunted for the rest of their lives. Toward the end, hollow-cheeked infants wailed for days before finally slipping into comas and dying."[513]

When they could no longer hold out in Phou Bia, countless Hmong decided to flee for safety in Thailand. Yet, life in the refugee camps would be, for many people, a life with uncertainty, powerlessness, and futurelessness. As a Hmong woman who spent five years in Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand explained, "When you are in camp this long, you think there is nothing to look forward to, no future. You don't know what will happen to you."[514] To understand the Hmong experience of displacements in Thailand, it is necessary first to understand Thailand's immigration policies in the 1970s and 1980s and its general attitudes and feelings toward the Hmong at the time. These policies and attitudes, I contend, informed the Thai's treatment of Hmong refugees and shaped their lived experiences in the camps in Thailand.

---

[511] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 421.
[512] Wendy Mattison, Laotou Lo and Thomas Scarseth, *Hmong Lives: From Laos to La Crosse*, (La Crosse, WI: The Pump House, 1994), 13.
[513] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 417.
[514] Jo Ann Koltyk, *New Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong Life in Wisconsin*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 25.

Refugee Experiences in Thailand

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, Thailand has acted as a first asylum country, hosted millions of refugees and asylum seekers from virtually every one of its neighboring countries, and accommodated a host of international humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), within its border. Thailand, however, was not a party to any of the UN treaties relating to the status of refugees, including the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol.[515] As a consequence, from the outset, Thailand did not employ the term "refugee" to refer to any of the populations displaced on its soil. Instead, Thailand had always considered the refugees fleeing from "well founded fear of persecution" in their homeland "asylum seekers," "displaced persons," "boat people," "land people," illegal entrants," or illegal aliens" rather than legitimate refugees. As "illegal immigrants," refugees in Thailand were deprived of the rights and protections accorded to that status by international laws.[516] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), too, did not legally classify the people fleeing persecution from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to Thailand as refugees until 1977. Like Thailand, UNHRC officials "suggested that the majority of people fleeing Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, were displaced due to a change of regime and a general fear of the new regime, and that none of them could claim membership of a particular group that was being persecuted."[517]

In 1975, Thailand agreed to host asylum seekers within its borders on the condition that UNHCR and the United States Department of State provided food, education, and medical care to the asylum seekers and that the camps were left under Thai control.[518] Even after a Thai cabinet had decided on June 3, 1975 to house refugees and asylum seekers in camps established and administered by its Ministry of Interior

---

[515] United States Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2009*, http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2316 (accessed 23 November 2009).

[516] Bridget M. Cooney, "The International Policies, Refugee Spatialities, and the Hmong of Southeast Asia," (MA Thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2005), 47; Vitit Muntarbhorn, "Differentiating Refugees from Illegal Immigrants," *The Nation*, 2 April 1987, 4.

[517] Sara E. Davies, *Legitimizing Rejection: International Refugee Law in Southeast Asia*, (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008), 91.

[518] UNHCR, *State of the World Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*,(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/unhcr2000.htm (accessed April 2, 2007).

(MOI) in designated areas, Thailand continued to exhibit a fundamental ambivalence toward refugees and asylum seekers—an ambivalence which had been reflected in much of Thailand's subsequent policies and practices.[519] From 1975 to 1979, Thailand's policy was: "Should any displaced persons attempt to enter the Kingdom, measures will be taken to drive them out of the Kingdom as fast as possible. If it is not possible to repel them, they will be detained in camps."[520]

During this initial phase of Thailand's immigration policy toward Indochinese refugees, which Thai law professor and human rights advocate, Vittit Muntarbhorn, called, "preventive and retaliatory phase," the experiences of Hmong refugees varied from person to person and family to family.[521] Some remembered great hardships while others did not. The non-uniformity of the Hmong experiences during this initial phase depended on when and how Hmong refugees crossed the Mekong River to Thailand. The 2,500 Hmong evacuated from Long Cheng airbase and flown across the border with American advisors on May 14, 1975 did not experience the traumas of escape by foot through the perilous jungle or by makeshift bamboo rafts across the Mekong River. General Vang Pao who left with American advisors on May 14, for example, never had to experience the pain of trekking through the jungle for days or even months to get to the Mekong River. He never had to fight the rapid currents of the Mekong River to get across to Thailand. Nor did he have to worry about being ambushed and fired upon by communist soldiers along the way or while crossing the Mekong. On June 18, after only a little more than two months in a temporary shelter in Thailand, he was already on his way to the United States.[522]

Unlike Vang Pao, Pao Herr did not escape by flying across the river to Thailand. When Pao Herr reached Long Cheng, the last American plane had left. Still, like Vang Pao, he did not have to suffer the hardships of walking through the jungle to Thailand.

---

[519] W. Courtland Robinson, "Thailand: Background Paper on Human Rights, Refugees and Asylum Seekers," A Writenet Report commissioned by the UNHCR, Protection Information Section (DIP), (July 2004): 22.
[520] The Public Affairs Institute, *Indochinese Refugees in Thailand: Prospects for Longstayers*, (Bangkok: The Public Affairs Institute, An Institution of the Public Affairs Foundation, 1989), 25.
[521] Vitit Muntarbhorn, "Displaced Persons in Thailand: Legal and National Policy Issues in Perspective," *Chulalongkorn Law Review* 1 (1982): 14.
[522] Roger Warner, *Back Fire: The CIA's Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 351.

After he got to Vientiane soon after the evacuation at Long Cheng, he was able to pay a taxi driver to take him to the Mekong River, where a boat he had previously arranged was waiting for him and his family. There they jumped in the boat and were sped off across the river. Landing in Nong Khai, they met twenty to thirty other Hmong families taking shelter in a Buddhist temple called Wat Samaky. "We had no idea what would happen but the Thai people took care of us very well," Pao remembers. "One family even offered us a bedroom to sleep in overnight." They spent a week in Nong Khai before being transferred to the Nam Phong camp.[523]

Yang Long, an ex-radio operator and communication expert for the CIA secret army in Laos who I interviewed, also did not escape Laos by plane with Vang Pao and his American advisors. However, fluent in both Lao and Thai because of his experience working with Lao and Thai radio operators during the war, he had an advantage that many Hmong refugees did not. After crossing the Mekong River, because of his previous work experience and language, Yang Long knew how to handle Thai border patrols. At a checkpoint by the river, Yang Long told me he relied on liquor and kip—the Lao currency—to bribe his way into Thailand. "I buy bottle beer, 32 ounce, the big bottle," he said. With the "big bottle," he told the Thai captain monitoring the checkpoint, "Here—here is a gift for you." From his pocket, he took out 20,000 kip (about 300 baht in Thai currency). "And here is something else for you. This is for you to get a cup of coffee and grab a lunch. Please let me go." He smiled and put the money in the captain's pocket. With this, Yang Long and his family were routed to Udon to stay in a military base that the United States had established during the war. This was in May 1975. By August the following year, he and his family were already in the United States. For Yang Long, the Thai had been good to him. Like Pao, he remembered being given shelter and even food during his stay in Thailand after crossing the Mekong River.[524]

Most Hmong refugees, however, were not so fortunate. To get to Thailand, Hmong families had to walk through rugged and dangerous terrains, abandoned villages and untended fields, and many decomposing corps. "During the escape," historian Sucheng Chan writes, "many Hmong mothers suffered a special agony. When they could

[523] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 14.
[524] Yang Long, interview with author, 12 March 2007.

not quiet their crying babies, some mothers abandoned the children, lest the babies' cries betray the presence of the entire group. To lull the infants to sleep, they gave them small wads of opium. In some instances, the amount was too large and the children overdosed and died."[525] In the mid-1990s, a Hmong mother named Yia Thao Xiong told author Anne Fadiman: "When the babies would cry, we would mix the opium in water in a cup and give it to them so they would be quiet and the soldiers would not hear, because if they heard the babies, they would kill all of us. Usually the baby just went to sleep. But if you give too much by mistake, they baby dies. That happened many many times."[526] Thousands of others died en route from Pathet Lao and Vietnamese bullets, landmines, diseases, starvation, snakebites, poisonous plants, and toxic water sources.

After surviving all these, more difficulties still lay ahead for Hmong refugees at the Mekong River. To get to Thailand, they had to cross the river, but many of them could not swim. Their situation went from bad to worse when, as the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported, "Thai police, seeing Hmong attempt to cross the Mekong, sometimes fired shots in the air to alert Pathet Lao troops across the river, who would shoot at the Hmong. Most of the Hmong, who did not know how to swim, tied themselves to logs or driftwood to cross the Mekong, while under fire from Vietnamese and Pathet Lao machine guns."[527] Doua Thao, who had served for nine years as a soldier in Vang Pao's secret army, described the horrifying attempt to cross the Mekong River to Thailand in 1977 after living a few years in Phou Bia:

> We started out with a group of 3,000. Some dropped out and many were killed. Maybe 300 reached Thailand safely. I had left with my wife and our two-year-old son. There were ten of us altogether in our group. I tied a rope around us in a long chain and we slipped into the Mekong River at night. I was swimming in front. But there was a patrol boat cruising the river. They had a flashlight and shinned it on us and started shooting. My wife shouted to me, 'I think they've hit our son.' I turned around and felt for him in the dark. My fingers went into the hole in his head. They were still firing and someone yelled, 'Cut us loose or they

[525] Sucheng Chang, "Scarred Yet Undefeated," 259.
[526] Ann Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 162.
[527] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*: *The Human Rights of Laotian Asylum Seekers in Thailand,* (New York. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989), 9.

> will kill us all!' I did and then dived under the water and swam for as long as I could. I made it to the Thai side but I lost track of the others… I learned eight months later that my wife had been captured and imprisoned. My uncle was able to get her released [by paying a bribe]. In May 1978, I snuck back across the Mekong River, again at night, and brought her back with our newborn daughter. She had been pregnant when we left the year before.[528]

Like many in this group, countless other Hmong died trying to cross the Mekong. Thai fishermen and police reported seeing "hundreds of bodies of men and women with children strapped to their backs floating lifelessly in the river. One woman, whose husband and three children were machine-gunned to death as they struggled to swim the Mekong, clung to the lifeless bodies for several hours as they floated down the river. She was found wandering in the Thai forest, half-starved and babbling incoherently."[529] Life, for this woman, was too cruel and ruthless. It completely sapped all sense of humanity out of her. Her "babbling incoherently" was symptomatic not of her insanity but a loss of her humanity. From 1975 to 1980, according to some estimates, between 50,000 to 100,000 Hmong died.[530] In early 1979, journalist and author Jane Hamilton-Merritt herself witnessed the massacre of some 200 Hmong by Communist forces as they attempted to cross the Mekong.[531]

After Hmong refugees survived the trail of death from the Lao jungle to Thailand's border, more difficulties awaited them in the refugee camps. Many likened their stay in the camps to a life of imprisonment. Speaking of his brief experience in Nong Khai refugee camp from February 1976 to September 1976, Abraham Yi Vang, who served for the CIA for thirteen years and was in charge of the 12th Brigade, recalled:

> They [the Thai Government] make a corral, a fence, line it around the camp so [they] don't let many people go out. They make a gate and the Thai policeman

---

[528] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 104.

[529] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*, 9. See "Our Forgotten Allies in Laos are Being Massacred," Chicago Tribune, 27 May 1979; "Our Forgotten Allies are Being Massacred," Chicago Tribune, 8 April 1979; "Poison Gas is Being Used Against the Meo," Agence France Presse dispatch, 26 September 1978; photo essay in *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 1 September 1979.

[530] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*, 8; W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 106. Santoli of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights placed the number of Hmong perished during this period at 100,000. Robinson, citing the estimate by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and a survey by the ARC in February 1980, placed the estimate of Hmong deaths between 50,000 and 100,000.

[531] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, "Tragic Legacy from Laos," *Readers Digest*, August 1981.

> work for the gate. You go from fence when they see you they arrest you and put you for the jail. You lost a lot of money. They hit you like animal and not like you. The police officer go[es] to someone home or arrest some people and they tried to arrest and tied their hand on their back. In Thailand, [you] will be suffering until your blood show, blood from your eye, from your nose, and really suffer like an animal. The worse animal in here, you know from all of that suffering. It is real, real danger. You lose a lot of money too. They fine you. You don't have money pay for the Thai policeman so you will stay for the jail. That is the situation.[532]

Speaking of his experience in Chiang Kham, which was first opened in February 1976, Chue Yang said:

> The fence is made of bamboo and is about eight to ten feet tall. You could see through the cracks—but the guards won't even allow you to peek outside. If you do they could arrest you. Also, if Thai people from the outside brought in goods and you bought—if the soldiers saw it—you could be caught for that, too. In this cam no one could do business….[And] every morning around 7:00 A.M. they have songs sung in Thai, like the flag salute. They have speakers all over in the camp, so whenever these songs go on, it does matter if you're an adult or children, everyone is supposed to walk up and salute or sing along with the song. You can't walk. You just have to stand up straight, like you respect them. If you don't, you could be jailed for it. Even if you have little children who didn't know anything about it, the parents could be jailed if they didn't make the little kids salute and sing the songs.[533]

Describing what life in the refugee camp was like for her and everyone else, Khou Her added:

> We left behind our rice farms, our house, our pigs, chickens, everything, and we came to Thailand, and then they put us in a camp. The camp where we were kept was surrounded by barbwire. No one was allowed to go to out without

---

[532] Abram Yi Vang, oral interview with students of D.C. Everest Area Schools, Wausau, Wisconsin. Interview transcript is found in *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, collected by the Students of D.C. Everest Area Schools, (Wausau, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2000), 97.

[533] Lilian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 73-74.

> permission. All we could do was wait for our paperwork to be finished so they would let us go to Ban Vinai where it was a little better. If you tried to leave the camp without permission, the Thai would kick at you or kill you… In the camp we were in jail, like the chickens and pigs in Laos. We were that helpless and trapped. We ate only what we were given and when we were given, and if they didn't want to give us we would just starve.[534]

No fence and no barbwire, notwithstanding, Ban Vinai refugee camp also had an imaginary borderline beyond which refugees were not permitted to venture.[535] Mai, a fifty-eight-year-old Hmong woman, remembered, "I was not even allowed to go and gather wood for fire."[536] An eighteen-year-old Hmong teen, Tong Lor, who arrived in Ban Vinai after being separated from his parents and siblings who were still in Laos added, "I hate not being allowed outside the camp. It might have been better to stay in Laos. I try to find as many things to do as I can. I hate just 'staying free'."[537] Dwight Conguergood also observed that "refugees are forbidden to go outside the camp without the express permission of Colonel Vichitmala, the Thai camp commander. Armed guards enforce this policy. During the time of my fieldwork [in Ban Vinai in 1985] more than one refugee was shot for venturing outside the camp."[538]

Boredom and what Tong Lor described as "staying free," or what Jim Anderson of the International Rescue Committee has called "enforced idleness," characterized the life of the refugees in the camps. Describing life in the camps for Hmong refugees, Anderson said:

> It was probably the most boring existence you can possibly imagine, because they weren't allowed to do anything. It was just—it was enforced idleness…. You'd see kids running around playing everywhere, but there was just this look of depression upon all of the adults. They'd just sit there and—there's nothing to do, and I'm sure they were just bored out of their minds. So not a pleasant experience

---

[534] Lilian Faderman, with Ghia Xiong, *I Begin My Life All Over Again*, 72-73.
[535] The author lived in this refugee camp of Ban Vinai from 1980 to 1987 before being transferred to Phanat Nikhom where he and his family were processed for resettlement in the United States.
[536] Daniel F. Detzer, *Elder Voices: Southeast Asian Families in the United States*, (New York: Altamira Press, 2004), 51.
[537] Caroline Dewhurst, "Life at Ban Vinai," *The Nation*, January 1985, 19.
[538] Dwight Conquergood, "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture," *The Drama Review* 32, no. 3 (1988): 188.

> at all. They had basic amenities. I mean, nobody was starving to death, everybody had housing, everybody had access to medical care—so everything was being provided, but it was just a totally empty experience.[539]

Lynellyn Long writes of the refugee experience of boredom in Ban Vinai: "Boredom is an endemic state in the camp…. [It] is the negation or absence of emotion…[and] a by-product of warehousing.... Boredom characterizes the expression that outsiders see on people's faces, who have lived in the camps for several years…. Boredom may be characteristic of long-term camp situations."[540] Recalling the difficulty of living in Ban Vinai, Mai Thao Her, who left the camp in 1978, remembered:

> When we lived in camp Vinai it was very hard and we didn't have wood for fires, water or drink and I had a hard time. In my family there were five of us. There were five of us and the food pantry only gave us a five gallon bucket of water so that we could take our baths and it was very hard. The rice was not enough to eat. They gave one cup of rice for each person. One bowl for five of us, then one time there wasn't enough for seven days and they only gave each person a bowl of rice for seven days.[541]

Hmong life in the camps became even more difficult after 1979. The Khmer Rouge genocide and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia on December 25, 1978, the agricultural collectivization and massive attacks on Hmong resistance fighters in Phou Bia in 1977-78, and Sino-Vietnamese dispute continued to force thousands of Indochinese refugees into Thailand.[542] By June 1979, Thailand was already home to over 173,000 refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Of this number, 50,000 had arrived in the first six months of 1979.[543] By July 31, 1979, according to one estimate, there were 176,651 refugees in Thailand. Ninety-four percent of these arrived by land.[544]

---

[539] Hmong Oral History Project, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. [http://homepages.csp.edu/hillmer/Hmong_OHP.html]
[540] Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp*, 108-109.
[541] Mai Thao Her, oral interview, in *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, collected by the Students of D.C. Everest Area Schools, (Wausau, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2000), p. 27.
[542] Milton Obsborne, "The Indochinese Refugees: Causes and Effects," *International Affairs* 56, no. 1 (Jan., 1980): 37-53.
[543] Sara E. Davies, *Legitimizing Rejection*, 105.
[544] Indochina Refugee Action Center (IRAC), "Issue Paper: Synopsis of Current Refugee Situation," 8 August 1979, in IIM General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.

Yet, as Sara Davies writes, "the total number of resettlement places offered in that period was just 17,000. Laotians, who still represented the highest number of refugees in Thailand, were arriving at the rate of 4,700 a month since 1978. On top of this, there were 85,000 Cambodians on the Thai border who had been attempting to enter camps since Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia."[545] As a result, by June 1979, Thailand, like other first asylum nations in the region, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, began to deny entry to incoming refugees. The rate of resettlement was slower than the rate of arrival. On June 30, 1979, ASEAN issued a joint statement stating that its member states would not accept new arrivals.[546]

In response, the UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim invited the ASEAN countries and sixty-six other states to attend a Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in Southeast Asia in Geneva on July 20-21, 1979.[547] One result from the meeting was an increased commitment by Western countries to resettle Indochinese refugees. From 1975 to 1979, non-communist countries in the West had resettled nearly 600,000 refugees, and at the meeting in 1979, they made commitment to resettle 300,000 more through September 30, 1980.[548] More specifically, Canada raised its pledge dramatically from 8,000 to 50,000 by the end of 1980. Australia pledged to accept an additional 14,000 on top of the 22,000 it had already resettled. France had already resettled more than 50,000 by mid-1979 but agreed to take 5,000 more boat people. Germany pledged 10,000 places. The United Kingdom agreed to take 10,000 Vietnamese from Hong Kong.[549] The United States, through July 1979, had resettled 221,000 refugees, 185,000 from Vietnam, 10,000 from Kampuchea, and 25,000 from Laos.[550] Between 1975 and 1980, according to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the United States resettled a total of 322,500 Indochinese refugees.[551] At the meeting, the United States pledged to double its

---

[545] Sara E. Davies, Legitimizing Rejection, 105.
[546] ASEAN, *Joint Communiqué of the Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting*, Bali, Indonesia, 30 June 1979, (Jakarta: Terbatas, ASEAN Sekretariat Nasional, 1979).
[547] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 51.
[548] Indochina Refugee Action Center (IRAC), "Issue Paper: Synopsis of Current Refugee Situation," 8 August 1979, in IIM General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[549] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 54.
[550] Indochina Refugee Action Center (IRAC), "Issue Paper: Synopsis of Current Refugee Situation," 8 August 1979, in IIM General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[551] U.S. Committee for Refugees, "Indochina Refugees: No End in Sight," *World Refugee Survey 1981* (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Services, 1981), 20.

monthly quota from 7,000 to 14,000 for an annual total of 168,000.[552] In 1980, the United States ended up resettling 152,240 refugees.[553]

The increased commitment by Western countries to resettle more refugees led to the second phase of Thailand's immigration policy, which was an "open-door" policy. Thailand's commitment from late 1979 to early 1980 to not turn back anyone, "however large the influx of displaced person," backfired, resulting in an increased influx of refugees to Thailand. Many were enticed by the prospect of resettlement, particularly to the United States. According to the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), in 1975, nearly 45,000 hill tribe and roughly lowland Lao crossed the border to Thailand. However, the number dropped during the next two years, with approximately 27,000 combined in 1976 and 22,000 in 1977. The number, however, increased again to almost 57,000 combined in 1978, perhaps, the result of the massive attacks on the Hmong in Phou Bia in 1977. With Thailand's open-door policy, the number of refugees from Laos remained relatively high with almost 46,000 combined in 1979 and 44,000 in 1980.[554] According to another source, the refugees from Laos arriving in Thailand jumped from 64,000 in 1979 to 95,000 in 1980.[555] The number of Vietnamese refugee arrivals in Thailand also soared from an average of 4,000-5,000 annually between 1975 and 1977 to 16,000 in 1979, 26,500 in 1980 and 22,500 in 1981.[556] The increase prompted Prime Minister Kriangsak Chomanan to declare that the influx of refugees to Thailand was not just "flooding" Thailand; it was "drowning" it.[557]

With assistance from the U.S. Department of State and the UNHCR, Thailand quickly implemented in early 1981 the third phase of Thailand's immigration policy known as "human deterrence" to discourage the flow of incoming refugees to

---

[552] UNHCR, "Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Person in Southeast Asia Convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at Geneva on 20 and 21 July, 1979, and Subsequent Developments," 7 November 1979; W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 53.
[553] U.S. Committee for Refugees, "Indochina Refugees: No End in Sight," *World Refugee Survey 1981* (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Services, 1981), 20.
[554] The Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, (Bangkok: CCSDPT Secretariat Office, 1986), 6.
[555] Astri Suhrke, "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and the Politics of First Asylum," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467, (May 1983): 106.
[556] CCSDPT, *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, 9.
[557] Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of 'Humane Deterrance' Policies in Southeast Asia," in *Refugees and International Relations*, eds. Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 125.

Thailand.[558] At the heart of the policy were: (1) the closure of Thai border to new arrivals; (2) the denial of resettlement for new arrivals; (3) the placement of new arrivals in austere camp conditions; and (4) renewed efforts to apprehend and expel arrivals at the borders.[559] On the surface, the policy was a success. It effectively deterred "illegal migrants" from crossing the border and reduced the number of refugees entering Thailand for the next several years. In 1981, for example, only 25,000 refugees from Laos entered Thailand, which was less than half the number the previous year.[560] That number fell by a further 75 percent in the course of 1982.[561] The number of lowland Lao dropped from 29,000 in 1980 to 16,300 in 1981 and then to 3,200 in 1982.[562] Between April 1, 1981 and March 31, 1982, only 11,000 lowland Lao arrived in Thailand, or about one-third of the 1980 arrival rate.[563] Arrivals of boat people throughout Southeast Asia in the first eight months of 1982 were also down 41 percent compared to the same period in 1981. In 1981, 59,596 Vietnamese fled to the various camps in Southeast Asia, but only 35,170 entered these refugee camps in 1982.[564] In Thailand alone, the number of Vietnamese boat arrivals dropped from more than 21,000 in 1980 to some 6,000 in 1982.[565] The rate of Hmong refugees from Laos also dropped drastically, averaging around 300 a month from April 1981 to March 1982.[566] Hmong arrivals dropped from 14,800 in 1980 to just 1,800 in 1982.[567] Lack of resettlement prospects, it seemed, had acted as a disincentive for Indochinese refugees to flee their homeland.

Closer inspection, however, revealed a different story. Humane deterrence did nothing to stop the flow of refugees from flooding Thailand. When they were persecuted back home and when they were sufficiently desperate to risk the often hazardous and perilous journey, by boat or land, including the widespread murders and rapes by Thai

---

[558] *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, in IIM, General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN; Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of 'Humane Deterrence' Policies in Southeast Asia," 127-128.
[559] The Public Affairs Institute, *Indochinese Refugees in Thailand: Prospects for Longstayers*, 28.
[560] *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, in IIM, General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[561] Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of 'Humane Deterrence' Policies in Southeast Asia," 128.
[562] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 115.
[563] Astri Suhrke, "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and the Politics of First Asylum," 107.
[564] *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, in IIM, General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[565] Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of Human Deterrence Policies in Southeast Asia," 128. Note the CCSDPT put the number of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand in 1980 at 26,500 (1,500 more than McNamara's estimate). See CCSDPT, *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, 9.
[566] Astri Suhrke, "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and the Politics of First Asylum," 107.
[567] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 115.

pirates, they would hardly be discouraged by the prospect of long detention in Thailand or the lack of resettlement abroad. This was especially the case for Hmong refugees who were not interested in third-country resettlement.[568] Unlike most other Indochinese refugees, the Hmong actually refused to resettle in a third country. They preferred to stay close to Laos and to return home when there was a change of regime.[569] Fear of imprisonment and persecution in their homeland continued to push Hmong refugees across the border in spite of Thailand's humane deterrence policy throughout the late 1980s.[570] They fled their homeland not because they were enticed by the prospect of resettlement but largely out of profound fear of persecution and death back home.

The decline in the number of refugees to Thailand also resulted not from the humane deterrence policy but from other factors not associated with the policy. The number of boat people went down, for example, because Vietnam had increased penalties for persons attempting to leave the country. This discouraged mere "economic" migrants from leaving. Boats, by this point, were also in short supply in Vietnam, making it difficult for persons to cross international borders.[571] More importantly, through the UNHCR, the United States and Vietnam had reached an agreement to allow Vietnamese to directly enter the United States through the Orderly Departure Program as either refugees under the Refugee Act of 1980 or as holders of immigrant visas under the Immigration and Nationality Act.[572] According to the CCSDPT, "Over 100,000 Vietnamese have been resettled directly from Vietnam to a resettlement country through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), enacted in May 1979 between Vietnam and the UNHCR as an alternative to the dangerous flight from Vietnam by boat."[573] By the time Thailand entered the third phase of its immigration policy—humane detterence—in 1981,

---

[568] Astri Suhrke, "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and the Politics of First Asylum," 107; *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[569] Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 41-42; and Paul Rabé, *Voluntary Repatriation: The Case of Hmong in Ban Vinai*, (Bangkok: Refugee Information Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992).
[570] Barbara Crossette, "Laotian Migration Worries Thailand," *New York Times*, (September 20, 1984): A11; Barbara Crossette, "Laotians Still Pour Into Thailand Despite Efforts to Stem the Flow," *New York Times*, (April 1, 1985): A4; Barbara Crossette, "Laotian Refugees Crowd Thai Camp," *New York Times*, (June 23, 1985): 7.
[571] *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, IIM General Files, Box 100, Box 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[572] *Refugee Reports* 2, no. 12, 28 November 1980; and *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 15, 2 July 1982, IIM General Files, Box 100, Box 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[573] CCSDPT, *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, 10.

most of the Hmong opposition to the Pathet Lao government had also left. The rest had, as Astri Suhrke said, "made a peace of sorts with the Laotian government's policy of removing the highlanders to lowland settlements."[574] The number of Cambodia arrivals in Thailand also went down, but that was only because Thailand had repatriated more than 40,000 Cambodian refugees to Cambodia in June 1979, causing several thousand deaths in mine-infested plains.[575] Ultimately, as Dennis McNamara of the UNHCR has written, "There is little historical evidence to support the contention that the majority of refugees are deterred even by the threat of inhumane treatment on arrival—which they have too often received—when the need to leave their own country has been compelling."[576]

Meanwhile, because of the humane deterrence policy, Thailand turned the other way and enabled Thai piracy along the Mekong River against refugees from its neighboring countries to go undetected. Like other refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, Hmong refugees were also preys to Thai piracy. Jane Hamilton-Merritt writes,

> Refugees who had crossed into Thailand in 1975 and 1976 reported few instances of brutality by Thai people. The somewhat friendly Thai attitude toward tribal refugees began to change in 1978. The Thais discovered refugees as a source and valuables. They also discovered that refugees had no rights, no recourse to abuses, no ability to bring charges against thieves, murderers, extortionists, or rapists. After the slaughter at Phou Bia, those who survived the trek to cross into Thailand often found they were still not safe. Thai villagers and Thai defense forces, armed but untrained, scouted for Hmong crossing into Thailand. Surrounding new arrivals, some *Aw Saw*, local defense forces, made refugees strip naked. Sometimes these men gang-raped the prettiest girls and women. They often took

[574] Astri Suhrke, "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and Politics of First Asylum," 107.
[575] Peter Van Esterik, "Thailand's Response to the Refugee Crisis," in *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups & Ethnic Minorities: Prospects for the Eighties and Beyond*, Cultural Survival Report 22, Proceedings of a Conference Co-sponsored by Cultural Survival, Inc. and Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1987), 150; Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp*, 41; W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 48. Long puts the number of Cambodian repatriates at between 43,000 and 45,000 while Robinson at 42,000.
[576] Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of Human Deterrence Policies in Southeast Asia," 123.

> all the valuables, particularly silver earrings and necklaces nd the ancestral bars of silver, the last store of Hmong family resources.[577]

When refugees carried nothing of value, Thai pirates tried extortion. When that did not yield any fruit, they pushed refugees across the border to die at the hands of the Communists. As one relief official said, "If one has no money to pay the Thais, refugees are often pushed back into the river or shot."[578] Recalling the tragic encounter his mother had with Thai pirates, Vang Jue said, "In April 1979, things changed for the Hmong coming out of Laos. The police beat my mother and forced her and her small group back across the river. Then the Thai asked, 'How much can you pay to be allowed to cross back to Thailand?' My mother said $300 [a lot of money in northern Thailand in 1979]. My mother had no money, but they allowed her to return. She got the money from relatives and paid the Thai."[579] In 1980, Stanly Karnow wrote:

> Many Hmong who reached the Mekong after days of hacking through the Laotian jungles have been killed because Thai frontier guards either denied them entry into Thailand or, possibly in exchange for rewards, cruelly handed them back to the Communists in Laos. In one recent instance—which evoked a U.S. embassy protest—local Thai police sent a Hmong woman and her two daughters back across the river and then watched as Pathet Lao soldiers gunned them down. In some cases, too, Thai cops have robbed Hmong refugee families and even raped Hmong girls as they arrived, exhausted and apprehensive, from Laos.[580]

The push-back and the death of the Hmong woman and her daughters to which Karnow referred was reported by the *Washington Post* in 1978.[581] Fong Her, who now lives in Minnesota, also recalled:

> When we got to Thailand, the Thai people did not like foreigners; they did not like refugees. So they were beating up [Hmong] people. The morning that we reached Thailand, we were in a big group so a lot of the people around us got robbed and beaten up. Luckily my family was not beaten or robbed. But

---

[577] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 476-477.
[578] W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge*, 111.
[579] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 477.
[580] Stanley Karnow, "Free No More: The Allies America Forgot," *GEO* 2, (1980): 20-21.
[581] See "The Allies We Abandoned in Laos Are Still Fighting and Dying," *The Washington Post*, 17 September 1978.

> whatever that we had, whatever money that we had, they came by and searched everything. So they got everything.[582]

In mid-June 1982, another 321 "Lao hill tribe people" were forcibly pushed back to Laos after the group had crossed the border and taken refuge in northern Thailand.[583] Neither Thai authorities nor Lao authorities ever responded to repeated inquiries by the United States Committee for Refugees on the fate of these repatriates.[584] Thai continued to push refugees back throughout the 1980s. In 1986, roughly 66 percent of the 7,000 refugees from Laos who were interviewed were approved as refugees. Yet, none of the approved was Hmong.[585] In May 1986, a group of 200 Hmong trying to enter Thailand were forced back across the border; the seven leaders of the group were taken aside and shot by Pathet Lao troops. In December, 43 Hmong refugees, including women and children, were shot to death by Vietnamese troops as they were attempting to cross the Mekong River.[586] On March 15, 1987, Thai authorities removed 105 Hmong from Ban Vinai, claiming that they entered the camp illegally, and delivered 38 of them to Laotian officials and placed the rest in a more austere camp. On the evening of November 16, a group of 34 Hmong were apprehended trying to enter Ban Vinai.[587] Everyone in the group, except an eight-year-old girl, Kia Lor, was summarily executed. Lor later recounted her ordeal to the Lawyers Committee through her uncle in Minnesota:

> They took us to the top of a hill, putting a rope around the adults' necks, they made us sit in a line like we were going to dance. They told the women, 'Take your babies off your backs and hold them in front of you.' My mother told us, 'Now they will kill us. We don't talk.' Then the soldiers shot us with B-40 rockets and their guns.[588]

---

[582] Hmong Oral History Project, Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[583] *Refugee Reports* 3, no. 17, 30 July 1982, in IIM General Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN.
[584] Roger P. Winter, "1982-the Year in Review," in U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1983*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council for National Service, 1983), 3.
[585] UNHCR, *State of the World: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, 101.
[586] U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1986*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Services, 1986), 53.
[587] Court Robinson, "Refugees in Thailand," in U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1987*, 53. See also "Thais Reportedly Force Exiles Back to Laos," *New York Times*, 17 March 1987, A5; Roger P. Winter, "Hmong Pushed Back at Laos-Thai Border," *New York Times*, 8 July 1985, A16.
[588] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*, 17.

In July 1988, nearly 200 Hmong were again pushed back in three separate incidents. The fate of the Hmong repatriates remained unknown.[589]

Furthermore, because of the humane deterrence policy, many refugees were placed in austere camp conditions, where they did not always have enough food to eat or clean water to drink. In the refugee camps in Thailand, as in the camps set up by General Vang Pao and USAID during the war, Hmong refugees had to depend on the food rations provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid organizations for survival. Kao Kalia Yang recounts ration days in Ban Vinai in her memoir:

> Rations came three times a week and consisted of dried fish, which caused little children to get stomach cramps, and old broken gains of rice that required no chewing to fall apart. Both smelled of mold and dark places. But ration days were good days because there was something; the other four days of the week each family had to find whatever they could to eat.[590]

Starvation was especially a problem for "illegal residents," those who entered the camps after Thailand implemented its humane deterrence in 1981. "Illegal residents" did not receive the donated rations that the others did. The experience of ten-year-old Nou Vue and five-year-old Mee Vue and their elderly aunt who arrived in the camp in May 1987 exemplified the experience of illegal residents in Ban Vinai. In a message that she sent to her brother in Minnesota to inform him of his two daughters on July 20, 1987, the aunt described their condition as "without adequate shelter or medicine." "We only have two meals a day, with little food because we have no money," she said. "The children are very skinny. They cry often because they are hungry and thirsty. They stay on their beds all day because they are very sick and can't walk." Mee died from malaria shortly after her father received this message.[591]

In the refugee camps, Hmong were also exposed to serious hygiene and sanitation problems. In a 1979 unpublished report, Jean Carlin, a medical consultant, observed that:

---

[589] U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1988*, (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Service, 1988), 54.
[590] Kao Kalia Yang, *The Late Homecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2008), 61.
[591] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*, 32.

> There are 42,000 people in this very crowded place which lacks sanitary facilities. Drinking water is contaminated. People bathe out in the open; there is no other place. They pour water over them to try to be clean. They wash their clothes out in the open also. There is no adequate way to dispose of garbage and wastes, although they attempt to keep them out of the immediate footpaths, etc. This lack of sanitation plus an abundance of flies and mosquitoes leads to numerous health hazards… When not enough food arrives at the camp, they have no money to buy from the stalls, so their children literally starve and die… The allocated food supplies often have been partly depleted before they reach the remote Ban Vinai camp. Thai citizens steal food for their own starving children, and while this is indeed understandable, it does not solve the problem at Ban Vinai.[592]

In 1988, Dwight Conquergood, health educator in Ban Vinai, home to 45,231 refugees with an additional 2-3,000 undocumented "illegals" living in the camp without rice rations in 1985 when he arrived, similarly reported that:

> Ban Vinai has serious hygiene and sanitation problems…. Ban Vinai is located in an isolated, hilly region of northeast Thailand, the poorest sector of the country. The camp has a population larger than any city in this remote area of Thailand, surpassing even Loei, the provincial capital. It is the most populous refugee camp in Asia. All these people are crowded onto about 400 acres of undeveloped land…. The overcrowding in the camp, not to mention the sanitation level, is compounded by large numbers of animals…. Housing is extremely crowded and inadequate…. The refugees have responded to the housing shortage by building more than 2,250 thatch/bamboo huts…. Camp Ban Vinai is the largest gathering of Hmong in the world…there is no running water or adequate sewage disposal…. There are not enough pit toilets for the camp population. The latrines are distributed unevenly through the camp and are clustered together in long rows—

[592] Fungchatou T. Lo, *The Promised Land: Socioeconomic Reality of the Hmong People in Urban America (1976-2000),* (Lima, OH: Wyndham Hall Press, 2001), 77-78. For the report, see Jean E. Carlin, *Report of a Medical Consultant's Observations and Evaluations of and Recommendations for Indochinese (Southeast Asian) Refugees Camps,* (University of California Irvine, August 29-September, 1979).

> convenient if you happen to live close to a cluster but the trade-off is the overwhelming stench.[593]

Most of all, because of Thailand's humane deterrence policy to place refugees in austere camp conditions, refugees were readily exposed to abuse and violence at the hands of Thai camp authorities. Keith Quincy, for example, recorded that the camp director, Amphorn Chai, of Ban Nam Yao "liberally tortured Hmong inmates. His favorite punishment was to bury a man up to his neck and let his head bake in the sun. When a few inmates protested the practice, Amphorn had them executed. [Hmong heads were] arranged in a neat row like cabbages, roasting in the sun."[594] In a different camp in Phayao in northeastern Thailand, Banhard Supanich, the Thai Ministry of Interior commander in Chiang Kham refugee camp, repeatedly exploited refugees from 1983 when the camp was open as a "humane deterrence center" to 1988 when Banhard was finally transferred. He confiscated food and clothing donated to the refugees by international organizations and sold them on the black markets in local Thai communities. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported,

> When the camp residents consequently lacked adequate food supplies, he forced their leaders at gunpoint to sign papers claiming that they were receiving supplies. On three different occasions, Banharn forcibly tried to coerce camp leaders to sign papers requesting the replacement of UNHCR representatives who would not cooperate in the black market of internationally donated blankets and food. Banharn also instructed the camp's administrators to confiscate personal belongings, forcing the camp residents to buy them back, and allegedly trafficked drugs inside and outside the camp. Additionally, …Banharn and his subordinates jailed camp residents—some as young as nine years old—for being unruly, dirty or insubordinate. This could mean failing to pick up litter, talking with outsiders, failing to bow to Banharn or leaving one's hut after the 9:00 p.m. curfew. Punishment sometimes included tying the hands and feet of refugees, then torturing them. Others had their hair shorn in a humiliating triangle shape, and then were paraded around the camp by Banharn's men. Victims, including

[593] Dwight Conquergood, "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture," 185 & 187-189.
[594] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 461.

> children, were beaten in front of other refugees…[and] women put in prison were kept in a large cell. At night, Banharn would send for a woman prisoner and rape her in his quarters. He would threaten to shoot the raped woman with his pistol if she reported the incident.[595]

Thai camp guards, who were supposed to protect them, also raped young refugee women at will. Samkhann Khoeun, a resident of Massachusetts, told historian Sucheng Chan how Thai camp guards in Khao I Dang—the main UNHCR camp holding Cambodians—identified their victims to molest: "In the daytime, [the Thai guards]… went from place to place, so at night, after the UNHCR staff went back to their residences… the guards knew who had daughters and possessions. They took the girls at night and robbed the refugees."[596] Jane Hamilton-Merritt documented the horrendous rape of a Hmong girl in the main camp holding Hmong refugees:

> In 1979, a 14-year-old Hmong girl was raped by 12 Thai in Ban Vinai camp. The Thai came to her 'house' demanding money from her parents. The family had none so the Thai took the beautiful daughter into the night and raped her all night long. They also beat her when she screamed. She couldn't walk; she crawled home the next day. Her parents took her to the camp hospital and reported the rape to the Thai authorities who did nothing.[597]

Hmong ethnicity, during those years, further aggravated Thai's mistreatment of them in the camps. By 1975 when Hmong refugees began escaping Laos to Thailand, the Thai government had been repressing Hmong communist insurgency within its border for nearly a decade. Starting in 1967, when Thai authorities burned to the ground "Doi Chompoo, a Hmong village in the province of Chiang Rai, after various attempts by local officials to exact payment for the cultivation of poppy had been rejected by Hmong villagers," the Hmong revolt expanded to various areas of Chiang Rai and Nan provinces.[598] Many Hmong, disgruntled at Thai injustice and enticed by communism, joined the Communist Party of Thailand. By 1970, Hmong had become the most active of all ethnic minorities to resist the Thai government, so much so that they were

---

[595] Al Santoli, *Forced Back and Forgotten*, 34.
[596] Sucheng Chan, "Scarred yet Undefeated," 260-261.
[597] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, p. 477.
[598] Nicolas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36, 73-84.

pejoratively labeled "Meo terrorists."[599] Ironically, therefore, Hmong refugees from Laos who had fought the Communists in Laos for fifteen years were suspected as potential threats to Thailand because of their ethnic association with the Hmong communists (or Red Hmong) in Thailand. As historian Paul Hillmer writes, "Despite training and support from the Thai government and Thai 'volunteers' during the war, they [were] now associated with Communist Thai Hmong."[600] Ethnic prejudices, Peter Van Esterik also observes, "fueled the Thai response to refugees as refugees of Chinese ancestry—Chinese Lao and Chinese Khmer—and tribal groups such as the Hmong were viewed as possible threats since they might link up with Chinese Thai and Hmong already living in Thailand."[601] Bernard Van-es-Beeck adds, "Although anti-Communist, the Hmong have stirred memories of the rebellion in the late sixties of the Hmong of Nan province against the Thai government. In that province, pro-Communist guerrillas are still active. Reception of the Hmong is not helped by the fact that the way of life of these mountain-dwelling peoples arouses only incomprehension and contempt among the Thai."[602] The way of life included the Hmong cultivation of opium poppy and their practice of slash-and-burn agriculture, which the Thai public saw as the cause of deforestation in Thailand.[603] By 1975, the Thai public, as Vitit Muntabhorn acknowledges, had also negatively associated the Hmong with opium cultivation.[604] The result was mistrust and ill treatment of Hmong refugees because of their ethnicity. Comparing the Thai treatment of Hmong and Lao refugees, Xai V, a Hmong woman whose 15-year-old was once arrested for sneaking out of the camp to make contact with his parents in Laos, said, "The

---

[599] Roger Lindsay, "How Mao the Meo?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 January-1 February 1969, 182.
[600] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 210.
[601] Peter Van Esterik, "Thailand's Response to the Refugee Crisis," 151.
[602] Bernard J. Van-es-Beeck, "Refugees from Laos, 1975-1979," in *Contemporary Laos*, 329.
[603] The Thai blamed hill tribe slash-and-burn agriculture for deforestation and used it to justify forced relocation of hill tribes from the highland to the lowland and to push for modernization projects. Deforestation in Thailand, however, had more to do with logging concessions and other development projects than hill tribe slash-and-burn agriculture. See Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion*, 51-70; Thomas A. Marks, "The Meo Hill Tribe Problem in North Thailand," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 10 (October 1973), 929-944; Chupinit Kesmanee, "Dubious Development Concepts in the Thai Highland: The Chao Kao in Transition," *Law & Society Review* 28, no. 3, (1994): 673-686; C. Kesmanee, "Hilltribe Relocation Policy in Thailand," Cultural Survival Quarterly 12 (1988): 2-6; Claudio O. Deland, "Deforestation in Northern Thailand: The Result of Hmong Farming Practices or Thai Development Strategies," *Society and Resources* 15 (2002): 483-501; Chantaboon Sutthi, "Highland Agriculture: From Better to Worse," in *Hill Tribes Today*, eds. John McKinnon and Bernard Vienne, (Bangkok: White Lotus-Orstom, 1989), 107-142.
[604] Vitit Muntarbhorn, "Differentiating Refugees from Illegal Immigrants," *The Nation*, 2 April 1987.

Thai officers treated us like animals. They treated the Laotians better than Hmong. They cursed us by saying that we were the scum of the earth."[605]

Away from communist prison camps, guns and bullets, notwithstanding, the Hmong remained "homeless" in Thailand. Dorinne Kondo, rephrasing Gayatri C. Spivak, defines "home" as "that which one cannot not want. It stands for a safe place, where there is no need to explain oneself to outsiders; it stands for community; more problematically, it can elicit a nostalgia for a past golden age that never was, a nostalgia that elides exclusion, power relations, and difference."[606] In Thailand, Hmong refugees were placed in prison-like refugee camps. All of the camps that Hmong refugees ever lived, except Ban Vinai, had a fence or barbwires beyond which refugees were prohibited from venturing. Thailand was not "a safe place" for Hmong refugees. Hmong life in the refugee camps was characterized by uncertainty, anxiety, fear and violence. In Thailand, as Conquergood has observed, "Their world has been shattered. They are in passage, no longer Laotian, certainly not Thai, and not quite sure where they will end up or what their lives will become."[607] Confined to a refugee camp, Hmong refugees suffered a loss of status, identity, and autonomy.[608] Life in the camp, for them, represented the opposite of being Hmong, a name that means "free"; it had, Conquergood said, "reduced them from proud, independent, mountain people to landless refugees."[609]

Resettlement and Nativism in the United States

If Hmong refugees did not find home or "a safe place" in Thailand, they also did not find it in the United States. Like Thailand, the United States did not want to accept any Indochinese refugees into America. The United States, according to Asian American

---

[605] Fungchatou T. Lo, *The Promised Land*, 79.
[606] Dorinne Kondo, "The Narrative Production of 'Home' Community, and Political Identity of Asian American Theatre," in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geography of Identity*, ed. S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 97; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Histiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural politics*, ed. G. Spivak, (New York: Methuen, 1987). Italicize—my emphasis.
[607] Dwight Conquergood, "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture," *The Drama Review* 32, no. 3 (1988): 180.
[608] Barry Stein, "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study," *International Migration Review* 15, no. 1 (1981): 324.
[609] Dwight Conquergood, "Health Threatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp," 195.

scholar David Palumbo-Liu, initially proposed to resettle them elsewhere. Palumbo-Liu writes, "Initial proposals for locating refugees included putting them on an uninhabited island or removing them from countries of first asylum and placing them in 'holding centers' for indefinite periods of time (China's Hainan Island, Japan's Okinawa, America's Guam, north Australia)."[610] The fear of the "Yellow Peril" that the United States had for immigrants from Asia in the 19th century and early 20th centuries was transferred to the refugees from the Second Indochina War. Many U.S. government officials, including those from the State Department, feared that Indochinese refugees, like their Asian immigrant predecessors, would, as James Tollefson points out, "present a particular threat to American culture and economic life because they are from peasant backgrounds, may have little or no education, and may not be literate."[611]

When the United States finally agreed to accept Indochinese refugees and formalize programs and procedures to resettle them, it did so with a mixture of humanitarian and political motives.[612] On the one hand, there was the humanitarian concern that Indochinese refugees, particularly the boat people of Vietnam and the refugees fleeing genocide from Cambodia, would become victims of an "Asian Holocaust" without the interventions of the United States and the international community. The United States, thus, decided to admit Indochinese refugees to avoid repeating the history of the Jewish Holocaust.[613] As Gil Loescher and John Scanlan write, "The memory of America's failure to help the Jews in the 1930s was instrumental in the demands made in Congress to resettle Indochinese refugees."[614] On the other hand, there was a strong political motive to show the triumph of U.S. democracy over communism. By accepting Indochinese refugees, the United States could show that it was the communist regimes that produced the refugees and it was the United States that

---

[610] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 240-241.
[611] James W. Tollefson, "Indochinese Refugees: A Challenge to America's Memory of Vietnam," in *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, ed. D. Michael Shafer, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 263-264.
[612] Jo Ann Koltyk, *Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong life in Wisconsin*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 29.
[613] Helen Fein, *Congregational Sponsors of Indochinese Refugees in the U.S., 1979-1981: Helping Beyond Borders*, (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1987), 32-50.
[614] Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half Open Door, 1945 to the present*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 141.

extended a helping hand to save these victims from terror.[615] By favoring refugees from communist-controlled countries, the United States could also simultaneously mask its role in producing the refugees who fled persecution from totalitarian regimes, such as El Salvador and Haiti in South America.[616]

Still, when the United States enacted the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, refugees from Laos, including the Hmong, were excluded from consideration for resettlement. The Act targeted primarily "boat people" from South Vietnam and refugees from Cambodia.[617] According to historian Sucheng Chan, "No slots were set aside for the lowland Lao and Hmong because Vientiane, the capital of Laos, did not 'fall' overnight as did Phnom Penh and Saigon."[618] Refugees from Laos were included in the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance of 1976, but Hmong refugees remained excluded in the 1976 legislation. First, senior U.S. officials considered the Hmong far too primitive and backward to be resettled in the United States. As Lionel Rosenblatt, President of Refugee International, testified at a congressional hearing on Indochinese refugees in 1994:

> I worked, starting since 1975, with the Hmong refugees as a Foreign Service officer. I went out on the first assessment of refugees coming in by land, the so-called land refugees, as opposed to the boat people. I was astonished to find thousand of Hmong who had fought so closely for us, paid by the CIA, being left to languish in the camps in Thailand. We fought very hard for the notion that they, too, can have access to resettlements. *Senior U.S. officials who felt that it was good enough for them to fight for our country also felt that they were 'too primitive' to come to this country*.[619]

---

[615] Idean Salehyan, "Safe Haven: International Norms, Strategic Interests, and U.S. Refugee Policy," Working Paper 41, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California-San Diego, (June 2001), 1-39; Mark Bixler, "Wavering Welcome: Foreign Policy Weighs Heavily on Refugees' Entry to U.S.," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9 April 2003.
[616] Charles B. Keeley, "How Nation-States Create and Respond to Refugee Flows," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 4, (1996): 1046-1066; Arthur C. Helton, "The Refugee Act's Unfulfilled Asylum Promise," in *World Refugee Survey*, (1985), 5-8.
[617] Chia Youyee Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora," 27 & 35.
[618] Sucheng Chan, "Scarred yet Undefeated," 258.
[619] United States Congress, House of Representative, *Indochinese Refugees: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, One Hundred Third Congress, second, April 26, 1994, p. 40. [Italicize—author's emphasis]

Senior U.S. officials did not believe that Hmong refugees could adapt to U.S. society and achieve self-sufficiency fast enough to not become economic burdens for local communities. One senior USAID officer, for example, argued that Hmong refugees "were far too primitive to ever be considered settlement in the U.S. because they were straight out of the trees."[620] Hmong refugees continued to be described as "low-caste hill tribe," "Stone Age," "emerging from the mists of time," "like Alice falling down a rabbit hole," and "a people who made one airplane flight from the 16th century to the 21st" in newspaper and magazine stories in the late seventies and eighties after they arrived in the United States.[621] More importantly, Hmong refugees were by-product of a covert war that the United States orchestrated in Laos. Exclusion of the Hmong and other refugees from Laos for resettlement rendered invisible the U.S. complicity in the creation of the refugee crisis and kept hidden the U.S. secret war in Laos.[622] In the end, the United States was willing to admit fewer than 300 Hmong refugees in 1975; these included mainly those high-ranking military officers and their families who the government believed could assimilate into U.S. society and achieve self-sufficiency within a few years after their resettlement.[623]

In November 1980, the United States created an orderly departure program for Vietnamese refugees. Under this program, Vietnamese, after first obtaining their exit permit from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, could enter the United States either as refugees under the Refugee Act of 1980 or holders of immigrant visas under the Immigration and Nationality Act.[624] Yet, no such program was ever created for Hmong refugees. The Pathet Lao declaration to "exterminate" the Hmong to the roots of its tribe

---

[620] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society Press, 2010), 198.
[621] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 188; Spencer Sherman, "Waking Up On the Moon: The Hmong in America," *APF Reporter* 8, no. 3 (1985): 2; Nancy Shulins, "Transplanted Hmong Struggle to Adjust in U.S.," *State Journal*, 15 July 1984; Stephen P. Morin, "Many Hmong, Puzzled by Life in U.S., Yearn for Old Days in Laos," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 1983; Susan Vreeland, "Through the Looking Glass with Hmong of Laos," *Christian Science Monitor* 30 March 1981; Frank W. Marin, "A CIA-Backed Guerilla Who Waged a Secret War in Laos Puts Down Roots in Montana," *People*, 29 August 1977; and Seth Mydans, "California Says Laos Refugee Group Has Been Extorted by Its Leadership," *New York Times*, 7 November 1990.
[622] Chia Youyee Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora," 35-36.
[623] Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 167.
[624] The Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, (Bangkok: CCSDPT Secretariat Office, 1986); W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response*, (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1998), 171-175.

in May 1975 and the Pathet Lao massacre of the Hmong after it came to power were insufficient to warrant a U.S. intervention. As Lilian Faderman writes, "Since American involvement in Laos was not supposed to have existed, the CIA believed it was important to maintain the secret, and they feared that excessive U.S. concern about the plight of the Hmong might be taken as a tacit admission of obligation for services rendered. Though the United States soon began resettling anti-Communist Vietnamese who were uprooted by the war, the Hmong were for a time essentially on their own."[625] As a result, thousands of Hmong refugees had to trek through the dangerous terrains of the Lao jungle to get to the Thailand, only to be denied the official status of refugees and placed in austere living conditions in Thailand—the result of Thailand's humane deterrence policy.[626] Hmong refugees, to say the least, did not find a home in America because the United States never wanted them in America in the first place.

In the United States, Hmong refugees knew that America was not their home the minute they stepped off the plane and saw that everything was different. Nothing was familiar to them—not the houses, the stores, the buildings, the people, or the language. Life for them in the United States was, consequently, filled with confusion, fear, and anxiety. One man, for example, remembered: "There were so many roads and cars. We needed someone to take us everywhere, to the store, to our house. We were afraid that we got lost we would not be able to tell anybody anything because we couldn't speak English." Another man remembered encountering similar problems in his first few months. "We would go to the store," he says, "and didn't even know what to do or how much to pay for the food. We would just hold out the money and let the people take the right amount."[627] America, said Xia Tou Lo of Wausau, Wisconsin, "is a beautiful country, but there are no mountains [like Laos]." Speaking to the interviewer, he added,

> Your country has plenty of people, they are white people, Anglo and you've not seen people like Asian people and look like they are not talking and you don't

[625] Lilian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 8.
[626] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 476-477; Bridget M. Cooney, "The International Policies, Refugee Spatialities, and the Hmong of Southeast Asia," (MA Thesis, California State University-Long Beach, 2005); and Dennis McNamara, "The Origins and Effects of 'Humane Deterrence' Policies in South-east Asia," *Refugees and International Relations*, eds. Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 123-128.
[627] Jo Ann Koltyk, *Pioneers in the Heartland*, 30.

> know their language and you can't communicate with them and no people walk on the streets anymore. We just see cars, and all the roads and streets and just cars, but no people… We are happy that we are all in freedom country. That there's no fighting and no chemical weapons and no communists anymore. And that made us happy, but one thing made us sad is that *we don't own a home. We don't own property*. And we don't speak the language—we don't read, and we can't write. And we just have no idea what we should do to survive in this country—to find a job or what we are going to do. You know, this is something that made us really sad.[628]

In the United States, Hmong refugees knew they were not at home in America when no one seemed to know who they were and none of the Americans they knew from Laos and Thailand was at the airport to greet and welcome them. Chou Thao, who had served eight years in the Hmong Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) and previously risked his life to rescue downed American pilots during the war, for example, said: "I thought the American people will provide and do anything for us. I believe they will do what they agreed. When I got here, it was completely different. There was nothing. No one knows about it [the commitment that he believed the Americans had made to take care of the Hmong after the war]. We couldn't even find Burr or Jerry or Pop [three of the highest American officials Thao had known in Laos."[629] Another Hmong veteran, Moua Geu, added, "Even if we lost, they [the Americans] promised they would take us to the United States, but when we got here we have no idea who the CIA is, we don't know where they went."[630]

In the United States, the Hmong knew they were not at home when their families were separated and their communities broken because of the United States dispersal policy. While Thailand sought to deter more refugees from coming with its humane deterrence policy, the United States sought to minimize economic burden on any one local community or state by rendering refugees invisible in America through the dispersal

---

[628] Xia Tou Lor, oral interview, with students and staff from the D. C. Everest Area Schools for the Hmong Oral History Project, in D.C. Everest Area Schools, *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools Publications, 1998), 69.
[629] Tom Hamburger and Erick Black, "Hmong: Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 21 April 1985.
[630] Spencer Sherman, "Waking Up on the Moon: The Hmong in America," *APF Reporter* 3, no. 2 (1982): 3.

policy.[631] With this policy, the United States dispersed Indochinese refugees in all of United States' fifty states.[632] For Hmong refugees, they were resettled in fifty-three cities in twenty-five different states, that is, "wherever a church group or local community would agree to sponsor a family," according to one U.S. Department of Health and Human Service official.[633] The objective was to spread the Hmong "like a think layer of butter throughout the country so they'd disappear," as John Finck, who worked with Hmong at the Rhode Island Office of Refugee Resettlement, put it.[634] The result of the policy for Hmong refugees was broken families, shattered communities, and loss of identity. As Anne Fadiman writes, "In some places, clans were broken up. In others, members of only one clan were resettled, making it impossible for young people, who were forbidden by cultural taboo from marrying within their own clan, to find local marriage partners. Group solidarity, the cornerstone of Hmong social organization for more than two thousand years, was completely ignored."[635]

In the United States, the Hmong knew America was not home when their skills were nontransferable to U.S. job markets. Hmong women were skilled at sewing Hmong *pajntaub* (needlework), something they had been doing in traditional Hmong village in Laos and continued to do in the refugee camps.[636] In the refugee camps, especially in Ban Vinai, some families earned as much as 90 percent of their income from sewing and selling *pajntaub* to interested tourists, aid workers, and consumers abroad.[637] With these skills, Hmong women were able to earn income for the family by making and selling *pajntaub* to non-Hmong consumers in America. By the latter half of 1983, Hmong refugee women were "generating annual sales of $700,000, and were providing women

---

[631] Simon Fass, "The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency," *Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report* 4, no. 2 (April 1991), 3-4; Jo Ann Koltyk, *Pioneers in the Heartland*, 9-10.
[632] U.S. Committee for Refugees, "Indochina Refugees: No End in Sight," *World Refugee Survey* 1981, (Washington, D.C: American Council of Nationality Service, 1981), 19.
[633] Frank Viviano, "Strangers in the Promised Land," *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 August 1986.
[634] Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 185; John Finck, "Secondary Migration to California's Central Valley," in *The Hmong in Transition*, eds. Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1986), 184-187.
[635] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 185.
[636] Sally Peterson, "Translating Experience and the Reading of A Story Cloth," *Journal of American Folklore* 10, no. 339, (1988): 6-22; Erik Cohen, "Hmong (Meo) Commercialized Refugee Art: From Ornament to Picture," in *Arts As A Mean of Communication in Pre-Literate Societies*, eds. D. Eban, E. Cohen, B. Damet, (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1990), 51-95; Susanne L. Bessac, *Embroidered Hmong Story Cloths*, (Missoula: University of Montana, 1988).
[637] Lillian Faderman, with Ghia Xiong, *I Begin My Life All Over*, 70.

with over a half-million dollars per year in total income."[638] Not only this, they were able to find jobs in fabric-making factories in America without English proficiency.[639] Hmong women, therefore, felt a little more at home in the United States.

Hmong men, in contrast, were unequipped with the skills of embroidery. They had to find some other means to support their families, which for many were almost to complete impossible, given their lack of English proficiency. Unable to speak, read and write English, many struggled to find even the most basic jobs available. The agony of job hunting for many Hmong refugees is exemplified in a scene in the 1983 documentary of a Hmong family called "Becoming Americans: The Odyssey of a Refugee Family." In this scene, the man of the family went looking for jobs and was turned down again and again. Yet, he did not even know it. At one point, a potential employer kept saying, "No. No. I don't have a job for you." The Hmong man, not understanding English, kept saying, "Yes. Yes. I need a job."[640]

Those with some command of the English language had an easier time locating a job. Nevertheless, they were just earning minimum wages in poor working conditions.[641] In a 1984 study of the Hmong settlement in Forth Smith, Arkansas, for example, Bruce Downing and his colleagues found that in March 1983, 87 of the Hmong in Forth Smith were employed, out of a potential work force of 107 persons, but nearly all Hmong employed in Forth Smith, over 80 persons, were working in two local poultry processing plants under conditions described as "very unpleasant," with no health care coverage, and earning near minimum wage at less than full time. The poultry processing industry was the only employer in Forth Smith willing to accept persons with very low English language proficiency.[642] The other studies funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement

---

[638] Simon Fass, "Innovations in the Struggle for Self-Reliance: The Hmong Experience in the United States," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 2, (Summer 1986): 361.
[639] Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 88-122; Bill Keller, "Of Heart and Home and the Right to Work," *New York Times*, 11 November 1984; "Laotian Needlework From Rhode Island," *New York Times*, 26 March 1981; and Ann Barry, "Laotian Needlework Comes to America," *New York Times*, 12 August 1985.
[640] Ken and Ivory Levine, prod., *Becoming Americans: The Odyssey of A Refugee Family*, (New York: Iris Films, 1983), film.
[641] See Kay Litting, prod., *Being Hmong Means Being Free*, (Green Bay: Northeastern Wisconsin In-School Telecommunications, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, 2000), film.
[642] Bruce Downing, et.al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Forth Smith, Arkansas*, Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 21-27.

also found similar problems of unemployment among Hmong refugees in other cities, including Fresno (California), Portland (Oregon), Minneapolis-St. Paul (Minnesota), and Dallas-Forth Worth (Texas). A major impediment to Hmong employment and self sufficiency in all these cities was the lack of English proficiency.[643] Compounding the problem of unemployment for Hmong refugees was the economic recession of the early 1980s, which according to economist Simon Fass, "created more joblessness than any time since the 1930s," forcing Hmong newcomers to compete with long-time experienced U.S. residents and other refugee populations for the same entry-level jobs.[644] Thus, eighty to eighty-five percent of the Hmong were steadily unemployed in the early 1980s.[645]

Even when they found employment, Hmong men still had a loss, the loss of their status. General Vang Pao, for example, went from the top commander of the Military Region 2 during the war to a mere farmer after resettling in Missoula, Montana, where his friend Jerry Daniels lived. This, as historian Paul Hilmer points out, was "a cataclysmic fall."[646] Hundreds of others, who were teachers, storeowners, restaurateurs, village chiefs, pilots, nurses, politicians, and military officers back in Laos, experienced the same loss of status after they immigrated to the United States. In America, deprived of their traditional leadership roles, they had become, as one Hmong man told John Duffy, "birds who have lost the trees."[647] For a 35-year-old Hmong man in Fresno, his life was reduced to "nothing." "I'm not too happy here," he said. "I earn minimum wage putting spices in bottles and I speak hardly any English. Here, I am nothing."[648] In America, the

---

[643] Stephen Reder, et.al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Fresno, California,* Submitted by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Official of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1983): 1-64; Stephen Reder, *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Fresno, California,* Submitted by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Official of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-62; Bruce T. Downing, et.al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul,* Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-79; Bruce T. Downing, et.al., *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Dallas-Forth Worth, Texas,* Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-56.
[644] Simon Fass, *The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency,* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, 1991), 14.
[645] Bruce T. Downing, et.al, "Hmong Resettlement," *Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Reporter* 14, no. 3 (May 1984): 1-8.
[646] Paul Hilmer, *A People's History of the Hmong,* 268.
[647] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots,* 34.
[648] Ben Barber, "We Share A Lot of Pain in Our Heart," *The Washington Times,* 3 December 1997.

Hmong had become a minority within minorities. They were leaders back home, but they were no longer leaders in the United States. To be a leader in the United States required that they acquired a level of English proficiency and a respectable job. Shong Thao, who survived on welfare after resettling in St. Paul, expressed this frustration, saying: "I used to be a leader and now I don't have a good job to go to. I knew how to organize my people in Laos. Here, with this weather and the Hmong people scattered, I cannot organize. I am very sad about that."[649] Major Wang Seng Khang, a former battalion commander in Laos and a leader for 10,000 Hmong in his refugee camp in Thailand, who took a job as a part-time church liaison and depended on his wife's wages from a jewelry factory to pay rent and on his children to translate for him, expressed a similar anguish with life in America. "When you have no country, no land, no house, no power… [you] have become children in this country," he said.[650] Thus, in the United States, as Duffy has written, "Former leaders became dependent upon their children to communicate with schools, social service agencies, and other representatives of what many perceived as a hostile majority culture. The result, for some, was loss of status and a loss of confidence in their abilities."[651]

Most of all, in the United States, the Hmong knew that the United States was not their home when local U.S. residents began verbally and physically assaulting them. Sometimes the verbal assault came in the form of anti-Hmong rumors or what Ray Hutchison has called "mythologies."[652] The most popular mythology was, perhaps, the one that accused Hmong refugees of stealing, butchering and eating their neighbor's dogs. In one specific instance, one female subject, age 20, told Roger Mitchell, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, on December 1, 1980:

> A friend of my brother, who works at the Co-op, told my brother about something that happened right outside of the store. A man with a very nice dog left the dog in his car while he went into the Co-op. Supposedly, it was a huge German Shepherd. All of a sudden a car of Hmong drove up. They got of their car and

---

[649] Tom Hamburger and Eric Black, "Hmong Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 21 April 1985.
[650] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 206.
[651] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 34.
[652] Ray Hatchison, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, 1-2 and 37-41. Here, Hatchison discusses the two common myths: "the dog-disappearing" myth and the myth of the Hmong as welfare migrants.

> surrounded the car that the dog was in. Then, they snatched the dog from the vehicle and drove off. Apparently, someone witnessed this incident and notified the police. When the police arrived at one of the Hmong homes the dog had been decapitated, skinned, and gutted within ten minutes. The dog's head was found in a nearby garbage can.[653]

Another female, age 35, told of a similar rumor to Mitchell in 1981:

> The story I've been hearing is about the Hmong stealing a dog from a car. This happened on the Randall parking lot. A woman had gone in to shop and she left her dog in the car. It was a Pekinese or a poodle—one of those fancy little dogs. So the window was down a little to give it some air. Some guys saw these Hmong come running up. They reached in through the window and opened the door. They grabbed the mutt and ran. When the woman came out the guys told her what happened and she called the police. When the police came the witnesses told their story, but you know, Orientals all look alike to Americans. So the cops made their search and finally located the house. But it was too late. The pooch was already in the pot.[654]

Related to the dog-napping mythologies was the mythology that the Hmong were exploiting the welfare system. At the heart of this myth was local residents' criticism of the size of Hmong family and their use of food stamps and welfare payments. To get a bigger welfare check, local residents charged, Hmong families "breed like rats," and with their big welfare checks, the Hmong purchased brand new model cars. After a Hmong family in Wausau, Wisconsin was awarded $78,000 following the death of their fourteen-year-old son in a car-bicycle accident, a new rumor surfaced, accusing the Hmong of intentionally asking their children to run in front of cars to get a big insurance settlement.[655]

Very often, the assault on the Hmong went beyond just creating rumors about them. It involved threats, harassment, intimidation, and physical assaults. Recalling an incident that Minnesota State Senator Mee Moua said would have made her start "the

---

[653] Roger Mitchell, "The Will to Believe and Anti-Refugee Rumors," *Midwestern Folklore* 13, no. 1 (1987): 14.
[654] Ibid..
[655] Ibid., 9-10.

first Hmong girl gang in the United States" if "there had been more Hmong girls" in her town, Providence, Rhode Island, at the time and one that had made her "felt so disrespected and so violated that [she] was ready to resort to violence," she wrote:

> It was a beautiful summer day, and my mother and I were sitting by our big bay window; she was trying to teach me how to do traditional Hmong embroidery. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw three young men riding by on their bicycles. As they drew near the window, one of the boys threw a handful of eggs at the window. As the eggs were streaking down one side of the window, they came back from the other direction, and the second boy threw another handful of eggs on the other side of the winder. I was so shocked and afraid, but wanting to see these boys closer, I went up to the window, and as I was peering out to see if I knew who they were, the third boy came up our lawn on his bicycle and looked at me in the yes and spat at the window. As the three of them rode away, as the eggs were streaking down the sides of the window and the wade of spit was running down the center of the window, I became so angry and enraged.[656]

Moua's family eventually left Providence and moved to Appleton, Wisconsin and later to St. Paul, Minnesota.

Like the Moua family, between 1982 and 1984, three-quarters of Hmong families in Philadelphia left the city to join friends and relatives in other cities, and more left after several Hmong residents were attacked in 1984. In August of that year, Jeremy Hein recorded:

> A group of black youths cornered two Hmong men in West Philadelphia and told them, "We don't want people like you around here." When the Hmong ran to a relative's house the youths pursued them, attempted to break down the door, and threw rocks through the window. Several weeks later a Hmong man [Seng Vang] from Canada came to visit his brothers. After their car was vandalized and a call did not bring the police, the brothers started driving around the neighborhood looking for the vandals. A group of black men pulled them from the car and the visitor was beaten, resulting in two broken legs and brain injury. When one

[656] Mee Moua, "Mee Moua: MN State Senator, First Hmong American Elected to A State Legislature, A Closer Look," *Hmong Is You* 3, (Summer 2007): 8.

> brother and a Catholic priest returned in a van the next day to look for clues, they were bombarded with rocks. The next week, a black man threw a brick at an elderly Hmong man riding a bicycle.[657]

After the attack, Lue Vang, one of the victims, knew it was time for his family to leave. "I am not angry," he said. "But if we keep staying I don't know when someone [else will] die."[658]

Hmong residents in Wisconsin and Minnesota, two of the top destinations for Hmong families, too, were victims of random acts of violence and harassment. In 1980, Wausau, Wisconsin, was an ethnically homogenous city with less than one percent of the population as non-white.[659] As such, the influx of Hmong refugees to Wausau was seen by local residents as an Asian invasion of their safe, cozy, and middle-class neighborhoods and city.[660] The responses to Hmong resettlement in Wausau by many old settlers were intimidation, harassment, and violence. Hmong children were verbally and physically abused in schools while Hmong adults became targets of random violent attacks.[661] Recalling his family's resettlement experience in Wausau, Wisconsin in 1987, Xia Tou Lor, said:

> When we are in Wausau and we are driving along the street people yell to us when they see that we are Asian people. They always yell to us and showing fingers to us. And one guy just follow me I was scared because he's a big guy. He followed me until my home when I stopped at my parking lot by my backyard at my home on Hamilton Street. This big guy followed me to my backyard and he opened the door. He came over to me and I was scared. I closed my window and stayed in the car. I did not open my window and I locked my door. He kicked on the outside of my door and said, "I hate you people! Go back to your country! I hate you people! I'm going to kill you!" He got angry to me without

---

[657] Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 83.
[658] William Robbins, "Violence Forces Hmong to Leave Philadelphia," *New York Times*, 17 September 1984.
[659] Roy Beck, "The Ordeal of Immigration in Wausau," *Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 4 (1994): 86. [84-97]
[660] Jo Ann Kolytk, *New Pioneers in the Heartland*, 5.
[661] John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots*, 173.

> any reason. I was angry too, but I better stay quiet because I have not enough energy to fight him because he's a big guy and I was a little guy.[662]

In neighboring Minnesota, a Hmong man, thinking it was safe to walk in America as it was in Laos and Thailand, was shot in the leg with a pellet gun while walking at night near the Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul. A Hmong woman was attacked by a German shepherd and bitten on the buttocks as she stood on a sidewalk while she was trying to read a street sign, part of her English assignment for the day. A neighbor told police that children in a nearby house had deliberately released the dog on her. Two white men carrying clubs attacked two Hmong brothers who were walking home at 1 a.m. from their dishwashing jobs at a St. Paul restaurant. One of the brothers were beaten unconscious. Hmong could not understand why any stranger would break their windows, hurt them, or call them "Chinks."[663]

At the root of the attacks on Hmong residents in Philadelphia and elsewhere was what immigrant scholars have called "nativism," an ideology that ranks the foreign-born below the native-born and construes the foreign-born as aliens who are not legitimate members of the country.[664] At the core of this nativist ideology, which can be traced as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in U.S. history, are the racial inferiority of immigrants, the inability of immigrants to assimilate into American culture, and their "theft" of American jobs.[665] In city after city, Hmong were attacked because the "natives" believed that the Hmong received special and undeserved privileges or that they stole jobs and public services away from the natives. After the attack on Hmong residents in Philadelphia, for example, a Black woman who ran a block club in the neighborhood and helped to distribute leaflets in the neighborhood to prevent such an attack from recurring, explained, "These youngsters are doing what they were learning at

---

[662] D.C. Everest Area Schools, *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, (Wausau, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2000), 69.
[663] Tom Hamburger and Eric Black, "Hmong Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* (April 21, 1985), pp. 1A & 29A; and "Refugees are usually victims of Crime," *The Dispatch* (October 20, 1980). IIM Files, Box 99, Folder 4, IHRC, U of MN.
[664] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955).
[665] Joe R. Feagin, "Old Poison in New Bottles: The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism," in Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States, ed. J.F. Perea, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 13-14. (13-43)

the table—they're hearing adults say the Asians are taking jobs, they're all getting welfare, they're dirty."[666]

Similarly, local resentment toward Hmong built up after the Minnesota Agricultural Enterprise for New Americans (MAENA) and the Hiawatha Valley Farm Cooperative (HFVA) introduced Hmong refugees to farming in Minnesota as a way to transition them from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency in the early 1980s.[667] "They're the aliens, living off my tax dollar, that's what fries me," criticized Martha Unger, a St. Paul woman who had rented a county garden plot in the area of Larpenteur Ave and west of Rice Street for several years. "We are in the minority out here. It's reverse discrimination. We're paying their way, and we're paying through the nose." Unger was also unhappy that Hmong gardeners did not seem to follow the same rules. They used too much water from the pump to irrigate their gardens, had some "objectionable personal habits," and were pushing the Americans out. "And they've bought bigger and better cars than everyone else," Unger added, "yet they can't even read and write English." Unger's views, the author of *The Dispatch* article noted, "echoed the opinions of several groups in St. Paul who see the refugees as competition for tax dollars, jobs, housing and other services."[668]

The native resentment toward Hmong refugees was especially acrimonious because Hmong refugees were resettled in the low-cost, inner-city housing and neighborhood where they were forced to compete for the entry-level jobs that were once readily available to blacks and other racial minorities. "The Hmong seem to have things people who have lived here for years still do not have," explained Jim Mann, the owner of a barbeque restaurant at Selby Avenue and Avon Street. "No one is helping black people to get on welfare, to get on food stamps, to get on the public housing rolls, to get on-the-job training. The Hmong people barely speak English. How do they get bank loans? How do they get into public housing?" Racist rumors also circulated in the community in St. Paul alleging that the Hmong "don't have to pay taxes for five years,

---

[666] Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 84.
[667] *Refugee Reports*, vol. 3, no. 24, (October 22, 1982), IIM Files, Box 100, Folder 2, IHRC, U of MN; Chia Y. Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora," 45-47.
[668] "Crop of Resentment Growing," *The Dispatch*, 20 October 1980. IIM Files, Box 99, Folder 4, IHRC, U of MN.

that they all know karate, that they eat cats and dogs, [and] that they're storing up guns." Yet, as Cedric Mitchell, who worked at the Martin Luther King Center at 270 Kent Street, said: "It's all false. Especially the cats and dogs. They won't even allow them in their houses, much less eat them."[669]

From city to city, the Hmong had strangers yell at them: "Chinks Go Home," or "Go Back to Your Country." Sometimes the words were spray-painted onto the walls of Hmong houses or onto the sides of their cars. The Hmong were victims of expressions of nativism even in their homes. "In Eau Claire," historian Ronald Takaki writes, "Hmong names stand out in the telephone book, and they get hostile phone calls. Angry voices tell them: 'Go back to your country.' 'You eat dog.' 'I'm coming to kill you!'"[670] Speaking of the verbal harassment he received over the phone a year after his arrival, a Hmong man in his thirties said:

> Someone called me on the phone and pretended to ask questions like a survey. He said cousin did not speak English so he wanted to talk to me about the survey. But after a while he said mean things to me. First, he asked, "Do you eat rice?" I said, "Yes." Then he said if I wanted to eat rice I should go back to my country because there is only enough rice here for Americans. I was very angry but tried to be calm.

Another Hmong in his forties told of a similar incident:

> I heard that Americans don't like the Hmong and that they want the Hmong to back to Laos. They say that the Hmong came here for AFDC [i.e., public assistance]. But they also think that the Hmong take away their jobs if the Hmong are working. Americans called me on the phone and told me that. They said we should go back to Laos and we do not belong in the U.S.A. I was very frustrated. Americans should know that we are humans too.[671]

Implicit in these verbal abuses was, of course, the belief that the Hmong were foreigners in America—a belief that historically and continues to cast and treat Americans of Asian

---

[669] Ibid.
[670] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 463.
[671] Jeremy Hein, "Interpersonal Discrimination against Hmong Americans: Parallels and Variation in Microlevel Racial Inequality," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41, no. 3, (Summer, 2000), 422-423.

descent as foreigners in the United States.[672] Hmong were told to go back too often that many Hmong felt that America was not their home and that they should go back to their homeland. As Sy Vang told reporters in 1985, "It is not natural for us here. Sometimes people yell at us, "Go back to your own country,' and sometimes I think they are right. We lost our country. Maybe we should have fought longer. Maybe we should go back."[673] The Hmong, in short, did not find a "home" in America because neither the United States government nor local American residents welcomed them. While the government did not want to accept them because government officials thought they were "preliterate" and too "primitive" to be resettled in America, local residents wanted them to "go back" to their country because, as foreigners, they were "invading" America and "stealing" jobs and services, which they did not deserve, from local residents.

Nostalgia and the Struggle to Return Home

In light of these early refugee experiences of displacements and nativism, it is no surprise that they exhibited a strong desire to return to their homeland after resettling in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In fact, while other Southeast Asian refugees were eager to resettle abroad, many Hmong refugees actually refused the offer of resettlement because they were waiting for a chance to go home.[674] "Most people," said Dennis Grace of the International Rescue Committee who helped coordinate the network of private organizations to bring half a million Southeast Asian refugees to the United States, "are dying to come to America… The Hmong did whatever they could to not come to America." The Hmong, he added, "wanted to go home… [T]hey never lost the heightened interest in returning to [Laos]."[675] This, author Anne Fadiman observes, was "a unique situation historically. The Hmong are the first refugees we know who

---

[672] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From A Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans,* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s,* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).
[673] Tom Hamburger and Eric Black, "Hmong Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star and Tribune,* 21 April 1985.
[674] Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States,* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 41-42; Lynellyn Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 50.
[675] Paul Hilmer, *A People's History of the People,* 195 and 215.

were offered resettlement and in large numbers simply turned it down."[676] Many who eventually accepted resettlement in the 1970s and 1980s did so, thinking that their stay abroad would be temporary and they would return to Laos to rebuild the country as soon as it was safe for them to do so.[677] They, in a sense, saw themselves largely as sojourners in America. As Yuepheng Xiong of St. Paul, Minnesota explained:

> Hmong, everybody knows, never intended to settle in America permanently when they first came here. They saw America as a temporary shelter. People thought they were sojourners. They were here temporarily until it was safe to return home. They never thought they would stay here to this day. So many Hmong people followed General Vang Pao here, thinking this would be a resting place. This was in the minds of many people before they came here. They thought they were coming to America to just rest temporarily. They would all go back when it was safe to do so.[678]

The hostile nativism and racism that Hmong families encountered in America only worked to bolster their nostalgia (a longing for the lost home and a glorified past) and their desire to return to Laos.

The Hmong desire to return home is readily found in accounts people have written on the Hmong. In the latest book on the Hmong, *A People's History of the Hmong*, historian Paul Hillmer, for example, writes, "In the 1970s and '80s, Hmong desire to return to Laos was easy to find."[679] In the widely read and hugely popular *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Anne Fadiman recorded a Hmong leader in Merced named John Xiong telling her:

> All the older people, they say, We want to go back. We born over there, we come here. Very nice country but we don't speak the language, we cannot drive, we just stay home isolated. Over there we can have a little piece of farm, raise chicken, pig, and cow, don't forget to wake up early, harvest on time, make enough this year to another coming year. That's it. Then we feeling like

---

[676] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 168.
[677] Chia Youyee Vang, "Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad," in *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, ed. Ieva Zake, (Plagrave Macmilan, 2009), 218.
[678] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, tape recording, St. Paul, MN, 22 October 2008.
[679] Paul Hilmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 268.

> peaceful. Here, we do right and they say wrong. Then we do wrong and they say right. Which way we go? We want to go home.[680]

In a separate article on the Hmong in 1997, Fadiman wrote, "Nearly every older Hmong wishes it were possible to return to Laos."[681] In her study of Hmong migration to the Midwest, Cathleen Jo Faruque similarly documented the desire of the Hmong to go home, quoting a Hmong female adult saying, "I really feel homesick and I miss Laos. The outside doesn't look like home and the inside doesn't look like home to me. In this country, we have food and clothing, we have a shelter, but my insides are broken to pieces. I wish I could go home one day, but I don't know if this will be possible."[682] Dr. Yang Dao, a Hmong scholar and former officer of the United Lao National Liberation Front, also told me, "Many people, regardless of whether they were Hmong, Lao, Khmu, or other ethnic group, were seriously homesick. Many really missed Laos after arriving in this country. Many people, especially the ones struggling with problems of adjustment in America, surely longed to go home."[683]

The Hmong desire to go home—which the Hmong called *peb qub teb qub chaw*, 'our old fields and old lands,"—is also found in a 1982 survey conducted by the University of Minnesota. In the survey, an overwhelming eighty-six percent of the respondents indicated that they would return to Laos while only seven percent said that they would not and some sixty-five percent said life in the United States was worse than life in Laos [Table 1]. Furthermore, the dream of returning home is found in Brigitte Marshall's four-month field report of the adaptation of Hmong refugees of Fresno and Merced, California, to American society in 1990. Reflecting on Hmong conditions in the United States and their hope to return to Laos, Brigitte Marshall, a former ESL teacher in the COERR Adult English School in Phanat Nikhom Processing Center, Thailand, wrote:

> I cannot help looking forward to the day when resettlement is not the only option for the Hmong, for the day when return to familiar ground becomes a real and

---

[680] Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, 207.
[681] Anne Fadiman, "Heroes' Welcome," *Civilization,* (August/September 1997), 60
[682] Cathleen Jo Faruque, *Migration of Hmong to the Midwestern United States,* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002), 138.
[683] Yang Dao, interview with author, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, 02 February 2009. Also see Box 15, Folder 33, 35, 36, 38, and 41 of the Special Collections, Refugee Studies Center, IHRC, U of MN-Twin Cities, Minneapolis, Minnesota, for more testimonies of individuals, namely Ka Mao Vang, Ge Vang, Chue Yang, Xa Vang, and others, who wanted to go back to Laos.

> safe possibility. If we consider physical and material conditions alone, then life in the U.S. may be better than life in a refugee camp, but there are other, perhaps more important considerations, and it is definitely true that for many Hmong, life in the U.S. is not a good life.[684]

Apart from these, the Hmong people's desire to return home was readily located in newspapers and interviews. General Vang Pao himself exhibited a strong desire to return home. In a 1980 article, for example, when asked whether General Vang Pao wanted to return to Laos, he quickly responded, "I want to go back to die in my country. I tell you very true. I want to go back to die." At the time, according to the article, 90 percent of the Hmong in the United States wanted to return with Vang Pao.[685] Vang Pao reiterated his desire to return home in 1995, saying, "For me, I'd prefer to go back. That was the land where I was raised, where I born."[686] In fact, according to Vang Pao in a recent interview, he had no intention on coming to the United States after he escaped to Thailand in 1975. "I told myself that when the country became stable, I would return to Laos," he said. "I had no plan to come to the United States at the time, but after arriving in Thailand, the Prime Minister and other Thai officials urged me to leave Thailand. If I stayed, they said, the communists would infiltrate their country. I was forced to leave, and so I came to America." Even after years of living abroad, Vang Pao still dreamed of returning to Laos. "Laos is our country," he explained. "Our ancestors died in that country. Our parents died in that country. That country belongs to all the Laotian people. Therefore, when all these conflicted have ended and the country is stable, I will surely go back."[687] Vang Pao continued to express a desire to go home as recent as December

---

[684] Brigitte Marshall, "Field Report: The Hmong in Fresno and Merced: July-November 1990," in Brigitte Marshall Files on Southeast Asian Refugees. MS-SEA013. Special Collections and Archives. The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA. Box 1 Folder 1.

[685] "General Dreams of Returning to Laos," *The Dispatch*, 20 October 1980, IIM Files, Box 99, Folder 4, IHRC, U of MN.

[686] Alex Pulaski, "Revered Hmong Leader Vang Pao Stands Tall in Two Worlds," *Fresno Bee*, 1 January 1995, A15.

[687] Vang Pao interview with a German film crew in California in 2007. Author transcribed and translated the interview for the crew. For more on Vang Pao and his decision to leave Thailand for America, see also "Secret Wars," directed by Rob G., Optimum Films, Inc., Arvada, Colorado, 2007, video.

2009 when he announced that he was returning to Laos to negotiate peace and reconciliation with the Lao PDR government.[688]

TABLE 1

Interests in returning to Laos

In a 1982 survey, many Hmong commented that their life in Laos before the communist takeover was more free than their new life in American and that most Hmong adults do not feel comfortable here. "People could live the Hmong way without intervention. They could grow food, build a house or move almost anywhere they liked. In the U.S. there are severe restrictions on their way of life."

	YES	NO	Don't Know
Is life better in the US than in Laos	28%	65%	-----
Would you go back to Laos?	86%	7%	3%
Do you think you will spend the rest of your life in the U.S.?	10%	18%	69%

Totals do not equal 100% because some respondents did not answer some of the questions.

Source: Hmong Community Survey, conducted by the University of Minnesota, in 1982.[689]

Most of all, the Hmong people's desire to return to Laos was found in the songs that they composed and sang in the late 1970s and 1980s. Prior to the exodus of the Hmong from Laos, most of their music consisted of what Gary Yia Lee has called "dry singing," poetic improvisation sung without music known as *kwvtxhiaj*, and music "heard through the actual playing of Hmong musical instruments such as the reed pipe (qeej), the

[688] Roger Warner, "No Thanks to the State Department, the Last Remnant of the Vietnam War May Be About to End," *The Huntington Post*, 23 December 2009; Stephen Magagnini, "Vang Pao Says He's Returning to Laos: Ex-General Aiming for Reconciliation," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 December 2009.

[689] Box 99, Folder 4, IIM Files, IHRC, U of MN-Twin Cities, Minneapolis, MN. See table also in Bruce T. Downing, D. Olney, S. Mason, and G. Hendricks, *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Refugee Settlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1984), 78.

flute (raj), or the mouth harp (ncas)."[690] After 1975, not only did the form of Hmong music transform and expand to include music with lyrics and new instruments such as guitar and drum as well as melodies borrowed from local dominant cultures such as Thai, Lao and Chinese (i.e., modern music), the themes and messages expressed through the songs they sang were also different. Prior to the exodus, their kwvtxhiaj were mostly either k*wvtxhiaj plees* (courtship songs) or *kwvtxhiaj ntsuag* (songs about orphans).[691] After 1975, however, their *kwvtxhiaj* expanded to include songs of loss and separation due to war and persecution, longing to return home, the need to unite, love one another, and find the Hmong people a true kingdom.[692] Lamenting the loss of the homeland and the separation of families after the war, Chia Chu Kue, age 68, living in Providence, Rhode Island, dry sang a *kwvtxhiaj*, saying:

> Our country fell and belongs to the others now
> But we still feel that we have relatives left behind
> For this reason we cannot swallow food or water
> Nothing will go down into our bodies
>
> Why does this year seem different than other years?
> Because we all escaped from our country
> We had to prepare the three sheafs of rice before leaving
> We wanted to escape, and now we have thrown our country away
> Leaving it to be cultivated by the others
>
> We feel angry
> And wish that we could change into a bird or an insect
> Flying and singing in the mountain forests

---

[690] Gary Yia Lee, "Dreaming Across the Ocean: Media, Globalization, and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2006): 1-31.
[691] See, for example, Soob Yeeb Lauj, "kwv txhiaj," recorded in Laos, 1975. Special collection of audiocassettes, Hmong Archive, St. Paul, MN. Item #: LA/KT/L56555/1975. See also Ceeb Xeem Tsom, "Kwvtxhiaj Xov Tooj Cua Hmoob Chiang Mai," volume 1-4, recorded in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for kwvtxhiaj sung by Hmong Thai during this period. Special collection of audiocassettes, Hmong Archive, St. Paul, MN. Item #: TH/KT/T755C22/1970/v.1, v.2, v.3, and v.4.
[692] Gary Yia Lee, "Dreaming Across the Ocean: Media, Globalization, and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2006): 1-31.

Then we could fly back to visit our old villages and homes[693]

In his *lus taum*, another form of *kwv txiaj*, Va Pa Ger Yang also lamented being victims of the U.S. war in Hmong homeland, the loss of the homeland, the forced exodus from the homeland, the continued struggle to retain their homeland after the war, the longing by those left behind for the return of the Hmong leader to save them, and the life of slavery under Communism.[694]

The feeling of loss and the desire to return home were also prominent features in the modern songs that Hmong refugees composed and sang after 1975. In a modern song entitled, "Remembering Long Cheng," originally produced in 1983, for example, Ze Moua sang of his nostalgia and longing to return to Long Cheng, the Hmong "city" where General Vang based his military headquarters during the war. "Thinking of Long Cheng in the past," he sang, "Because of the instability of the country, you and I were forced to leave; Would there be day when we could return to Long Cheng?"[695] In a different song, describing the life of the Hmong eight years after the war, Moua lamented the displacement of the Hmong from Laos, the life of being refugees in foreign lands, the loss of their freedom and independence, and the guilt of leaving some Hmong behind in the jungles in a life of abject poverty eating roots and yams to survive.[696] These same feelings of loss, separation, and nostalgia also appeared in other singer's and band's music at the time, including Doua Pao Xiong's "Hmong Lost their Country" and "When There Is No Leader," and the band Tsoom Hmoob's "Sad for Loss of Country."[697]

The desire to go home was a central part of the Hmong diasporic experience. To be able to go home, however, real political change in the homeland must occur. The Hmong in the diaspora could not just go home because they were considered enemies of

---

[693] Found in Amy R. Catlin, *The Hmong: From Asia to Providence*, (Providence, RI: Center for Hmong Lore, Roger Williams Park Museum, 1981), 33-34.

[694] Vas Paj Ntxawg Yaj, "Hmoob Poob Teb Poob Chaw," [Hmong Lost Their Country or Hmong Becoming Refugees], audiocassette, no date, private collection. Full transcription in Appendix C.

[695] Zeb Muas, "Nco Txog Looj Ceeb," CD. Originally produced in 1983 but reproduced by DM Video Production, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2003. Full transcription in Appendix C.

[696] Zeb Muas, "8 Xyoo Peb Hmoob Tawg Rog," CD. Originally produced in 1983 but reproduced by DM Video Production, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2003. See also Zeb Moua, "Txog Thaum Twg Hmoob Mam Sib Sau," [When Will the Hmong Reunite], CD. Full transcription in Appendix C.

[697] Nruas Pov Xyooj, "Hmoob Poob Tebchaws," and "Thaum Tsis Muaj Tus Coj," CD. Originally produced in the Ban Vinai in the early 1980s but reproduced by Bangkok Market in Minneapolis, MN. Tsoom Hmoob, "Kho Siab Poob Tebchaws," audiocassette. Reproduced by Suab Kub Production in St. Paul, MN, in 1998. Full transcription in Appendix C.

the homeland government for their role in the Secret War in the 1960s. The formation of Hmong transnational political organizations such as the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos in Thailand in 1980 and the United Lao National Liberation Front, or Neo Hom, in the United States in 1981, thus, represented efforts by the Lao-Hmong diaspora to change the political situation back home in order for them to leave the harsh realities of diasporic life. Aside from the effort to end the Communist persecution of the Hmong in the jungle of Laos, Hmong transnational politics was the hope of the exiles for a chance to return home. It was the key to unlocking the door to the homeland. As Wa Her Vang, an active Neo Hom supporter in California, told me when asked why he joined Neo Hom, "I joined Neo Hom and supported its activities because I wanted to go home. America is a great country, but it is not my country. I still fell like an outsider here even after I became an American citizen. I would go back to my home country if I could, but I cannot go back right now because the country is still communist and it is not safe for me. I will definitely go back when it is liberated."[698] In fact, it was because of this profound nostalgia for their homeland in the Lao highlands that Vang Pao was able to so effectively marshal support and funds for his program to liberate Laos.

Hmong transnational politics was also the key to the recovery of their loss of status and human dignity. This was particularly the case for Hmong men who plunged downward from a high occupational and social status at home—from professional to menial, from elite to an impoverished minority—and those who felt they had lost their independence and who struggled daily to survive in the new land. As Yuepheng Xiong, a former Ph.D. student in Asian History at the University of Minnesota and owner of the Hmong ABC store who had produced a number of Hmong historical documentaries in the Hmong language, for example, explained:

> Many people became involved in transnational politics because they wanted to go home, and they wanted to go home because they were struggling in this country [America]. Many could not speak English. Many felt a sense of powerlessness. They felt a degradation of status. Every aspect of life was hard for them.

[698] Wa Her Vang, interview with author, 25 September 2008.

> Everything was different. The way of life was different. Even freedom was different.[699]

For those who lost their occupational and social status in the new land, Hmong transnational politics was their key to restoring their status. As Dr. Yang Dao, a former officer and political advisor to the ULNLF, explained:

> Back in Laos, many people were leaders and politicians. Yet, after arriving in this country, they lost all their positions and status. How can you be leaders in this country? You cannot even speak English. When you speak, nobody understands you. All the old leaders lost their leadership position. This was what made them want to go back. Most Hmong leaders, not to mention any name, ended up sweeping the streets and cleaning houses. Many were colonels and higher back in Laos, but they were street sweepers and janitors in America. They felt humiliated and embarrassed. They imagined that if there were democracy in Laos, they would restore their leadership position when they go back. They would be leaders as they were in the past again. They would have face. The humiliation they faced in America and the desire to have face again made many of them want to go back. They did not want to stay in this country because they had no face here.[700]

A supporter of the ULNLF who stayed in Thailand to fight for the ULNLF until he came to the United States in 2004 told me that he got involved in Hmong transnational politics because he wanted to feel like a human being again. Since losing his homeland, he felt like an animal and a "nomad," one that did not have a permanent home but wandered from place to place. He felt like he was no longer important. As a former school teacher in Laos, he felt like a "nobody" in the refugee camps and in the United States. He wanted to feel important and be recognized and treated like a human being again.[701]

Even if they did not experience the status loss that many former Hmong military officers and professionals did, many Hmong families still supported the resistance movements of the ELOL and the ULNLF because life in the United States, for them, was equally, if not more difficult. Transnational politics offered them the hope of escape

---

[699] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[700] Yang Dao, interview with author, 2 February 2009.
[701] Neng Ma Lee, interview with author, 17 November 2008.

from the drudgery and pain of life in America. As Yang Dao explained, "The general population also encountered similar problems. After arriving America, they did not speak English. They did not have the professional skills to get decent and well-paying jobs. Life in America was extremely harsh. Many were severely depressed. Their lives were filled with anxiety. That was why they looked up to Neo Hom and supported its activities."[702] Transnational politics, in this sense, represented a beacon of hope—the hope that their life in isolation and hardship in exile was only temporary, and soon they could return home and resume their agrarian lifestyle in the homeland.[703] Sometimes, even if they knew that they might not have a chance to go back, as Kia Thao, a Hmong interpreter for the Ramsey County Human Resources Department in St. Paul, Minnesota, said, "the pressures and problems here [in America] make them feel like they must" return home.[704] As Nao Kao Lee, an elderly Hmong man, for example, explained:

> I am old and I know I cannot go back. But if I could, I would go. This country is very comfortable, but it is not the same as living in Laos, where we didn't rent a house like here. We owned our house because I built it with an ax myself. I miss our cows and chickens and our two horses. When we left Houaysouy I just had to take the ropes off and let them go in the forest, and I don't know if they are alive or not. Houaysouy was a very beautiful village. You could see the sun rising or setting from our house. I do miss it all the time.[705]

In short, as anthropologist George Scott put it, while the realistic chances of recovering their "traditional way of life in the mountains and thereby [achieving] their long-cherished goal for final political autonomy" in Laos "have been irretrievably lost, the dream of somehow one day returning to Laos and reclaiming their mountain homeland lives go on whenever old Hmong men sit and talk about the past and make plans for the future."[706] Many Hmong refugees, in fact, in the early 1980s, adamantly refused to resettle in a third country. They preferred to stay close to Laos, so they could return

---

[702] Yang Dao, interview with author, 2 February 2009.
[703] Tom Hamburger and Erick Black, "Hmong Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 21 April 1985.
[704] Ruth Hammond, "Strangers in a Strange Land," *Twin Cities Reader*, 1-7 June 1989, 6-10.
[705] Anne Fadiman, "Heroes' Welcome," *Civilization*, (August/September 1997), 60.
[706] George C. Scott, "Hmong Aspirations For A Separate State in Laos," 119.

home as soon as there was a change of regime in the homeland.[707] Many refused to entertain the thought that they might never see their beloved country or return home again.[708] The desire to go home and the hope of returning home were so strong that sometimes even if they had no idea how the liberation of their homeland would happen and even if they and their families were impoverished, they still contributed money to the ULNLF and the ELOL to help realize the dream of liberating the homeland and returning home.[709] Transnational politics represented an extraordinarily creative and powerful response by a dispirited and scarred people to the cruelty and injustices that they encountered in their new land. It was, to borrow Peter Worsely's words, a "movement of the disinherited."[710] It gave the people who lost hope in the new land a renewed hope, purpose, and sense of belonging. It breathed life to their seemingly lifeless and idle existence in exile, whether in the refugee camps in Thailand or the run-down urban communities in America.

Transnational politics also enabled Hmong men who had lost their traditional leadership status to reassert their leadership status, authority and power in the Hmong community in exile. When they engaged in transnational politics, they not only kept themselves active and alive with the hope of returning home in the future, they regained their status as leaders of the Hmong community who dedicated their lives to finding a way back to the homeland for all who wished to return. It is within this context of the Hmong people's efforts to restore their leadership status and dignity that we can understand why most of the people engaged in transnational politics were men and not women. Unlike men, women did not suffer the loss of status as acutely as the men did.[711]

---

[707] Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Jeremy Hein, *From Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 41-42; and Paul Rabé, *Voluntary Repatriation: The Case of Hmong in Ban Vinai*, (Bangkok: Refugee Information Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992).
[708] Somtawin Khongsawatkiat, "Plight of Indochinese Refugees in U.S.," *The Nation*, 21 June 1981.
[709] Sanford J. Ungar, *Fresh Blood: The New American Immigrants*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 192; Ruth Hammond, "The Great Refugee Shakedown: The Hmong Are Paying to Free Laos—But What's Happening to the Money?" *The Washington Post*, 16 April, 1989, B1.
[710] Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).
[711] For studies that document men experiencing a higher level of psychological distress (anxiety, depression, hostility, paranoia, and phobia) than women due to loss of leadership and occupational roles and status within the family and how the level of the severity of their mental and emotional distress was associated with the loss of their vocational and social roles, lack of English proficiency, and increasing dependence on others for financial support, see Joseph Westermeyer, Tou Fu Vang, and Gaohli Lyfoug,

The women, skilled in the art of embroidery or needlework, could find work in America, but the men could not. Substantially more women were also able to secure work as part-time or casual labor.[712] Even if they did not find work, women did not suffer the blow to their ego that men did because they were not culturally expected to be the providers for their families. In contrast, traditionally the breadwinners of their families, Hmong men who were unable to find employment and forced to depend on welfare in the United States suffered a huge blow to their ego. They felt they had lost their role and prestige in the family. The role loss became especially corrosive when the men had to rely on their children for interpretation and their wives for survival.[713] For Hmong women, therefore, the desire of return was not as strong as it was for men. They did not lose much by living in exile, and they did not have much to recover by returning to the homeland. In fact, for Hmong women, their life in the United States was better than their life in Laos. In the United States, they had greater freedom, more protection, and more opportunities for education and social mobility. In her study of Hmong life in Wisconsin, Jo Ann Koltyk writes, for example, that Hmong women, "generally up to the age of forty-five, stated they would not go back because of the improvements in their life style and living conditions" in America. One woman told her: "We [women] have it much better here in America. We have running water in our houses, so that our work is not as hard here. We can take our cloths to the laundromat. There is plenty of food and refrigerators to keep the flies off the meat. And there are doctors and hospitals so that our children do not get sick and die. I do not want to go back."[714] Anthropologist Nancy Donnelly similarly observed that "no Hmong woman has ever told me she wanted to live in Laos again."[715] Beth Goldstein, too, found that "Hmong girls…did not want to return to the harder lives

---

"Migration and Mental Health: Association of Pre- and Post-Migration Factors With Self-Rating Scales," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 171 (1983): 92-96; Joseph Westermeyer, Mayka Bouafuely, and Tou Fu Vang, "Hmong Refugees in Minnesota: Sex Roles and Mental Health," *Medical Anthropology* 8 (1984): 229-245.

[712] Daphne N. Winland, "Christianity and Community: Conversion and Adaptation among Hmong Refugee Women," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 1, (1994): 30.

[713] Beth L. Goldstein, "Schooling for Cultural Transitions: Hmong Girls and Boys in American High Schools," (Ph.D Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985): 100-102; Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Hmong Women*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 73-76.

[714] Jo Ann Koltyk, *New Pioneers in the Heartland*, 126.

[715] Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Hmong Women*, 75.

they lived in Laos."[716] Given the greater freedom and protection that Hmong women enjoyed in the United States, it is, thus, not surprising that Hmong women were adjusting better to American society and less eager to participate in transnational politics than Hmong men were.

Rebuilding Broken Communities

Hmong transnational politics was not just about the search for home, a fight to return home, a cry for human dignity, and a struggle to recover lost self, role and status. It was also about the rebuilding of broken lives and shattered communities in and from exile—lives and communities that had been disrupted and broken because of the secret wars and their forced displacement from the homeland. To rebuild their lives and a sense of community in the midst of the chaos of refugee life in Thailand, followers of Yang Shong Lue, the Hmong Mother of Writing and architect of the Pahawh and inspiration for Chao Fa movements in Phou Bia Mountain in the 1970s and thereafter in Thailand, established the Chao Fa confraternity in Center 3 of Ban Vinai, the largest Hmong refugee camp in Thailand, in 1979. The idea for the confraternity began in 1977 when a Hmong foreteller in Center 3 named Sao Yang announced that God was going to give the Hmong a writing script through him.[717] Among those who initially gathered with Sao Yang to brainstorm the erection of the Chao Fa temple for God to reveal the writing to the Hmong were Chia Koua Vang, a student of Yang Shong Lue and later the co-author of *Mother of Writing* with William Smalley and Ghia Yee Vang, and Lee Chai, the best known student of Chia Koua Vang. Chia Koua Vang, however, eventually disaffected from the group due to internal ideological difference between him and Sao Yang. Sao Yang insisted that the writing that God had revealed to him in a dream was the second stage of the Pahawh writing script, and that God had instructed them to teach Hmong refugees in Ban Vinai that second state of the script. However, Chia Koua insisted that

[716] Beth L. Goldstein, "Schooling for Cultural Transitions," 213.
[717] William Smalley, with Chia Koua Vang and Nhia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of A Hmong Messianic Script*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 122-123.

they used the third stage of the Pahawh script in the refugee camp.[718] In 1978, Chia Koua abandoned the project, left the group, and immigrated to the United States.[719] A year later, Lee Chai, who initially learned the third stage of the Pahawh from Chia Koua Vang in Nam Phong refugee camp, formed a Chao Fa confraternity in Center 3 with Sao Yang and other Chao Fa followers. They named the confraternity "Hmoob Koos Haum Haum Xeeb," which translates to the Center for Hmong Harmony.[720] This was, thus, the start of what anthropologist Nicholas Tapp has called the *koom haum haum xeeb* movement in the camp.[721]

The Chao Fa confraternity had three primary functions, according to Lee Chai, the principal cultural, social and historical teacher and community organizer at the center and the person to popularize the movement internationally. The first was to study, research, and develop a Hmong national religion, like Buddhism and Christianity, to unite the Hmong people in the midst of their dislocation and religious factionalism. The second was to teach the sacred messianic script, the Pahawh, and promote it as a symbol of the Hmong people's national identity. The third was to develop poetry, music and arts to heal the heartaches of Hmong refugees whose lives had been devastated and scarred by the traumas of war and displacement, so that they could cope with the loneliness and agonies of their hopeless life of exile in a foreign land. The Chao Fa confraternity, as Lee Chai explained to me, was:

> A place for men, women, and children who experienced great sorrows in their lives, who lost their husbands, wives, and loved ones, who were sad, angry and indignant, to come and release their frustration and express their sorrows and grievances. It was a place for them tell God in heaven their pain and suffering and ask God for blessing and healing, so they could feel less anxious and more relieved about the harsh living conditions under which they lived.[722]

Outside of Ban Vinai refugee camp, followers of Yang Shong Lue, namely Pa Kao Her and his officers of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos, rebuilt community

---

[718] For the development of the messianic script and its various stages, see William Smalley, with Chia Koua Vang and Nhia Yee Yang, *Mother of Writing*, 64-74.
[719] Chia Koua Vang, interview with author, St. Paul, MN, 19 March 2009.
[720] Lee Chai, interview with author, St. Paul, Minnesota, 12 January 2009.
[721] Nicolas Tapp, "Reformation of Culture: Hmong Refugees from Laos," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, no. 1 (1988): 23.
[722] Lee Chai, interview with author, St. Paul, Minnesota, 12 January 2009.

through the formation of the ELOL the military training camp in Nan province in northeastern Thailand. In the ELOL training camp, as in Ban Vinai refugee camp, they were building a community of followers of Yang Shong Lue. Unlike Lee Chai and his colleagues in the temple, however, Pa Kao Her and his officers in ELOL and the military camp were more militant. While religion and the teaching of the messianic script were the focuses and activities of the Chao Fa confraternity in Ban Vinai, politics and the defense of the Hmong community through armed struggle against communist Laos were the focuses and operations of the ELOL and the military camp. Lee Chai and his associates neither prepared their followers nor led an army of Chao Fa fighters to fight any government force. Lee Chai himself insisted that he never picked up a gun and fired it in his life.[723] By contrast, Pa Kao Her and his officers were actively recruiting and arming Hmong refugees to help the Chao Fa fighters in the jungle of Lao defend what they considered historically Hmong territory in the homeland. Their concern was not just limited to the cultivation of harmony and the preservation of identity among the Hmong through the development and pedagogy of a common language and religion. They were also equally concerned about the restoration of their land and territory in the homeland which, they believed, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese had invaded and confiscated from them.[724]

Because their emphases were different, the cultural symbols and artifacts that Pa Kao Her and his officers created to mark the Hmong national identity were also fundamentally different from those that Lee Chai and his associates constructed at the center. While Lee Chai and his associates emphasized a common religion, language, cultural gods and heroes, such as Tswb Tshoj and Xeem Xais, and shared historical memories as markers of Hmong national identity, Pa Kao and his officers added a flag, a national anthem, and unique Chao Fa uniforms to their identity.[725] The flags hang on the

---

[723] Lee Chai, interview with author, St. Paul, Minnesota, 12 January 2009.
[724] Sue Her, interview with author, St. Paul, MN, 10 November 2008.
[725] For more on the painted idols of Hmong gods and cultural heroes in Ban Vinai, see Nicolas Tapp, "Reformation of Culture," 23-25; Keith Quincy, *Hmong: History of A People*, (Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press, 1995), 217-218. For more on Tswb Tshoj, see Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong and America's Secret War in Laos*, (Spokane: Washington University Press, 2000), 24; Nicholas Tapp, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 131-144; Heu Tcha Siong, Ya Tcha Nzeu, Ya Va Thay, *Keeb Kwm Hmoob Rws Tsev Koom Haum Vib Nais* (Origin of the Hmong According to Vinai "Confraternity," recorded and published by Yves Bertrais, (Village de Javouhey, France: Association Communauté Hmong, 1985), 32-53.

poles outside of the Chao Fa temple that Pa Kao Her and his officers erected as a place of worship, a sacred space to offer thanks and ask Hmong deities, like Tswb Tshoj and Xeem Xais, for help and protection, in the military camp.

At four corners of the flag were four symbols, each representing a Xob (pronounced as So), the God of Lightning. The four Xob in four corners symbolized the Chao Fa cosmological understanding of the four gods on four corners of the earth. These gods control the air and the wind on the earth's atmosphere. They ensure that the seasons change. They send down rain to water the earth. In the flag were also a sun, representing justice, and a star, representing moral laws. Together, the star and the sun are symbolic reminders to humans that the world is governed by moral laws. Those who act justly will receive God's blessings, but those who are unjust will receive punishment from God. The star and the sun are also symbols to encourage people to fight and stand for justice on earth. Sue Her, a long-time supporter of Pa Kao Her and Board member of the Hmong Language Institute of Minnesota, where the Pahawh is taught, explains, "Xob tells us that there are guardians in heaven. The guardians watch over us. If you are immoral, you will be punished. Xob help to ensure that we are just, righteous, and morally responsible on earth." The flag is painted with two colors: red and yellow. "Red is the color of our people's blood," Sue Her explains. "It reminds us that our people have been killed by others, and that our people's blood has been spilled on earth. The earth is covered with our people's blood. It reminds us that our ancestors have bled and died for us, and it tells us that it requires the shedding of blood to revive a people and form a nation." Yellow, then, is the color of faith—the faith in the righteousness of God to act in the world to bring justice and liberation to the oppressed and to those who are suffering. It represents the hope in the imminent arrival of a Hmong messiah (an agent sent by God from heaven to earth) to re-establish an independent Hmong kingdom.

The arrows, which were absent in the original flag that Yang Shong Lue devised for his followers in Laos, showed the displacement of the Hmong from their homeland as well as the road back to the homeland. The arrows reminded Pa Kao and his Chao Fa

---

For more on Xeem Xais, see Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 381-382; Don A. Schanche, *Mister Pop*, (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1970), 50-51; Heu Tcha Siong, Ya Tcha Nzeu, Ya Va Thay, *Keeb Kwm Hmoob Rws Tsev Koom Haum Vib Nais* (Origin of the Hmong According to Vinai "Confraternity," recorded and published by Yves Bertrais, (Village de Javouhey, France: Association Communauté Hmong, 1985), 11-32.

soldiers that they now lived outside of their homeland, and that Thailand was not their permanent home. It was only a temporary base for them to find the road to Hmong liberation in their homeland of Laos. The way to Hmong salvation and liberation was through the devotion to their Chao Fa faith or religion (represented by the yellow arrow), commitment to justice, righteousness, and purity (represented by the white arrow), and the building of international friendship and alliance (represented by the blue arrow). Simply put, faith, righteousness, and friendship, Pa Kao and his Chao Fa followers believed, were the three intertwined paths to Hmong liberation in Laos.

Like the messianic written script, the Pahawh, the flag is a symbol of Chao Fa identity (see Figure 1 for the Chao Fa flag). A symbol of their identity, the flag was always carried by Chao Fa fighters to the battlefields. Explaining the creation and significance of the flag, Sue Her says, "We created the flag because it came from the prophet. Yang Shong Lue brought it to us. When you exist as a nation, when God wants you to exist as a nation, God will send you a messenger or prophet who will bring you a flag. Shong Lue is the person Heaven (Ntuj) sent to tell Hmong, 'This is your writing. This is your flag.' Shong Lue gave us this flag. That was why we used it."[726]

Along with their own flag, the ELOL also had their own national anthem. The words to the anthem are as follow:

We Hmong will rise, stand united, as a group.
We will honor, resurrect our tradition to protect our people.
We Hmong will rise, join hands, as a crowd.
We will honor, resurrect our tradition to protect our Hmong.

Our tradition's flag is fashioned with cloth.
We raise it to cover our body with bronze and shield our blood with steel.
Our tradition's flag is made with sacred soil.
We raise it to cover our body with bronze and shield our blood with stones.[727]

[726] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[727] This idea is similar to the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream: "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay." Daniel 2: 31-33 NIV [New International Version]

Hmong tradition is raised to stand upright.
We raise our flag toward heaven to pull our Hmong hands.
Hmong tradition is elevated high.
We raise our flag toward heaven to lift our Hmong up.

We raise our flag from the night of the new moon,
So we Hmong may have a new life.
We raise our flag on full moon,
So we Hmong may have a free and fulfilling life.

We raise our flag facing the moon,
So we Hmong can be transformed.
We raise our flag facing the sun,
So we Hmong can be free from all perils.[728]

A symbol of Chao Fa national identity, the anthem served as a call for action. It was a call to the Hmong to rise up, unite, lift up their people from hopelessness, resurrect their tradition, and fight for a new day in order for the Hmong to be free from all perils and have a prosperous and fulfilling life. The anthem was sung on a daily basis and particularly before Chao Fa soldiers went on patrol or into battle against the enemies.[729]

In the military camp, Pa Kao Her and his men also designed and crafted unique Chao Fa uniforms to express and affirm their identity (see Figure 2 for Chao Fa uniforms). Being Hmong, Pa Kao and his officers believed, involved dressing up "as Hmong, not as Lao, to indicate that they were sons of a Hmong king"—an ideology they inherited from Yang Shong Lue.[730] Closer inspection at the uniforms that Pa Kao

[728] This is the author's transcript and translation from: Yuepheng Xiong, *Phong Savan Rov Lawm Tov* (Phonsavan and Beyond), 1 hr, 30 min, (St. Paul: Hmong ABC, 2002), videocassette.
[729] Yang Thao, interview with author, digital tape recording, St. Paul, Minnesota, 31 January 2009. For a visual image of Chao Fa soldiers singing national anthem, see Yuepheng Xiong, *Phong Savan Rov Lawm Tov* (Phonsavan and Beyond), 1 hr, 30 min, prod. by Hmong ABC, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2002, videocassette; and *Ua Neej Taum Tab Nplog Teb* (Life of Resistance Against the Hmong Government), prod. by Hmong Chao Fa Video, Fresno, CA, 1992, author private collection.
[730] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1993), 383.

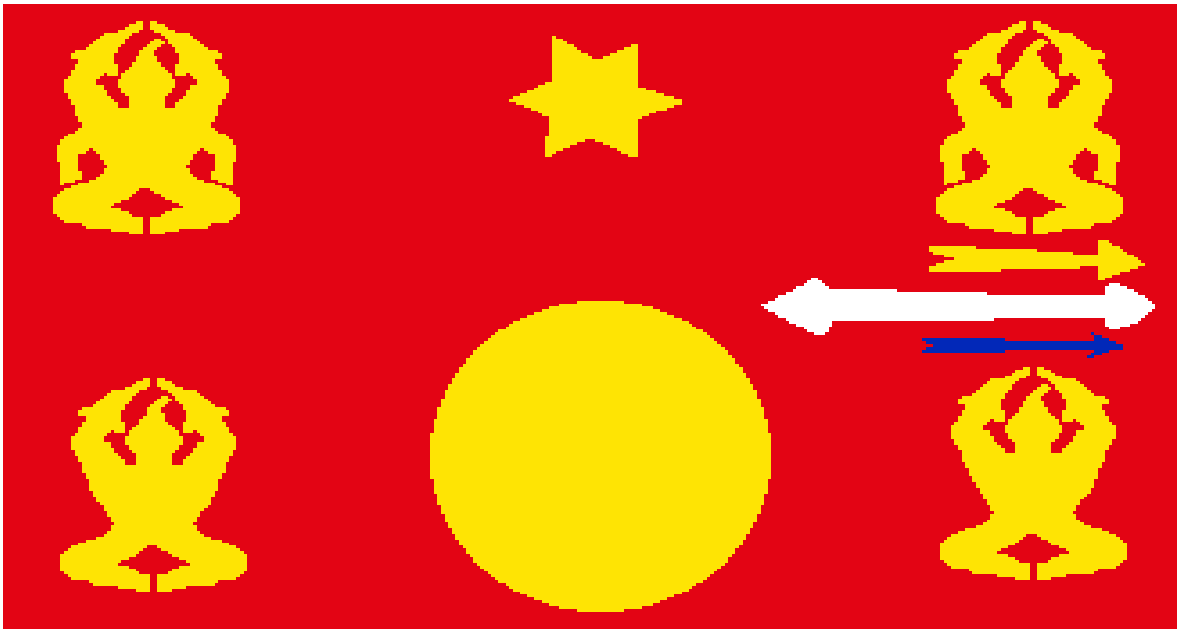


Figure 1: Chao Fa Flag

Figure 2: Chao Fa Soldiers in Chao Fa Uniforms, Thailand
(Bee Moua Photo Collection, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota)

designed for Chao Fa soldiers to wear reveals that the diagrams on the uniforms were no other than the Chao Fa flag. To put the flag on the uniforms was to ensure that Chao Fa soldiers were wearing the Chao Fa flag, the symbol of their unity and identity, everywhere they went. Wearing the flag not only showed their commitment to Chao Fa religiosity but also to the Hmong because the predominant color of the uniforms was Black. Black is the color of Hmong *pajntaub*, Hmong cloth and embroidery. Red represents the color of Hmong blood, extracted from the color in the flag.[731] Wearing the flag, the source of protection, ensured that Chao Fa soldiers were protected in battles and signified that they were truly soldiers of God or "Lord of the Sky," as the name "Chao Fa" is often translated.[732] If the Chao Fa confraternity in Ban Vinai represented a religious movement that sought to rebuild broken lives and shattered communities in the refugee camp through the teaching of the messianic script and the veneration of Hmong gods and cultural heroes like Tswb Tshoj and Xeem Xais, the ELOL and the military camp represented a political movement that sought to organize a community of Chao Fa patriots in exile to protect historically Hmong territory in the homeland and rebuild their nation from exile.

In the United States, to rebuild broken lives and shattered communities, Hmong refugees began a series of internal migrations within the United States, known as *secondary migration*, immediately after the resettlement agencies dispersed them all over the United States.[733] Just as immediately, local residents began attacking Hmong refugees and accusing them of being "welfare migrants," people who migrated solely to get access to better welfare benefits.[734] For the Hmong, however, there were just two major reasons for their migration. The first was to reunite with long separated family members and friends. As Vang Xeu Vangyi, Executive Director of Lao Family Community in Santa Ana, California, explained in an organizational newsletter in 1981:

---

[731] Yang Thao, interview with author, digital tape recording, St. Paul, Minnesota, 31 January 2009

[732] Grant Evans, *Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*, A Writenet Report Commissioned by the UNHCR, Protection Information Section (DIP), May 2004, 22; Tom Peterson, "Lord of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, (August 1990); Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 401.

[733] Jac D. Bulk, "American Hmong on the Move: An Explanation of Very Distinctive Secondary Migration Patterns," *Hmong Forum*, (1996): 3-27; John Finck, "Secondary Migration to California's Central Valley," in *The Hmong in Transition*, eds. Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1986), 184-187.

[734] Ray Hatchison, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, (the Center Public Affairs at UW-Green Bay and the Institute on Race and Ethnicity at UW-Milwaukee, 1992), 38-41.

> The Americans feel that our refugees move around from one state to another too much, to seek only better welfare and education. We get many complaints regarding their problems. We try hard to help them understand why we move. You move because you follow your relatives, friends and family from whom you have been separated for a long time, since the fall of Laos. The Americans understand a small part of that.[735]

Sandra Hall concurred, summarizing in a study of Hmong kinship system and clan relations, that:

> Much of the secondary migration which took place after initial Hmong resettlement can be readily understood if one recognizes the necessity of having *ib cuab kwv tij* [one family brothers] nearby to give mutual assistance. Americans raised with independence and the ability to "solve one's own problems" as primary values, are often unable to perceive this secondary migration as a necessary and inevitable feature of Hmong immigration; they may see it instead as a "luxury" or a sign of "instability" among the Hmong, while in fact, such migrations are a move toward the stability of an intact mutual assistance group.[736]

The second reason for their secondary migration was racial hostility or what Cheu Thao has called "community tension." In a 1982 study of Hmong migration and leadership in Laos and the United States, Thao writes:

> A second major reason for leaving a site is the presence of community tension… A case point is an incident in Orange County. In the late 1970s, hundreds of Hmongs moved from different sites to Orange County, especially to Santa Ana, where most of them lived in the Voltaire Apartment Complex. In 1979 an old man of the Xiong clan was murdered early one morning in his apartment. The Hmong community, in searching for reasons for the murder, concluded that the murder occurred because other groups feared that the Hmongs increased the competition for housing. After the old man's funeral, many families in his clan

[735] Vang Xeu Vang, "A Message to Hmong Refugees," *Lao Family Monthly News* 5, (August 1981): 8-9.
[736] Sandra Hall, "Hmong Kinship Roles: Insiders and Outsiders," *Hmong Forum* 1 (1990): 29.

> moved to Portland; since then, Hmong movement into Orange County has slowed down, and movement out of the county has increased.[737]

By 1983, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the Hmong population lived in just three states—California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. By 1988, this figure had increased to 84.5 percent. Meanwhile, the Hmong population in some states—most notably Illinois and Utah—declined dramatically during this period as families moved to other areas of the country.[738] By 1990, eighty-nine percent of the Hmong populations were living in Minnesota, California and Wisconsin.[739] This secondary migration, to say the least, exemplified not only the strength of the Hmong culture, particularly its emphasis on family, kinship, clan relations, communalism and interdependence. It also displayed the resilience of a scarred people and the spirited efforts to reunite their separated families and rebuild their broken communities in urban cities in America.

In a similar manner, the United Lao National Liberation Front was the effort of exiled Lao and Hmong political and military leaders, including General Vang Pao, to organize and rebuild the Lao-Hmong communities in and from exile. As Xang Vang, an advisor to General Vang Pao, explained:

> Neo Hom was the organization that held Hmong together the longest. Whether we held workshops on hunting laws, civil rights and civic engagement, or organized Hmong to engage in U.S. state and national politics, we always used Neo Hom. We did not use any other organization. When we asked for donations from the community to help our effort to stop human rights violations against our people in Laos and Thailand, we used this organization. Other organizations like the Hmong 18 Clan Council could not bring Hmong together for a common cause the way that Neo Hom could. Thousands of Hmong went to Washington, D.C., to

---

[737] Chue Thao, "Hmong migration and leadership in Laos and the United States," in *The Hmong in West: Observations and Reports*, edited by Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, (Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, U of MN, 1982), 108-109.
[738] Ray Hatchison, *Acculturation in the Hmong Community*, 8.
[739] Jac D. Bulk, "American Hmong on the Move: An Explanation of Very Distinctive Secondary Migration Patterns," *Hmong Forum*, (1996): 14. See also John Finck, "Secondary Migration to California's Central Valley," in *The Hmong in Transition*, eds. Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1986), 184-187.

> protest the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos [in the early 1990s]. These were all the good efforts of Neo Hom.[740]

For Vang Pao, the ULNLF represented his effort to prepare a community of Laotians, by which he meant both ethnic Lao and Hmong diaspora, to return to a liberated and democratic Laos. Because of his position in the Lao and Hmong diasporic communities, Vang Pao could not stand aloof of the economic and political challenges facing those communities both in the United States and back home. As the size of the Hmong refugee population swelled in America, the volume of phone calls to Vang Pao for help skyrocketed. Many demanded that Vang Pao do something about the persecution of the Hmong back home. "Even nowadays, people are still calling me," Vang Pao said in a recent interview. "That is why I cannot sleep. I cannot rest. I am constantly working at this problem—to stop the persecution in Laos—so that everyone can return and help develop the country. Develop the infrastructure. Develop a healthcare system. Develop the economy, so that fruits, animals are abundant and plentiful. Take the technology to Laos. All these."[741] According to author Roger Warner, Vang Pao also recognized that his life could be in jeopardy should he remain a bystander to the persecution of the Hmong back home. "Vang Pao has to satisfy his people," Warner writes. "Many of the older refugees, who still use shamans and believe in the parallel spirit world, have vivid dreams of returning to their homeland. These dreams seem more real and desirable to them than their waking lives in run-down urban communities, collecting welfare and fighting cockroaches. If Vang Pao ever gave up the idea of the resistance, his sympathizers say, he would risk some old tribesmen coming up and shooting him in anger."[742]

Because Vang Pao wanted to prepare a community of exiled Laotians to return to a liberated and democratic Laos, and not a community consisted solely of ethnic Hmong diaspora and a separate and independent Hmong state, he and his Hmong associates in the ULNLF adamantly rejected the Chao Fa flag, national anthem, and Pahawh script. The Pahawh script, for Vang Pao and his associates, was a Soviet invention and Yang

---

[740] Xang Vang, interview with author, St. Paul, Minnesota, 20 October 2008.
[741] Vang Pao interview with a film crew from Germany in California in 2007. Author transcribed and translated the interview for the crew.
[742] Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon*, 384.

Shong Lue, the inventor of the Pahawh script, a Communist spy.[743] To accept the Pahawh script was to accept communism, which Vang Pao and his associates in the ULNLF rejected. The Lao language was, thus, their medium of expression. As exiled Laotians or members of the Lao state in exile, Vang Pao and his associates clang to the old monarchical Lao flag, with the three elephant heads representing the kingdom of Lang Xang (a million elephants), and the Lao national anthem.[744] Nowadays, the Lao anthem can still be heard playing at the opening of events and meetings, including the Hmong New Year and the July 4th Soccer Tournament in St. Paul, organized or sponsored by organizations associated with Vang Pao such as Lao Family Community and the Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) of Minnesota.

Conclusion

Displacement, to borrow Angelika Bammer's definition, "refers to the separation of people from their native culture, through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture."[745] Wanni Anderson and Robert Lee identify four existing forms of displacement as the lived experiences of the immigrant, the refugee, the exile, the expatriate, and the migrant: *physical/spatial* displacement, *cultural* displacement, *psychological/affective* displacement, and *intellectual* displacement. "Each form of displacement is not exclusive," they write. "A displaced group can experience one form or several forms, and one displaced person in a group can live a displaced life differently from others, depending on the relative degree of his or her estrangement."[746]

---

[743] Xang Vang, interview with author, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 20 October 2008. See also the perspective of Gue Vang, a Vang Pao supporter and a former commander of a regiment at Long Cheng at the time of Shong Lue Yang's assassination in 1971, for his view of Yang Shong Lue as a spy and the Pahawh script a Soviet invention, in William Smalley, *Mother of Writing*, 166-168.

[744] See ULNLF documents, such as "The Lao National Liberation Army, Proclamation I & II," 5 December 1989; "Manifesto of the ULNLF," 7 September 1981, available at the Special Collections at Hmong Archives in St. Paul, Minnesota. These documents are available in both English and Lao.

[745] Angelica Bammer, ed. *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xi.

[746] Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee, eds., *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 11.

In this chapter, I suggest that Hmong refugees of the Secret War in Laos experienced all forms of displacement. First, they lost their homeland to the Communist Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese. Their agrarian way of life was greatly disrupted by the war as well as their flight for safety to Thailand. Unable to maintain their traditional lifestyle, countless died of starvation in the Lao jungle and in the refugee camps in Thailand. In Thailand, Hmong refugees suffered the agony of push-backs at the hands of Thai border patrols and pirates along the Mekong River—the effects of Thailand's humane deterrence policy—all of which informed the Hmong that they were not welcomed in Thailand and that Thailand was not their home. In the United States, Hmong refugees continued to suffer from depression and other psychological displacements. In the early 1980s, a few dozen Hmong died mysteriously in their sleep. To this day, the cause of their deaths remains a mystery. Hypotheses over the cause of their deaths ran the gamut from the inability of Hmong refugees to find traditional healers and continue shamanism and ancestral worship in the United States and the difficulty of adapting to a new lifestyle to exposure to chemical warfare in Laos, cardiac failure or irregularity, sleep disorder, depression, cultural shock, survival guilt, and nocturnal chest-pressing spirit (*tsog*).[747] Many were intellectually displaced from respected military officers and professionals, community leaders and respected elders in Laos to blue-collar factory workers, welfare dependents, and "children" in the United States. In the United States, Hmong refugees, seen as foreigners and invaders, were repeatedly told to go back home. Many times, that expression of nativism turned into physical assaults, and Hmong became victims of violent racial attacks. Neither in the refugee camp nor in run-down urban communities of America did Hmong refugees find home. Their life in limbo, many longed to return to the homeland. The formation of the ELOL in Thailand and the ULNLF in the United States, thus, represented separate efforts by the Hmong in the diaspora to find their way back to the homeland. It was their efforts both to change the

[747] Ronald G. Munger, *Sleep Disturbances and Sudden Death of Hmong Refugees: A Report on Fieldwork Conducted in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp,* Proceedings of the Second Hmong Research Conference, University of Minnesota, 17-19 November 1983; Shelley R. Adler, "Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome Among Hmong Immigrants: Examining the Role of Nightmare," Journal of American Folklore 104, no. 411 (Winter, 1991): 54-71; and Bruce Thowpaow Bliatout, *Hmong Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome: A Cultural Study,* (Portland, Oregan: Sparkle Publishing, 1982).

political climate back home, so they could return home, and to creatively challenge the pressure of displacement and the pain of nostalgia in exile in foreign lands.

The formation of the ELOL and the ULNLF also represented two separate attempts by exiled Hmong leaders to rebuild broken lives and shattered communities abroad as well as in the homeland. Though divided, the ELOL and the ULNLF were not antagonistic to each other. The ELOL represented the effort by Pa Kao and his Chao Fa followers to find a permanent home for the displaced Hmong people in the refugee camps in Thailand and those living in the Lao jungle. Similarly, when Vang Pao and other exiled Lao and Hmong political and military leaders formed the ULNLF in 1981, they did so out of other needs beside the simple desire to compete with the ELOL for power, status, and community resources. They also formed the ULNLF out of the desire to recover their lost self and restore their dignity, rebuild their shattered communities and recuperate their sense of belonging, provide a social space for their dispersed populations in different states and countries to network with one another, and ultimately search for a safe and stable place they could call home.

Benedict Anderson has defined a nation as an "imagined" political community. "It is *imagined*," he writes, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[748] In this sense, what ELOL and the ULNLNF ultimately represented were also efforts by exiled Hmong and Lao leaders in Thailand and the United States, driven by a desire for transformation and liberation as much as by nostalgia and the trauma of separation, to construct their own "imagined community" or nation of patriots. While the ULNLF sought to restore the lost monarchical Lao nation to the homeland and prepare a nation of "Laotian" patriots to return to a liberated Laos, the ELOL sought to redefine existing Lao national borders, create their own separate nation, and prepare segments of the Hmong in the diaspora to return to an independent Hmong state. Their differences, notwithstanding, leaders of both the ELOL and the ULNLF sought to construct their own nations from exile, each complete with their own flag, anthem, national language and writing script.

---

[748] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

CHAPTER 4

Border Conflicts, Cold War Politics, and the Rise of Hmong Transnational Politics

The 1980s was undoubtedly the period during which Hmong transnational politics was strongest, both in terms of the support the ELOL and the ULNLF received from within the Hmong diasporic community and from external or non-Hmong individuals, groups and institutions. In the early 1980s, for example, it was estimated that as many as 80 percent of Hmong families in America were members of the ULNLF alone. Throughout much of the 1980s, both the ELOL and the ULNLF also received the support of China, Thailand, and the United States in varying capacities. The 1980s were, in short, the formative years of Hmong transnational politics. It was the period when the ELOL and the ULNLF were gaining international attention, prestige and credibility.

What, then, sustained the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) and the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) once they were established? What were the forces that nourished, compelled, and kept the transnational politics of the Hmong moving and alive? What enabled the ELOL and the ULNLF to garner the support, prestige, resources, and power that they did from China, Thailand, and the United States during the 1980s? These are questions that I seek to explore in this chapter, and I want to do this with what social movement theorists have called the "political process" approach. This approach looks at how political and economic shifts, often independently of the actors' efforts, open up a space and opportunity for leaders to garner crucial financial, political, and military supports from other groups and institutions to help sustain their movement.[749] This approach best explains the growth and internationalization of the ELOL and the ULNLF during the 1980s because the ELOL and the ULNLF did not exist in isolation. To appreciate their formation, growth and internationalization, it is thus necessary to understand the political, institutional, and global forces that nurtured them and, thereby, the force, power, and flow of Hmong transnational politics.

---

[749] For more on "political process" approach, see Craig Jenkins and Charles Perrow, "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Workers Movements (1946-1972)," *American Sociological Review* 42, (1977): 249-268; Dough McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Sidney Tarrow, *Power Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

In this chapter, I show that the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, the Thailand-Laos border conflicts, the communist insurgency in Thailand, and the Reagan program to destabilize the Soviet Union opened up a space and opportunity for the ELOL and the ULNLF to develop alliance and garner support from China, Thailand, and the United States. By allying themselves with anti-Soviet resistance groups in China, Thailand, and the United States, the ELOL and the ULNLF in turn received money, training, weapons, publicity, and power. The resources and support they received from China, Thailand, and the United States gave them credibility and power and inspired their members to contribute money to the organizations and support the resistance against the Lao PDR government, all of which, in turn, helped to sustain the political movements of the ELOL and the ULNLF throughout the 1980s.

Sino-Vietnamese Border Dispute

To understand how the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute helped to sustain the transnational politics of the ELOL and the ULNLF during the 1980s, it is necessary to know something about the events leading up to the dispute. During the Second Indochina War, otherwise known as Vietnam War, the Khmer Rouge and the Viet Minh were partners in the fight against what they perceived was U.S. imperial aggression, especially from 1970 to 1975. Under the terms of the 1973 cease-fire agreements arranged with the United States and signed in Paris between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho to end the war, not only in Vietnam but in all of Indochina, including Cambodia, Vietnam had to withdraw its troops from Cambodia, leaving the Khmer Rouge forces on their own.[750] Feeling abandoned by the Vietnamese in 1973, the Khmer Rouge did not hide their hostility toward the Vietnamese. They sought the patronage of Maoist China and confronted Vietnam militarily over "the border demarcations drawn during French colonial days—demarcations that left substantial numbers of ethnic Vietnamese and

[750] Joseph R. Pouvatchy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (April, 1986): 447; Norman Owen,ed., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 485.

Cambodians on the 'wrong' side of the line."[751] The Khmer Rouge deported and massacred Vietnamese residents in Cambodia along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border and on the coastal islands where fights between the two communist parties broke out. In 1975, when Pol Pot visited Hanoi and a Vietnamese delegation came to Phnom Penh, the two communist parties attempted negotiations, but they failed to reach any agreement. Discussions about the Vietnamese-Cambodian border broke down completely in 1976 when, according to the Khmers, the Vietnamese presented a new map "which took away a vast part of Cambodia's territory."[752] The situation became so bitter that by mid-1977, Vietnam had become Cambodia's "number one enemy."[753] By the end of the year, Khieu Samphan, the new head of the Khmer state, completely severed diplomatic relations with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, declaring in 1978: "the number one enemy is not U.S. imperialism, but Vietnam, ready to swallow up Cambodia."[754]

Meanwhile, Vietnam, after several failed attempts to negotiate with the Khmer Rouge, became convinced that "only if Pol Pot's main military force could be destroyed by the Vietnamese People's army itself" could the Khmer Rouge fugitives—military leaders and soldiers that the Khmer Rouge forced into exile in Vietnam—return to Cambodia and, thereby, put an end to the border dispute.[755] With Soviet support, Vietnam quickly organized the fugitives into a government in exile and recruited, trained and armed an anti-Pol Pot Cambodian insurgent force among the 150,00 Cambodian refugees who had been in exile in Vietnam since 1975.[756] On December 3, 1978, Hanoi announced the creation of the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation [KNUFNS] with Heng Samrin, a former eastern regional military commander under Pol Pot, as its leader.[757] On December 15, 1978, Vietnam, using more than 100,000 troops, launched a massive attack on Cambodia. Before morning the next day, Pol Pot himself had fled to Thailand. By morning, the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) under Pol Pot's

---

[751] Marian Kirsch Leighton, "Perspectives on the Vietnam-Cambodian Border Conflict," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 5, (1978): 448.
[752] Joseph R. Pouvatchy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 4, (April, 1986): 447.
[753] Norman Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 485.
[754] Joseph R. Pouvatchy, "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," 447.
[755] Philippe Devillers, "Vietnam in Battle," *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 214.
[756] Karl D. Jackson, "Cambodia 1978: War, Pillage, and Purge in Democratic Kampuchea," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 1 (January 1979): 76.
[757] Sheldon Simon, "Kampuchea: Vietnam's 'Vietnam'," *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 198.

leadership was completely annihilated.[758] By the end of January 1979, the Vietnamese army took complete control over all the population centers in Cambodia, with ten of thousands of former Khmer Rouge troops, along with many civilians, retreating to the almost inaccessible Elephant Mountain in southwestern Cambodia or fleeing across the border to Thailand. In the Democratic Kampuchea's place, Vietnam quickly installed in Phnom Penh a pro-Vietnam regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), with Heng Samrin as its president. On February 18, 1979, during his visit to Phnom Penh, Pham Van Dong signed a 25-year treaty of peace, friendship, and cooperation with Heng Samrin. The treaty formalized Vietnam's right to maintain troops in Cambodia, call for a renegotiation of their common border, and pursue "friendship and good neighborliness with Thailand and the other countries in Southeast Asia," among other things.[759]

For China, the installation of a pro-Vietnam regime in Cambodia was a threat to its own national security as well as its credibility as a regional power and influence on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).[760] "Because of Vietnam's November, 1978, Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union," Sheldon Simon writes, "Hanoi's control of Indochina would revive the Soviet Union's Asian Collective Security concept, originally broached in 1969, confronting China with a hostile Indochina to the south linked to her perennial Soviet enemy to the north and west."[761] Beijing had found out through Chinese intelligence in Vietnam's state apparatus that Vietnam was preparing to attack Cambodia as early as April 1978.[762] Beijing also knew that it would not be able to repulse a full-scale Vietnamese attack on Cambodia, and Chinese officials had made this clear to Khmer Rouge Defense Minister Son Sen. In August 1978, they told Son Sen to prepare for a protracted guerilla warfare. To prepare them for the attack, China sent arms, food, and communication equipments to the Khmer Rouge to be stored in the jungle base

---

[758] Norman Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 485; Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954," (Ph.D Diss., University of Denver, 1996), 264.
[759] "Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation Between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the People's Republic of Kampuchea, February 18, 1979," *FBIS Daily Report*, 22 February 1979, K13-K15.
[760] For a brilliant summary and analysis of events leading up to the Sino-Vietnamese dispute in 1979, see Nguyen Manh Hung, "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play among Communist Neighbors," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 1 (November 1979): 1037-1052.
[761] Sheldon Simon, "Kampuchea: Vietnam's 'Vietnam'," 197; FBIS, *Daily Report-People's Republic of China*, 9 May 1979, C2.
[762] Philippe Devillers, "Vietnam in Battle," *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 214.

areas of the Elephant Mountains.[763] On November 8, 1978, a little more than a month before the Vietnamese attack on Cambodia, Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping of the People's Republic of China told Thai officials during his visit to Bangkok that the "Vietnam-Soviet treaty is not only directed at China, but to a greater extent is aimed at threatening peace and security in the Asian-Pacific region and even in the world."[764]

Soon after the Vietnamese installation of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) in Cambodia, the Chinese government, according to Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, "accused Hanoi of 'militarism, wild aggression and expansion' and promised to do its 'utmost' to help the deposed Khmer Rouge regime 'in every way'."[765] Immediately, Beijing called for the creation of a united front resistance movement that incorporated all anti-Vietnam elements in Kampuchea.[766] The hope was that, according to Sheldon Simon, "a protracted war will prove so unpalatable to the already overcommitted Vietnamese government that in time Hanoi will be prepared to negotiate an alternative. That alternative could be the creation of a new government in Cambodia—perhaps under the quintessential nationalist, Prince Sihanouk—pledged to neutrality between Beijing and Hanoi."[767] Unable to protect the Pol Pot regime from Vietnam's invasion, which resulted in a major loss of "political" face, China, after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, was resolved to teach Vietnam "some necessary lessons."[768] "Moscow is backing Vietnam's massive armed aggression against Cambodia," Deng Xiaoping told U.S. officials on January 30.[769] Speaking on the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia the next day, Deng Xiaoping added, "If you don't teach them some necessary lessons, it just won't do."[770] On his way back to Beijing, Deng Xiaoping stopped in Tokyo, met with Japanese Prime Minister Masayoshi Ohira on February 6-7, and said that Vietnam must be "punished severely." "Once we say we will

---

[763] Nayan Chanda, "Cambodian: Fifteen Days that Shook Asia," *FEER*, 19 January 1979, 2.
[764] "Vice Premier Teng at Bangkok Press Conference, Vietnam-Soviet Treaty Threatens World Peace and Security," *Beijing Review* 21 (November 17, 1978): 24.
[765] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 115.
[766] FBIS, *Daily Report—People's Republic of China*, 16 February 1979, A6-A7.
[767] Sheldon Simon, "Kampuchea: Vietnam's 'Vietnam'," *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 223.
[768] See, for example, Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 115; and Sheldon Simon, "Kampuchea: Vietnam's 'Vietnam'," *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 197 & 223.
[769] Don Oberdorfer, "Carter, Teng Ready Working Relations," *The Washington Post*, 31 January 1979, 1.
[770] Fox Butterfield, "Teng Again Says Chinese May Move Against Vietnam," *The New York Times*, 1 February 1979, 16.

do something," he added, "we will do it."[771] From there, the bitter exchanges between Vietnam and Chins quickly degenerated into what Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley have termed "the Third Indochina War."[772]

To suit their actions to their words, Beijing dispatched 100,000 Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops, backed by tanks and artillery, to the 1,300-kilometer border between Vietnam and China on February 17, 1979. Fights immediately broke out between China and Vietnam, and soon 200,000 Chinese troops were fighting Vietnamese troops along the border, primarily around the town of Lang Son.[773] After a month of fighting, Beijing announced it was withdrawing its troops. On March 15, the Chinese government announced:

> The Chinese government reiterates that we do not want a single inch of Vietnamese territory, but neither will we tolerate incursions into Chinese territory. All we want is a peaceful and stable border. We hope that this just stand of the Chinese government will be respected by the government of Vietnam and the governments of other countries in the world. We warn the Vietnamese authorities that they must make no more armed provocations and incursions along the Chinese border after the withdrawal of the Chinese frontier troops. The Chinese government solemnly states that the Chinese side reserves the right to strike back again in self-defense in case a recurrence of such Vietnamese activities.[774]

By the next day, Beijing completely withdrew its troops from the border. The human costs on both sides of the warring parties were enormous. On May 2, 1979, General Wu Xiuquan, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Deputy Chief of Staff of China, acknowledged that China suffered 20,000 casualties themselves, but he claimed that "50,000 Vietnamese had been killed or wounded."[775] For its part, Vietnam "claimed that 62,500 Chinese had been killed or wounded, 280 tanks and armored cars and 115 pieces of artillery destroyed, and a large quantity of military equipment captured."[776] For

---

[771] Dusko Doder, "Moscow Cautions Beijing on Vietnam Intervention," *Washington Post*, 9 February 1979, 1; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 115.
[772] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, xvii.
[773] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954," 267; and Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 115.
[774] "Text of China's Statement on Withdrawal of Troops," *The New York Times*, 6 March 1979, 10A.
[775] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954," 270.
[776] Ibid.. See also Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 115-116.

Vietnam, therefore, "the Chinese have indeed taught someone a lesson. But it was not Vietnam that they taught it to, it was themselves."[777]

Because of the Lao People's Democratic Republic's "special friendship" with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a friendship sealed through the 25-Year Friendship Treaty that Laos signed with Vietnam in 1977, the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute also inevitably affected Sino-Lao relation. For the Lao PDR government, China's attack on Vietnam was an exercise of Chinese hegemonic power and an expression of Chinese imperial expansion. On February 18, 1979, the day after Beijing first dispatched its troops to the China-Vietnam border, the Lao government issued a statement, calling for the withdrawal of Chinese forces from Vietnamese territory.[778] Three days later, the Central Committee of the Lao National Construction Front again issued another statement condemning China's attack on Vietnam. "The Lao National Construction Front," it declared, "calls on the entire Lao people to strengthen their militant solidarity with the fraternal Vietnamese people and to support the just struggle of the Vietnamese people in defending their independence, freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."[779] On March 22, 1979, during his visit to Phnom Penh from March, Prince Souphanouvong of the Lao PDR and Heng Samrim of the People's Republic of Kampuchea issued a joint statement in support of the Vietnamese "resolute struggle against China's big power expansionist and hegemonic authorities." Souphanouvong himself also charged that Beijing had threatened to invade Laos many times during the Sino-Vietnamese dispute because of the Lao-Vietnamese alliance.[780] From February to March 1979, Laos and China were close to declaring war against each other.[781] The tension between China and Laos stopped short of escalating into a war largely because of Laos' relations with Vietnam and the Soviets, both of which had issued stern warnings to Beijing against a Chinese attack on Laos. The Soviets had said, for example, that "the Chinese aggressors should know that the more crimes they commit, the more deadly they

---

[777] "China Lost in Vietnam, Izvestia Says," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 April 1979, 1-3.
[778] "Government Issues Government on PRC-SRV Border Conflict," *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 22 February 1979, 1.
[779] "National Construction Front Criticizes PRC Invasion of SRV, February 21, 1979," *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 22 February 1979, 12.
[780] "Joint Communique Issued on Souphanouvong Delegation's Visit," *FBIS Daily Report*, 26 March 1979, H1-H18.
[781] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954," 273.

will have to pay for them."[782] For its part, Vietnam vowed to defend the Lao people and Laos' territorial integrity at all costs. "Living up to the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed on 18 July 1977 between the two countries," it declared, "the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) government is resolved to fulfill its obligations toward the Lao people and to do all it can to support, assist and cooperate closely with the LPDR government in order to defend the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of each country and safeguard peace and stability in Southeast Asia."[783]

For the Hmong, they were not idle bystanders to the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute and the growing strain between the Lao PDR and China. They took full advantage of the escalating tension between the Lao PDR and its Vietnamese ally on one side and the People's Republic of China on the other, and they used it as an opportunity to garner support from China for their own struggle to overthrow the Lao PDR and expel Vietnamese troops from Laos. By allying themselves with China, they gained access to weapons, training, publicity, and power. In 1979, Pa Kao Her, President of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL), and five of his men flew from Bangkok to Beijing, by special invitation from Chinese officials, to discuss military collaboration against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and its puppet regime, the Lao PDR. This trip, according to Sue Her, who had lived and worked with Pa Kao in the ELOL military camp in Thailand in the 1980s, was the first trip that Pa Kao Her and his men ever took outside of Laos and Thailand. As such, they were nervous about the trip as well as about China's intention. Once in Beijing, they were put in separate cars and hotel rooms, and they thought that, by separating them, the Chinese would kill them separately in their room during night. No one, except Pa Kao, ate the fruit left in their hotel rooms. Some feared that the fruit was poisoned. Others were anxious that the Chinese would use the small pocketknife in their room to slit their throat during their sleep. After Chinese officials left, they paired up and slept together rather than sleeping separately in their own individual room.[784] According to Yang Thao, a military adviser and strategist for the ELOL, and Bee Moua, a ELOL country representative in the 1980s, Pa Kao Her and his men met with top Chinese officials, including Premier Deng Xiaoping and Vice-Premier

[782] "PRC Must Stop Threats, Interference in Laos," *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 8 March 1979, I1-12.
[783] Ibid.; and *FBIS Daily Report*, 29 March 1979, K7-K9.
[784] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.

Zhao Ziyang.[785] In 1979, Pa Kao Her himself was said to have sent 100 young Hmong for training in southern China.[786] In 1982, Yang Thao himself led sixty men on foot from Thailand to Yunnan Province to receive training and weapons.[787] For the next several years, three Hmong Chao Fa battalions received training and equipment from Chinese officials in Yunnan Province.[788] Throughout this period, Beijing provided ELOL fighters warm welcome and accommodation in China. "When we went to China in 1983," Blong Vang, now a resident in northern California, remembered, "the Chinese treated us so well. They lined up to welcome us and shake our hands. We were well fed, and we were sleeping in rooms as nice as some of today's hotel rooms. The rooms were well furnished and clean."[789]

Like Pa Kao, General Vang Pao also took advantage of the Sino-Vietnamese dispute and the growing tension between the Lao PDR and China to garner support from Chinese officials for his fighters in Laos. According to a BBC report, Vang Pao made a secret visit to China in the summer of 1978.[790] Assuming the role of a coordinator between Washington and Peking, Vang Pao was said to have secretly discussed with Chinese officials "plans of dismembering the People's Democratic Republic of Laos" and setting up "a puppet pro-Peking Mong kingdom" in China with Vang Pao as "its princely chief."[791] During the early 1980s, Vang Pao sent his guerrillas in Laos and Thailand to Yunnan Province to receive training and equipments from the Chinese along with Pa Kao's Chao Fa fighters. "China's involvement," Nicholas C. Auclair writes, "was intended both to tie up the Vietnamese troops stationed in Laos and to provide China with intelligence on Vietnamese troop movements along the border."[792] Overall, following the outbreak of hostilities between China and Vietnam, China provided sanctuary, training,

---

[785] Yang Thao, "Biography of President Pa Kao Her, Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," in Yang Thao Collection; Bee Moua, Notes in Hmong Social and Cultural Forum, 31 January 2008.
[786] Gary Y. Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4, (2000): 14.
[787] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection), 12.
[788] Bee Moua, Notes in Hmong Social and Cultural Forum, 31 January 2008.
[789] Blong Vang, interview with author, 25 September 2008.
[790] "Chinese 'Subversion' Against Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcast*, 5 March 1979.
[791] "Lao Paper Calls on Mong to Foster Unity," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 November 1981; "Chinese 'Subversion' Against Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 5 March 1979; "Reactionaries' Schemes Against Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 8 October 1980.
[792] Nicholas C. Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 278.

and arms to as many as 3,000 Lao and Hmong resistance fighters in Yunnan Province.[793] Vang Pao himself reported taking two trips to visit the Chinese government in 1987, the first in March and the second in October, to ask the Chinese government "to provide arms and ammunitions to the ULNLF in fighting against the pro Soviet/Vietnam Laos Government."[794]

By allying with China, both Pa Kao Her's guerilla fighters and Vang Pao's soldiers received not only training and weapons, they also received publicity and power. With China on their side, they appeared stronger militarily than they actually were, and they appeared to pose real and credible threats to the securities of Laos and Vietnam. In the summer of 1979, the Lao LPDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam charged that Beijing had formed and armed a division of 4,000 rebels in northern Laos and that the division, called Lanna, was carrying subversive activities against the Lao PDR government in Phong Saly, Nam Tha and Houa Phan.[795] Named after an ancient kingdom on the Sino-Lao border, Lanna gave the Lao PDR government, as Keith Quincy writes, "the impression that China might support the establishment of a new nation as a homeland for Laos' dissidents, carved out of Laos' northern provinces."[796] On November 18, 1979, Vietnamese official Quan Doi Nhan Dan issued a stern statement denouncing what he considered a scheme of Chinese expansionism. He warned China "not to touch Laos" both directly through a Chinese incursion into Laos or indirectly by recruiting and arming Hmong insurgents against the Lao PDR government. "Laying their hands on Laos, the Peking expansionists will certainly encounter stiff resistance from the people of this country, a nation which has defeated many imperialist ringleaders in its struggle to regain independence and freedom," said the Vietnamese official. "They will have to cope with the strength of the iron-like solidarity of the three Indochinese peoples and will also incur the wrath of progressive mankind." Together, Laos, Vietnam, and

---

[793] "SRV Paper Says China Trains Refugees to Subvert Indochina," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 November 1979; Nicholas C. Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), 278; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 225.
[794] "The Agreement Between Gen. Bo Mya of KNU and Gen. Vang Pao of ULNLF at Chiangmai on December 2, 1987," recorded by Mr. Wichitr Jayavann, 3 December 1987.
[795] "Nhan Dan: Thailand Peking's Mercenary Base," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 22 November 1979; "SRV Paper Says China Trains Refugees to Subvert Indochina," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 November 1979.
[796] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 438.

Cambodia would surely defeat the Chinese, Quan Doi Nhan Dan continued. "With the strength of the solidarity among, and support from, the genuine socialist countries and progressive mankind, including genuine Chinese revolutionaries," he said, "the heroic Vietnamese, Lao and Kampuchean peoples, who stand side by side in close solidarity and brotherhood, will certainly defeat Peking's great-nation expansionism and big-Power hegemonism."[797] In December 1979, following the capture of a few Hmong resistance fighters bearing Chinese weapons, one prominent Lao official was infuriated at Beijing, declaring, "the Chinese have mobilized some Hmong and Lu minority people for a movement against our government."[798]

Thailand-Lao Border Conflicts and Communist Insurgency

During the 1980s, both the ELOL and the ULNLF also took advantage of the border conflicts between Laos and Thailand and the communist insurgency in Thailand to garner support from the Thai government and military for their resistance against the Lao PDR. To see how the ELOL and the ULNLF benefited from the Thailand-Lao border conflicts and the communist insurgency in Thailand, it is important to understand what those conflicts and the insurgency were. For the Lao PDR government, China was unequivocally not the only threat to its peace and security. To achieve peace and stability in Laos, the Lao PDR government also had to contend with its neighboring country to the west, Thailand. During the U.S. Secret War in Laos, Thailand "actively supported the RLG [Royal Lao Government] in the civil war by allowing US air strikes to be flown against the Pathet Lao from Udon airbase in the northeast of Thailand, and when the cease-fire was announced in 1973 it had at least 20,000 Thai military 'volunteers' fighting in Laos against the Communists."[799] Thailand also set up special camps in Hua Hin, Phitsanoulouk, and Lopburi for the Americans and the Thai to train the Hmong "to parachute, gather intelligence, use codes, operate clandestine radios and sophisticated electronic gear, read maps, chart air strikes, and refine sabotage techniques first learned

[797] "Vietnam Tells China Not to Touch Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 14 March 1979.
[798] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 8 December 1979.
[799] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War*, 66.

from the French" before returning them to Laos to fight the Communists.[800] After the communist Pathet Lao came to power in 1975, the Lao PDR thus had good reasons to be wary of Thailand's intentions toward the new regime, especially after the change of government in Thailand and the brutal crackdown on leftist students in late 1976.

In October 1976, the right-wing Thai party and the military overthrew the government under Seni Pramoj, the leader of the Democratic Party, and selected Thanin Kraivichien, a civilian law professor, as prime minister of Thailand. Groups of students protesting the return of General Thanom to Thailand weeks earlier and the advent of the staunchly anti-Communist and conservative government of Premier Thanin Kraivichien at Thamasat University in Bangkok on October 6, 1976 found sanctuary in Laos after the government, abetted by the police and some military factions, embarked on what Norman Owen and his colleagues called "an orgy of violence, lynching, beating, burning, and killing demonstrating students."[801] Amidst the widespread and brutal suppression of the left that followed in Thailand, the Lao PDR government denounced the Kraivichien government, calling it a "warlord clique" and promising to give aid to Thai insurgents in their struggle for "independence."[802] On the other side, Thailand accused the Lao PDR government for providing sanctuary to leftist students in anti-government activities and for arming them against the Thai government.[803]

Relations between Thailand and Laos worsened in 1977 when three Thai river-patrol crafts sailed to the Hat Donchan sandbar on the Lao side of the river, and there they picked up, according to the Vientiane government, "two terrorists" who were being pursued by LPDR security forces. In their ensuing exchange of gunfire, Thai forces killed one Lao frontier official. Thailand denied that this was a deliberate border violation, but Lao officials charged that this was Thailand's reactionary circles' effort to foment anti-government resistance in the LPDR.[804] "Relations between Laos and Thailand were tense throughout most of 1977," MacAlister Brown and Joseph Zasloff

---

[800] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 199.
[801] Norman Owen, et.al., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*, 448-449; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 66-67.
[802] MacAlister Brown and Joseph Zasloff, "Dependency in Laos," *Current History* 75, no. 442 (1978): 206.
[803] *Bangkok Post*, 25 July 1980.
[804] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Laos and Thailand: The Balancing of Conflict and Accommodation," in *Contemporary Laos*, 280.

summarized. "On the Thai side, the rigidly anti-Communist regime of Thanin Kravichien suspected that the Lao Communists, together with their Vietnamese mentors, would step up support of the Communist insurgency in the North and Northeast of Thailand. On the other side, the Lao leaders charged that the Thai regime, with the help of the American imperialists, was encouraging insurgency within Laos in addition to blockading commerce."[805]

After General Kriangsak Chamanand came to power following a military coup in October 1977, relations between Thailand and Laos improved. From March 22 to 25, 1978, LPDR Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Phoun Sipraseaut visited Bangkok. On June 1, 1978, Thailand and Laos signed a trade agreement, restoring Thailand's transit trade to Laos and lifting its previous prohibition on private commerce with Laos. But then on December 23 and 24, another incident broke out along the Mekong River. This time, "Laos charged that three Thai patrol craft had violated Lao territorial waters on three occasions in a 48-hour period and had fired at a LPDR border defense unit on the river-bank. At the same time, the Lao claimed that 'many Thai aircraft' had strafed population centers in Laos' Savanakhet province."[806]

Incidents at the Lao-Thai border continued to break out sporadically in 1980, which only served to worsen their relations. On June 15, 1980, for example, a Thai patrol boat was fired on from the Lao bank of the river when it entered Lao territorial waters, killing one Thai naval officer and wounding two sailors. After the shooting incident, the Lao PDR government claimed that, the day before the incident, a "group of thirty-five armed terrorists in Thai military uniform crossed the river to the Lao bank in row-boats" in order to plunder a Lao village. These Thai terrorists, abetted by the Americans and the Chinese, were "acting in compliance with the wishes of the United States and the People's Republic of China" to provoke Laos to sabotage the good relations between Laos and Thailand. To retaliate, Thailand closed the Thai-Lao border, and temporarily terminated transit trade between the two countries.[807] On August 2, 1980, another

[805] MacAlister Brown and Joseph Zasloff, "Laos 1977: The Realities of Independence," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 2, (February 1979): 173.
[806] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Laos and Thailand," *Contemporary Laos*, 280-181.
[807] Radio Vientiane, 26 July 1980 (FBIS, 5 August 1980); *Straits Times* (Singapore), 20 June 1980.

incident broke out along the Mekong River. This time, according to a Bangkok press, two Thai Mekong River patrol-craft were fired on from the Lao side.[808]

From there, the relations between Thailand and Laos further deteriorated when 2,000 Vietnamese forces attacked a Kampuchean refugee village inside Thailand on June 23, 1980. The attack was presumably in retaliation for what Hanoi deemed to be Thailand's unwarranted assistance to guerrillas opposed to the Vietnam-backed government of Heng Samrin in Kampuchea.[809] To exacerbate the situation, Laos denounced the Thai government on July 18, 1980 "for allowing Thai bandit groups and patrol forces openly to intrude into Lao territory to foment" and for giving aid to anti-Vietnamese and anti-Hen Samrin guerillas and refugees in Thailand. For Thailand, this statement, coupled with the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the subsequent installation of the pro-Vietnamese regime in Cambodia, all the more substantiated their fear of Vietnam's intent to replace the French as the master of Indochina. By mid-August 1980, Justus van der Kroef writes, "it was clear that the main stumbling-block to improving Lao-Thai relations so far as the Bangkok government was concerned was Vientiane's heavy dependence on Vietnam."[810] It was the Lao PDR government's heavy reliance on Vietnam, the Bankok daily *Matichon* added, that was at the root of the tension between Laos and Thailand. It was Vietnam that forced its Indochinese neighbors to accept the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978 and subsequent installation of a "puppet" government in Phnom Penh.[811] The Thai, John Pavoni reported, were "nervous that the Lao communists will increase their support to the insurgency in northeastern Thailand and possibly facilitate a marked increase in North Vietnamese support to it."[812]

Besides the concerns that Laos had become a base of support for Thai insurgents and a part of an "Indochina Federation" ruled from Hanoi, controlling Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam, the Lao historic irredentist claim on sections of Thailand's northeast region, known in Thai and Lao language as Phat Isan, also gave the

---

[808] Radio Bangkok, 2 August 1980 (FBIS, 4 August 1980).
[809] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Laos and Thailand," *Contemporary Laos*, 275-276.
[810] Ibid., 277.
[811] *Matichon* (Bangkok), 29 August 1980 (FBIS, 29 August 1980).
[812] John Pavoni, "Laos-Thailand: Tensions Across the Mekong," Prepared for the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, Report No. 158, 15 October 1975, in Douglas Pike Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University.

Bangkok government further cause for alarm. The terms of the Border Delimitation Treaty that Laos signed with Vietnam on July 18, 1977 as a part of their 25-Year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation have not been published. It was, however, a "well-known fact among the Lao," according to Lao specialist Arthur Dommen, that "Nong Het, Ban Namo, Sop Loi, Ban Chalo and perhaps other localities" could see the shifting of border markers by the Vietnamese—an effort consistent with Vietnam's long-time claims to part of Laos' territory.[813] According to a Pathet Lao defector who fled to Thailand in August 1976, Hanoi "had a plan for an invasion of the Phat-Isan set for January-February 1977. At the end of May 1976, Hanoi moved seven divisions (60,000-70,000 men) into position on the Mekong in Houei Sai, Oudomsai, Luang Prabang, Thakhek, Savannakhet and Champassak."[814] The plan was ultimately sidetracked and aborted because of the growing anti-Communist guerrilla resistance to the Lao PDR government and the security concerns surrounding the arrest of King Savang Vatthana as well as Hanoi's increasing confrontations with the Khmer Rouge in 1977. According to Martin Stuart-Fox, a Lao specialist, since the Pathet Lao came to power in 1975, the issue of Lao irredentism in the northeast, or Phat Isan, figured prominently in private conversations among communist cadres.[815] It was thus no surprise that the Thai government in Bangkok would express concern over the formation in June 1979 of a new Thai Communist Party, the "Thai Isan Liberation Party," headquartered in Paksane, Laos and with a pro-Hanoi and pro-Soviet political orientation. On June 21, a Thai military source claimed that the Thai Isan Liberation Party, abetted by the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, planned to liberate the "Isan" region from the supposedly "pro-Chinese" Thai government in Bangkok.[816]

While Pa Kao Her of the ELOL and Vang Pao of the ULNLF used the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute and the escalating tension between the Lao PDR and China to gain weapon, training, credibility and power from China, they also took full advantage of the Thailand-Lao border conflicts over the Isan territory (northeastern Thailand) and

---

[813] Arthur Dommen, "Laos Between Thailand and Vietnam," *Contemporary Laos*, 310-311.
[814] Ibid., 311.
[815] Martin Stuart-Fox, "Factors Influencing Relations Between Communist Parties of Thailand and Laos," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 4, (April 1979), 350.
[816] Justus M. van der Kroef, "Laos and Thailand: The Balancing of Conflict and Accommodation," *Contemporary Laos*, 287-288.

along the Mekong River to get Thailand to provide them not only sanctuary in Thailand but also training for their resistance against the communist Lao PDR government during the 1980s. After his return from Beijing in 1979, Thailand authorized Pa Kao Her to set up the ELOL military training camp in northeastern Thailand. In the early 1980s, Thailand created three special task forces to work with the various resistance groups in Thailand. Task Force (TF) 185 was the link to Pa Kao Her's Ethnic Liberation Organization of Organization (ELOL). According to Bee Moua, the ELOL representative in the United States in the 1980s, the Thai military trained more than 1,000 Hmong Chao Fa soldiers in Chiang Rai, between 1979 and 1987.[817] In 1985, according to Yang Thao, former secretary general of the ELOL, the ELOL recruited and trained more than 1,500 armed personnel at Tatsin camp, ampheau Chiangkham, Phayao province.[818] Another task force, TF 332, kept contact with Vang Pao loyalists in the refugee camps. The third task force, TF 223, was responsible for organizing Hmong resistance fighters for special clandestine operations inside Laos.[819]

By forming alliance with the Thai government and army, Pa Kao Her and Vang Pao got them to give Hmong refugees, especially those in Ban Vinai, greater autonomy and mobility. With the cooperation of local Thai military officers, Hmong refugees could travel back and forth between Pa Kao's military training camp and Ban Vinai. They could move in and out of the camp to launch attacks on the Lao PDR government and army at the Thai-Lao border or inside Laos.[820] Vang Pao supporters in the United States were also able to travel back and forth from the United States to Thailand to recruit and mobilize Hmong refugees in the camps to join the resistance.[821] Vang Pao himself made several secret trips to Thailand. On one occasion, after he landed in Thailand, Vang Pao booked a flight from Bangkok to Yunnan Province to persuade "five Chinese Hmong

---

[817] Bee Moua, Notes in Hmong Social and Cultural Forum, 31 January 2008.
[818] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection), 12.
[819] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 439.
[820] MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, "Government and Politics," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 234; Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008; Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.
[821] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, tape recording, St. Paul, MN, 22 October 2008; Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War: Family Secrets, Part 2," *Twin Cities Reader*, 8-14 November 1980, 8-10 and 12-14; Ruth Hammond, "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1990, 12-13; Lee Lescaze, "Laotians Waiting in Thai Camps for Chance to Fight Again," *Washington Post*, 26 March 1979, A19.

(Miao) to join Neo Hom and help train guerillas."[822] On a different occasion, Vang Pao crossed the border back to Laos to visit and take photos with his guerillas in the Lao jungle near Sayaboury Province.[823] From 1983 to 1991, Hmong anthropologist Gary Yia Lee writes, "the Thai informally provided radio communications and short-term military training to groups of freedom fighters operating under the Chao Fa and the ULNLF, sending small teams of them into Laos and waiting at the border to accompany them back into the refugee camps on their return to Thailand."[824] Throughout the 1980s, besides the ELOL military camp that Pa Kao set up in northeastern Thailand, the ELOL and the ULNLF were also able to use the refugee camps as bases from which Hmong resistance fighters launched their guerilla raids into Laos, all with the tacit approval of the Thai government and military.[825]

In return, the Thai government and military used Pa Kao Her and his people as well as Vang Pao's guerillas in Thailand to gather intelligence on Communist insurgencies and movements along the Thai-Lao border. From time to time, Thailand also used Pa Kao Her and his men to fight off Pathet Lao soldiers when Thailand and Laos were directly involved in territorial disputes. In 1984, for example, Thailand called upon Pa Kao Her and his men to help the Thai Army fight against Pathet Lao forces over three remote villages that Thai army road building crews encountered in Utradith Province near the Thai-Lao border. For the Thai army construction crews, the location of the three villages on available maps indicated that the three villages belonged to Thailand. The Lao PDR government and military, however, thought otherwise, arguing that the three villages fell under Lao sovereignty based on maps from the early days of the French protectorate. Conflict between Thailand and Laos soon broke out for control over the

---

[822] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 452.
Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos*, (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1996), 384.; Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat, 452;* Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "The General's Last Stand," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 28 July 1996, 1A; Photos of Vang Pao with Hmong soldiers in Thailand are also available in Vang Xiong's Ban Vinai Photo Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[824] Gary Yia Lee, "The Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims of Totalitarianism or Terrorists?" in *A Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, edited by Andrew Tan, (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2007): 352-273. The article is available online at Gary Yia Lee's website at http://www.garyyialee.com/.
[825] Nicholas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 278; Lynellyn D. Long, *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 133-142; Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 439.

three villages.[826] According to Yang Thao, Thailand sought the assistance of Pa Kao's ELOL after several months of military and diplomatic standoff. When the ELOL intervened, Thailand was at risk of losing sovereignty over the three villages to Laos. After three weeks of fighting the Lao People's Army, Chao Fa soldiers, under the command of Colonel Moua Pa Kao and Moua Nhia Long, drove LPA forces across the border back to Laos. "During the border clash in 1984 at the Tri-villages, ampheu Bankhok, Utradith province, the Thai Commander in Chief asked Chao Fa to help Thai fight the PLA," Yang Thao wrote. "The Chao Fa fighters then penetrated deep inside Laos and attacked PLA in surprise. We destroyed PLA's heavy artilleries and killed their operation commanders. We destroyed PLA supply lines, sabotaged their reinforcement, and forced Laos to withdraw."[827] The Lao PDR government then took the dispute to the United Nations, where Thailand was striving for election to the Security Council. "In keeping with such aspirations," Nicholas Auclair wrote, "Thailand announced that it would remove its troops from the three villages and seek a peaceful settlement through a resurvey of the watershed border."[828]

In 1987, Thailand again involved Pa Kao's ELOL in its territorial dispute with Laos. The dispute broke out in December over a territory that the Lao PDR claimed was a part of Botèn District in Sayaboury Province and that Thailand claimed was a part of Chat Trakan in Phitsanulok Province.[829] According to Yang Thao, the military advisor and strategist for the ELOL, before the Thai military asked Pa Kao and the ELOL to intervene in this dispute at Ban Rum Kao in Sayabouri Province, the Lao People's Army had wiped out an entire Thai battalion—battalion 309—and took control of the territory. The Lao People's Army had also shot down one of Thailand's Jet Fighter F15. "Under urgent order of General Chavalit Yongchaiyut, the Thai Military Commander," Yang Thao explained, "General Sanaan Savectcerany came to seek help from Chao Fa to

---

[826] Arthur Dommen, "Historical Setting," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 73; MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zaloff, "Government and Politics," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 248; and Nicholas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 284; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 171-174.
[827] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Collection; Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.
[828] Nicholas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 284.
[829] Arthur Dommen, "Historical Setting," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 73; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 267-268.

destroy Lao People's Army supply line on route #1 from Luang Prabang to Sayabouri to the battle ground at Rum Kao." Code named Battalion 3091 under the supervision of two Thai generals, General Sanaan Savetcerany and General Chavalit Yongchaiyut and Hmong military officers, Bee Chou Thao, Pa Kao Moua, and Colonel Yang Thao, several hundred Chao Fa fighters completed an extensive military training program in Chiang Rai, northern Thailand. After several weeks of fighting, following their training in Chiang Rai, Chao Fa fighters pushed Lao People's Army away from Ban Rumkao and prevented the area from falling under complete Lao sovereignty.[830] Arthur Dommen and Nicholas Auclar, both specialists on Laos, reported that this dispute claimed more than 1,000 lives before Thailand and Laos declared a cease-fire on February 19, 1988.[831] Ban Rum Kao, according to Yang Thao, remains a contested territory to this day. Neither Laos nor Thailand has been able to claim absolute sovereignty over the disputed territory.[832]

Most of all, in return for their stay in Thailand, Thailand used Hmong guerilla fighters, especially Pa Kao Her and his men in the ELOL, to persuade Communist or Red Hmong in Thailand to drop their arms, end the insurgency against the Thai government, and come under Thailand's sovereignty. In the 1960s, because of their resentment and dispute with local Thai police over poppy cultivation, segments of the Hmong population in Thailand joined the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in the fight against the Thai government. After the Thai burned to the ground Doi Chompoo, a Hmong village in Chiang Rai Province, following several Hmong refusals to pay taxes to local officials for their poppy cultivation, a widespread Hmong rebellion against the Thai government broke out in four provinces in 1967-8. Nicholas Tapp wrote,

> The Royal Thai Army and Airforce were dispatched to the area, and the government treated the movement, which in its origins was a local one, as a full-scale insurgency. Troop assaults, napalm, and heavy artillery strikes were employed, and hill villages suspected of harboring insurgents were bombed from

[830] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Collection.
[831] Arthur Dommen, "Historical Setting," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 73; Nicholas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 285.
[832] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.

the air. Local Chinese militia and members of other minorities, such as the Akha, were also mobilized against the Hmong."[833]

By 1969, the Thai government was calling the Red Hmong "Meo terrorists."[834] The insurgency posed such a threat to Thai national security that it "created such a demand for reliable and practical data on the tribal structures, social customs, interrelationships and value systems of the mountain people." The result of the demand was the *Meo Handbook*, in which the U.S. Embassy and the Thai Military Research and Development Center described the Hmong as "highly industrious, relatively intelligent, frank and honest, highly aggressive under certain circumstances, and above all, independent" and the Hmong temperament as "a blending of passivity and aggressiveness." Under normal conditions, the U.S. Embassy and Thai Military Research and Development Center continued, "especially in dealings with outsiders, the Meo appeared to be reserved, quiet, and sometimes even elusive. Nevertheless, if they feel that their freedom is threatened or that their properties are endangered by outsiders, they are extremely aggressive."[835] A Thai colonel, writing in 1968-9, similarly described the Hmong as aggressive "man eaters" who would not be satisfied, "even though they may [have killed] their enemy, until they eat his liver."[836] Thailand's full-scale repression of Hmong communist insurgency in the late 1960s drove hundreds of Red Hmong into safer CPT zones in the forest.

After the government of Kriangsak Chommand gave amnesty to Communist insurgents in Thailand in 1978-1979, many Red Hmong insurgents had come out of the forest to resume their lives in the village. According to Yang Thao and Sue Her, former ELOL advocates and fighters who I interviewed, however, many of the Red Hmong insurgents had not. During the 1980s, Thailand used Pa Kao Her and the ELOL to rebuild the strained relation between Red Hmong and the Thai military and bring the Red

---

[833] Nicholas Tapp, *Soveriegnty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36.
[834] Roger Lindsay, "How 'Mao' the Meo?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 January-1 February 1969, 182.
[835] Joint Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center, *Meo Handbook*, (Bangkok: Advanced Researched Projects Agency, 1969), 1.
[836] Col. Thong-U Thaikla, "Meo: The Courageous Hill Tribe," *Yut Takot Journal*, August 1968-January 1969. In Thai and translated into English by Sasinee Jotikasthira. Located in Thailand Information Center, Chulalongkhorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, Call no. 11271.

Hmong under Thailand's sovereignty. Because of their shared ethnicity, Pa Kao successfully befriended the Red Hmong in Thailand and reintegrated them into Thai society. Describing the diversity of the people who supported Pa Kao Her's ELOL, Sue Her said:

> The people who joined Pa Kao came from the refugee camps, the Hmong villages in Thailand, and the jungle of Laos. Some were refugees. Some were Hmong Thai. Others were Chao Fa fighters from the Lao jungle. The Hmong Thai were those Red Hmong Thai. When Pa Kao was in Thailand, he befriended Red Hmong Thai and White Hmong Thai alike. The Thai government saw that by allowing Pa Kao to station his military base in Thailand, it would help to promote an understanding with Red Hmong Thai. After Pa Kao came to Thailand, he went to tal to Red Hmong Thai and brought them to live with him. He persuaded the Red Hmong Thai that the Thai government also cared about them. He fed and clothed them, so they stayed with him. When Chao Fa fighters crossed the border to fight in Laos, Red Hmong Thai also went with them.[837]

One of those Red Hmong was a young man in his twenties named Prakorb (a Thai name) who Tom Peter of *Soldier of Fortune* met and documented in his 1991 report of Chao Fa resistance activities near the Lao-Thai border in the early 1990s. Born while his parents were still members of the CPT, he surrendered to Thai authorities in the early 1980s with governmental amnesty but later joined the ELOL in their fight against Pathet Lao communists "for a purely Hmong cause."[838] According to Yang Thao, former general secretary of the ELOL, Pa Kao also successfully persuaded some Red Thai (Thai communist insurgents) in Thailand to surrender and reintegrate into Thai society after they cut off their support from the Lao People's Army and expelled Lao communists from the Thai border.[839]

---

[837] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[838] Tom Peterson, "Mekong River Mayhem: Chao Fah Ambushes Pathet Lao," *Soldier of Fortune*, (April 1991): 58-63.
[839] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection); Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.

Reagan Doctrine and the Second Cold War

Outside of Indochina, the ELOL and the ULNLF also took advantage of President Ronald Reagan's policy objective to roll back Soviet hegemony in the Third World to garn support from various anti-Soviet groups in the United States for their resistance against the Lao PDR and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. By allying themselves with conservative right-wing groups in the United States, the ELOL and the ULNLF received money, publicity, credibility, as well as power. To understand how the ELOL and the ULNLF benefited from their alliance with anti-Soviet resistance groups in the United States and how those alliances helped sustain their resistance during the 1980s, it is important to know the policy, ideology, political organizations, infrastructure, and events that led up to those alliances.

When Ronald Reagan sought the presidency in 1980, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia had fallen into the Soviet orbit in Southeast Asia. In southern Africa, Angola and Mozambique, with the aid of tens of thousands of Cuban troops, had come under pro-Soviet regimes. In the Horn of Africa, again with the help of Cuba, pro-Soviet regimes were taking over Ethiopia and South Yemen. Pro-Soviet regimes, too, took power in Nicaragua and Grenada in the Caribbean. In the heart of the Persian Gulf, Soviet troops directly invaded Afghanistan from the north on Christmas Day 1979. "By New Year's Day 1980," Andrew Busche writes, "the international wreckage caused by recent Soviet advances was visible virtually everywhere."[840] For Reagan, the Soviet Union was unmistakably the cause of all the instabilities and chaos in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. "Let's not delude ourselves," Reagan said in an interview in June 1980. "The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world."[841] An impeccable foe, the Soviet Union, as far as Reagan was concerned, "is at war with the United States."[842] The United States was not just at war with any enemy.

---

[840] Andrew Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 185-186.
[841] James M. Scott, *Deciding the Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 17; Chester Pach, "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy," *President Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1, (2006): 79.
[842] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War*, 231.

The United States, Reagan said in his televised speech for Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater in 1964, was "at war with the most dangerous enemy ever known to man."[843] To protect and defend freedom and democracy, the Reagan administration believed that the United States must strengthen its military power and stop the evil Soviet empire from its quest to conquer the world.

After Reagan took office in 1981, he made the challenge to Soviet imperialism a core objective of his foreign policy. On May 20, 1982, the administration released its first comprehensive "U.S. National Security Strategy," where it outlined its objective "to contain and reverse the expansion of Soviet control and military presence throughout the world, and to increase the costs of Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist and subversive forces."[844] A year later, the administration released another policy statement about U.S.-Soviet relations. In this National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 75, which Harvard University history professor Richard Pipes authored and Reagan approved on January 17, 1983, the administration affirmed its objectives to reverse Soviet expansionism and added that the United States should compete "on a sustained basis with the Soviet Union in all international arenas."[845] In 1983, President Reagan warned that the Soviets remained "the focus of evil in the modern world."[846] Two years later, Reagan outlined in his 1985 State of the Union address how the administration would compete with the evil empire in all international arenas. Central to the Reagan administration's strategy to "roll back" Soviet imperialism was the organizing and financing of anti-communist guerrillas in many of the countries that had recently fallen into the Soviet orbit. "We cannot play innocents abroad in a world that's not innocent; nor can we be passive when freedom is under siege," Reagan said in his State of the Union address on February 6, 1985. "We must not break faith with those who are risking their lives—on

---

[843] "A Time for Choosing (The Speech—October 27, 1964)," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California. Retrieved on 15 March 2010, from http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/timechoosing.html.

[844] National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 32, 20 May 1982, Intelligence Resource Program Federation of American Scientists. Retrieved on 15 March 2010, from http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-032.htm.

[845] Christopher Simpson, *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 255-263.

[846] Ronnie Dugger, *On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983), 353.

every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth… Support for freedom fighters is self-defense."[847] Ten days later, Reagan reiterated his commitment to support "freedom fighters" in the third world, saying not only that the United States had a moral obligation to aid those freedom fighters but also that the freedom of the United States was interconnected to the freedom of the anti-communist movements in the third world. "Time and again," Reagan said, "we have aided those around the world struggling for freedom, democracy, independence from tyranny… In the 19th century we supported Simon Bolivar, the great liberator. We supported the Polish patriots, the French resistance and others seeking freedom. It's not in the American tradition to turn away."[848]

On February 22, 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz affirmed Reagan's policy to roll back Soviet hegemony in a speech before San Francisco's Commonwealth Club. Like President Reagan, Shultz contended that Soviet imperialism had provoked a wave of democratic revolutions around the world in the 1980s. "Where once the Soviet may have thought all discontent was ripe for turning into communist insurgencies, today we see a new and different kind of struggle: people around the world risking their lives against communist despotism. We see brave men and women fighting to challenge the Brezhnev doctrine," Shultz said.[849] The United States could not remain an idle bystander in the midst of these democratic revolutions. The United States had a "moral duty" to aid those who had arisen to challenge Soviet hegemony, and they must do so not only because of the U.S. long tradition of supporting the struggle of other peoples for democracy, freedom, and independence but also because of the link between anti-communist movements in the Third World and U.S. national interests. In Shultz's words, "When the United States supports those resisting totalitarianism, we do so not only out of our historical sympathy for democracy and freedom but also, in many cases, in the interests

---

[847] "Address before a Joint Session of Congress of the State of the Union, February 6, 1985," *Public Papers of the Presidents: Ronald Reagan 1985*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), 135.
[848] Quote found Ted Galen Carpenter, "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The 'Reagan Doctrine' and Its Pitfalls," *Policy Analysis* 74, (Washington, D.C: Cato Institute, 1986):1. Retrieved on 5 August 2009 from http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa074.htm.
[849] George Shultz, "America and the Struggle for Freedom," address to the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, 22 February 1985, 2-4.

of our national security."[850] To turn its back on that tradition would mean, as Ted Carpenter points out, "conceding that communist revolutions were irreversible, something the Reagan administration would never countenance."[851] For Shultz, therefore, aiding the latest generation of freedom fighters in places like Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Angola, and Nicaragua not only was a must; it was a right. "So long as communist dictatorships feel free to aid and abet insurgents in the name of 'socialist internationalism'," he said, "why must the democracies, the target of this threat, be inhibited from defending their own interests and the cause of democracy itself?"[852]

On April 1, 1985, Charles Krauthammer named the Reagan administration's policy of a global rollback of Soviet imperialism through financing and arming anti-communist insurgents in third world nations the "Reagan Doctrine" in his regular column in *Time* magazine. For Krauthammer, the Reagan Doctrine was the president's promise not to "break faith with those who are risking their lives—on every continent from Afghanistan to Nicaragua—to defy Soviet-supported aggression and secure rights which have been ours from birth," which Reagan announced in his State of the Union address two months earlier.[853] Since then, the name, Reagan Doctrine, stuck although the president did not announce his policy as such. Journalists, academics, and political analysts were all using Reagan Doctrine to refer to the president's strategy to roll back Soviet expansionism in the Third World. For author Fred Halliday, the United States race to destabilize the Soviet Union from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s constituted the "Second Cold War" between the United States and the Soviet Union superpowers.[854]

A zealous proponent of the President Reagan's policy to provide covert assistance to anti-Communist insurgents in the Third World was former CIA Director William Casey who, in March 1981, presented the memo that later became the foundation for the Reagan Doctrine, a program designed to roll back Soviet expansionism by soliciting funds from wealthy individuals, corporations, and foreign powers to aid anti-communist

---

[850] Ibid..
[851] Ted Galen Carpenter, "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The 'Reagan Doctrine' and Its Pitfalls," 1.
[852] George Shultz, "New Realities and New Ways of Thinking," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1985): 713.
[853] Charles Krauthammer, "Essay: The Reagan Doctrine," *Time*, 1 April 1985, 54-55.
[854] Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War*, (London: Verso, 1983), 1-23.

guerrillas in the third world.[855] In his memo, Casey outlined covert actions against Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Laos, Cambodia, Grenada, Iran, Libya, and Cuba.[856] As the Reagan administration made the global rollback of Soviet expansionism one of its key foreign policy objectives, a broad range of conservative organizations rushed to join Washington to promote the cause of Third World "freedom fighters." A number of the New Right organizations in the United States raised money to ship clothes, bibles, medical supplies and guns directly to specific anti-communist guerilla movements in the Third World.[857]

A group of guerilla fighters against the Lao PDR government—the government which Casey had identified as one of the countries to overthrow in his 1981 memo—Pa Kao and his freedom fighters took the opportunity to secure the support of anti-Communist conservative groups and organizations in the United States whose interest and mission were to put the Reagan Doctrine into action. In June 1985, Pa Kao Her, President of the ELOL, got Lewis Lehrman, a millionaire Republican who ran unsuccessfully for Governor of New York in 1982 and Chairman of the Citizens for America, to fly him from Thailand to a village in Angola for a meeting with other anti-Soviet freedom fighters. In the Angolan jungle in Jamba, a village consisting of a military base, a hospital, open-air schools and other buildings close to Angola's border with South-West Africa, Pa Kao met Jonas Malheiro Savimbi, President of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), Adolfo Calero, Director of the Nicaraguan Unity of Opposition, and Ghulam Wardak, a colonel in the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujadhedin. Honored as the leader of the freedom fighters in Laos, Pa Kao formed a unity pact called the Democratic International with Johas Malheiro Savimbi, Adolfo Calero, and Ghulam Wardak. The four freedom fighter leaders, all of whom were

---

[855] Michael Ross, "Probe Links 'Reagan Doctrine' to Covert Aid to Lao Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1993.

[856] Thomas Bodenheimer and Robert Gould, *Rollback! Right-Wing Power in U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 83.

[857] Robert Tomsho, "Part-Time Revolutionaries," *Dallas Life Magazine*, 9 February 1986, 15-16 & 25-29; "Little Help from Friends," *Newsweek*, 23 December 1985, 27; Russel Watson, Kim Willenson, and Ron Moreau, "The Friends of Tommy Posey," *Newsweek*, 17 September 1984; and Alfonso Chardy, "Groups Won't Cut Contra Aid," *Dallas Morning News*, 16 June 1985; Robert Greenberger, "Right-Wing Groups Join in Capitol Hill Crusade to Help Savimbi's Anti-Communists in Angola," *Wall Street Journal*, 25, November 1985; Robert Pear and James Brooke, "Rightists in U.S. Aid Mozambique Rebels," *New York Times*, 22 May 1988.

fighting against Soviet or Cuban-backed regimes, vowed "to cooperate to liberate our nations from the Soviet imperialists."[858] "Colonialism denies the right of free people to legitimate self-determination," the Democratic International declared. "The old colonialism of the 18th and early 19th centuries has passed into oblivion with the success of the independent movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Today, there is only one colonial power in the world, the Soviet empire, an empire more vicious and oppressive than all others that passed before." Echoing the language of the Reagan Doctrine, the Democratic International added that "Soviet imperialism is the common enemy of mankind."[859]

At the time of this unity pact, Angola was embroiled in a bloody civil war. The Soviets backed the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the dominant power throughout the western portion of the country, including the crucial capital city, Luanda. Meanwhile, the United States and China threw their support to Savimbi's UNITA, most active in the southern and eastern provinces, and the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA), led by Holden Roberto, a relative by marriage to Zairian dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, a longtime American client.[860] According to author William Blum, there was very little difference, ideologically, among the three groups. The Portuguese government had denounced all three rebel groups as "communists and terrorists." The only apparent reason that both the United States and China had supported UNITA and FLNA was that the Soviets were backing the MPLA.[861] In Nicaragua, the United States supported an indigenous band of guerrilla contra fighters called Contras against the Sandinista Government, whose allies included the Soviet Union, Cuba and the Marxist guerilla forces in El Salvador.[862] In 1987, two years after

---

[858] Alan Cowell, "Four Rebels Units Sign Anti-Soviet Pact," *New York Times*, 6 June 1985; "A Fledging Alliance," *Time Magazine*, 17 June 1985; Michael Sullivan, "Rebels Opposing Marxist Regimes in 4 Nations Unite," *Washington Times*, 6 June 1985. For photos of Pa Kao Her and his associates, Bee Moua and Teng Yang, on their flight and stay in Angola, see the Bee Moua Photos and Papers Collection at the Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[859] A copy of the declaration of the Democratic International is found in the Bee Moua photo and paper collections at the Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[860] Ted Galen Carpenter, "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The 'Reagan Doctrine' and Its Pitfalls," 2; Jack Wheeler, "Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: UNITA in Angola," *Reason*, (April 1984): 25-28.

[861] William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995), 250-251.

[862] Mark P. Lagon, "The International System and the Reagan Doctrine: Can Realism Explain Aid to 'Freedom Fighters'?" *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (1992): 53-58; Charles Krauthammer, "Support the Contras," *Washington Post*, 11 January 1985; W. Bruce Weinrod, "Thirty Myths About Nicaragua," Heritage Lecture no. 54, (Washington: Heritage Foundation, 1986).

the meeting in the Angolan jungle, the Contras reportedly recruited anti-communist Hmong refugees in California to go to Nicaragua to help overthrow the Sandinista Government, but it is unclear whether any Hmong actually went to Nicaragua.[863] In Afghanistan, the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, among other nations, provided aid to the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan Mujadhedin, which comprised a loose confederation of seven rebel organizations, against the godless atheistic Soviet-run communist government of Babrak Karmal, leader and founder of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDFA).[864] For the United States, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas Day 1979 was "Soviet aggression;" it was, as William Blum writes, the "Soviet swallowing up another innocent state as part of their plan to conquer the world, or at least the Middle East."[865]

At the Angolan meeting, Lewis Lehrman, the millionaire Republic leader and chairman of the Citizens for America who financed the travel expenses of all the delegates, including Pa Kao Her and his associates, Bee Moua, and Teng Yang, presented each delegate with a framed copy of the Declaration of Independence.[866] He also read aloud portions of a letter from Reagan, which stated,

> Around the world we see people joining together to get control of their affairs, and to free their nations from outside domination and an alien ideology. It is a global trend, and one of the most hopeful of our times. Those of us lucky enough to live in democratic lands have to be moved by the example of men and women who struggle every day, at great personal risk, for rights that we have enjoyed from birth. Their goals are our goals.[867]

The Mozambique National Resistance Movement also was invited, but South Africa refused to allow them passage to Angola. The Cambodians also were no-shows although Cambodian rebel leader Son Sann sent a message of solidarity. Pa Kao Her, Jane

---

[863] "The Road From Laos to Nicaragua," *The Economist*, 7 March 1987.
[864] Mark P. Lagon, "The International System and the Reagan Doctrine," 50-51; Ted Galen Carpenter, "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels," 2; Jack Wheeler, "Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: The Mujaheddin in Afghanistan," *Reason* (September 1984): 22-27.
[865] William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War Two*, 346
[866] Walter Shapiro and Peter Younghusband, "Lehrman's Contra Conclave," *Newsweek*, (17 June 1986): 29.
[867] Letter from President Ronald Reagan to Mr. Lewis E. Lehrman, 30 May 1985. In Bee Moua Photos and Papers Collection, at the Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Hamilton-Merritt wrote, "left Angola with a videotape of his 'coronation' as the head of the Lao freedom fighters and with write-ups and photos in international news magazines."[868] By going to Angola, Pa Kao Her garnered international attention for his struggle for freedom in the Laos. By signing the unity pact with other anti-Soviet guerilla fighters, he brought credibility and power to the ELOL, making his resistance not only more legitimate but also more threatening to the Lao PDR government.

The publicity that Pa Kao Her received from his trip to Angola eventually led him to the United States. On September 9, 1985, three months after the Angolan meeting, retired U.S. Army Major General John K. Singlaub invited Pa Kao Her and Bee Moua to participate in the 18th Conference of the World Anti-Communist League in Dallas, Texas. Singlaub was deputy CIA station chief in South Korea from 1950 to 1952 and one of the major organizers of Operation Phoenix which killed between 20,000 and 40,000 South Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. In 1984, he was the Chairman of the United States Council for World Freedom (USCWF), the anti-communist organization with link to the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) and other conservative organizations, including Friends of the Americas, organized by New Right Louisiana State Rep. Woody Jenkins; *Solider of Fortune*, headed by Robert K. Brown; and Civilian Military Assistance, led by Tony Posey.[869] The United States Council for World Freedom (USCWF), which Major General Singlaub chaired in 1984, was the U.S. chapter of the WACL, an anti-communist organization originally founded by Taiwanese and South Korean leaders Chiang Kai-she and Syngman Rhee in 1954.[870] In his letters to both Pa Kao Her and Bee Moua, General Singlaub outlined that the intent of the conference, whose theme was "Counter-Offensive for World Freedom," was "to generate increased financial and moral support for the active democratic resistance movements." "We recognize eight active anti-communist movements in the world today," Singlaub added. "They are: Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Laos, Mozambique, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. It is our hope to bring together as many of the leaders as possible."[871]

---

[868] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 480.
[869] Thomas Bodenheimer and Robert Gould, *Rollback! Right-wing Power in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 57, 99-100.
[870] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 275.
[871] Letter from John K. Singlaub to Bee Moua, 14 August 1985; Letter from John K. Singlaub to Pa Kao Her, 14 August 1985. In Bee Moua Photos and Papers Collection, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Pa Kao's relationship with Major General Singlaub brought financial support from the USCWF to his organization. While at the conference, the USWF financed all travel and lodging expenses for Pa Kao, Bee Moua, and other Hmong leaders of the ELOL, as promised in his invitation letters to Pa Kao and Bee Moua.[872] After the conference, General Singlaub reportedly donated "an unspecified amount of money" to Pa Kao Her's guerilla organization, the ELOL, mainly for the purchase of arms. "The exact amount is unknown," Keith Quincy writes, "but reportedly it was relatively small."[873] In October 1985, the ELOL reported having received 1,050,000 (currency not indicated) from the United States government for its 15 politicians' operating costs. This, claimed Hamilton-Merritt, "was untrue. The Reagan White House gave nothing to Pa Kao Her's group and apparently never made any promise."[874] Alternatively, according to Keith Richburg of the *Washington Post*, Pa Kao Her, who declared himself "King of the Hmong" at the Dallas conference, was rewarded with generous financial support from the right-wing World Anti-Communist League (WACL) after the conference.[875] Pa Kao Her's ELOL also reportedly received generous financial support from the Hmong communities in the United States.

Pa Kao Her's relationship with Major General Singlaub also allowed him to "have a seat at the table," be seen as a credible power, present his quest for Hmong liberation in Laos, and further garner political and financial support from the Hmong in the United States. Following the Dallas conference, Pa Kao Her held meetings with Hmong communities in California and Minnesota. In one meeting on September 21, 1985, which lasted for six hours, Pa Kao presented his liberation strategies to Hmong leaders, outlined the supports of the United States and China for the organization, and delineated a plan to run Laos once the country was liberated. Presenting himself as the leader of the Hmong resistance in Laos, who had received the support of the United States and China and the promise of the United States with millions of dollars and military equipments to liberate

[872] Letter from John K. Singlaub to Bee Moua, 14 August 1985; Letter from John K. Singlaub to Pa Kao Her, 14 August 1985. In Bee Moua Photos and Papers Collection, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[873] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 441.
[874] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 482
[875] Keith B. Richburg, "Insurgency in Laos Seeking to Emerge From Anonymity; Recent Uprising in Jungle Fighting Reported," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1990, A27.

Laos, many Hmong naturally supported him and his requests for donations. "Many Hmong," said Hamilton-Merritt, "gave generously."[876]

After the Dallas conference, Pa Kao and the ELOL continued to receive strong support from the USCWF and the WACL. On October 22, 1985, in a letter to Bee Moua, General Singlaub explained that the presence of the ELOL leaders at the Dallas conference "contributed tremendously to the significance of its purpose, which was to organize Free World support for the active democratic resistance movements inside the Communist Empire." "I am very pleased," he wrote to Bee Moua, "you were able to share your knowledge and expertise with us and help make this one of the most meaningful and informative Conferences to date."[877] In September 1986, the World Anti-Communist League again brought ELOL representatives to Luxembourg to attend the 19th conference of the league. From August 16 to August 23, 1987, ELOL representatives again attended the 20th Conference of the World Anti-Communist League in Taipei, Taiwan, with the aid of the League. The U.S. right-wing support for Pa Kao Her and his ELOL continued 1987. In September 1990, ELOL representatives were again flown to Las Vegas, Nevada, to participate in the *Soldiers of Fortune* Convention and Expo.[878] In 1992, General Singlaub again helped arrange Pa Kao's visit to the Hmong community in Fresno, California. At the Fresno fairground, Pa Kao urged the 1,200 Hmong attendees to donate to the United Hmong Foundation, an organization founded in Clovis in 1991, to help stop Hmong refugees from being repatriated from Thailand to Laos. In his speech, Pa Kao said that the Communist government was similar to the previous Laotian monarchy; both prevented minorities like the Hmong from reach positions of authority. Laos could move ahead and prosper only if the government promoted democratic elections and equality for all ethnic nations. For Singlaub, communism was dead but not buried. "Unfortunately there are still several places where

---

[876] Ibid., 481-482.

[877] Letter from John K. Singlaub to Bee Moua, 22 October 1985. In Bee Moua Photos and Papers Collection, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[878] Pa Kao Her documented the attendance of ELOL representatives at these various conferences in his outline of the goals and policies of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos (a.k.a., the ELOL) in a packet of documents that Soua Her, a Chao Fa liaison in Merced, California, compiled and presented to U.S. Congress on April 26, 1994. These documents are found in the Special Collections at the Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota, File #: X21.1999.43.27. The events documented are found on pages 7-8 in the packet.

the leaders of the communist movement have not lost power and they continue to hold guns," he said.[879] Until the end of the collapse of Soviet Union in the late 1980s, because of the supports that Pa Kao received from the USCWF and the WACL, Hmong political scientist Shoua Yang observed, the United States "recognized Chao Fa as the only legitimate resistance organization fighting for freedom and democracy against the Communist government of the LPDR."[880]

Unlike Pa Kao Her, General Vang Pao of the United Lao National Liberation Front did not receive the support of the WACL or the USCWF, which General Singlaub chaired. In 1985, when Singlaub was looking for leaders who could help roll back communist victories in Southeast Asia, he initially contacted Vang Pao. After a meeting with Vang Pao in Los Angeles, however, Singlaub switched his support to Pa Kao, who he deemed "a real patriot." Singlaub was "not impressed" with Vang Pao when they met. Vang Pao, Singlaub said, never promised that he would get the United States government to recognize and pay back those who gave money to his fight against the communists in Laos, but he said he would try. "So I figure 'this guy is not playing it straight," Singlaub explained. "That's when I said, '[W]e'd better find somebody else'."[881]

Nevertheless, General Vang Pao was not completely out of the loop. In the early 1980s, Hmong resistance forces in Thailand, including Vang Pao's guerilla fighters, also reportedly received part of the money that President Reagan's National Security Council had raised from wealthy individuals, corporations and foreign powers to support anti-Communist forces across the globe. After a State Department meeting on July 28, 1981, representatives from the Pentagon, the NSC, and the State Department raised more than a half a million to pay Lao-Hmong resistance forces to gather intelligence on missing U.S. servicemen in Laos.[882] Some $578,689 wound up in a Bank of American account in Bangkok, Thailand, under the name Mushtaq Ahmed Diwan, and was later distributed to Lao-Hmong resistance forces in exchange for their help in locating U.S. POWs/MIAs in

---

[879] Alex Pulaski, "Hmong Asked to Help Lao Cause," *Fresno Bee*, 23 February 1992.
[880] Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations," (Ph.D Diss., Northern Illinois University, 2006), 169.
[881] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 276.
[882] U.S. Congress, Senate, *POW/MIA's*, Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993, pp. 303-310.

Laos.[883] "How much of the money went to Hmong resistance groups is unknown, but it is likely they received something," Keith Quincy writes.[884] In 1982, Washington provided $5 million in convert assistance to the anti-Communist resistance groups in Cambodia.[885] According to Quincy, a good deal of this money was channeled through Thailand, and "a small fraction was [again] siphoned off to Vang Pao's Hmong and to Pa Kao Her's Chao Fa."[886]

While Vang Pao did not impress General Singlaub of the USCWF, he received support from other right-wing anti-Communist individuals, groups and institutions in the United States. Individuals like Colonel Harry C. "Heinie" Aderholt and Carl Bernard (a highly decorated veteran of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War), who had served with Vang Pao in Laos during the Secret War in the 1960s, remained steadfastly loyal to Vang Pao. By August 1986, historian Paul Hillmer writes,

> Bernard and Rick Wade [a private citizen from Alaska who met Vang Pao in 1985] had found sympathetic ears in the offices of several congressmen and senators—including a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee—in the State Department, and in the Defense Intelligence Agency. Individuals from conservative groups like the Heritage Foundation, the American Freedom Foundation, GeoMiliTech Consultants Corporation, the Free Congress Foundation, and the ultra-right-wing Civilian Military Assistance (CMA) were also interested. In fact, CMA had already pledged sixty thousand dollars, contingent on Congress passing a bill for additional support.[887]

In 1984, the Heritage Foundation, the right-wing think tank in Washington, D.C., which had helped to translate President Reagan's doctrine into policy, had identified Laos as one of the nine nations, including Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Libya, Nicaragua, and Vietnam, to be overthrown.[888] On February 7, 1987, the Heritage

---

[883] Michael Ross, "Probe Links 'Reagan Doctrine' to Covert Aid to Lao Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1993; "Report Says Reagan Aid Sent POW Funds to Rebels," *Washington Post*, 14 January 1993.
[884] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 440.
[885] Andrew Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom*, 202; Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood at War*, 233.
[886] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 450.
[887] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 277.
[888] Stuart Butler, Michael Sanera, and W. Bruce Weinrod, *Mandate for Leadership II: Continuing the Conservative Revolution*, (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1984), 268.

Foundation brought General Vang Pao to Washington to speak to a group of invited guests. In his speech, Vang Pao said, "On behalf of the members of the United Lao National Liberation Front, the Laotian people, and the freedom fighters in Laos, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the Heritage Foundation for giving me the time to share with you the life of the Laotian people and the Laotian Resistance Forces that are currently struggling inside Laos." For Vang Pao, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was a "devious and wily imperialism," bent on "exterminating" the Laotian people by "escalating brutalities against" them, imprisoning and forcing them to do hard manual labor in reeducation camps, bringing more than 30,000 Vietnamese citizens to settle in the resource-rich areas of Laos in addition to the 60,000 Vietnamese occupation troops already stationed in the country, and slowly poisoning the people by toxic injections made to look like normal diseases. In his speech, Vang Pao outlined the objectives of the ULNLF as follow:

1) To mobilize all Laotian people, inside as well as outside of Laos, to overthrow the puppet regime imposed on the Laotian people by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; (2) To fight the expansionist policy of Socialist Vietnam and its territorial ambitions in Laos and in Southeast Asia; and (3) To mobilize support of world public opinion in favor of a democratic and peaceful Laos, protected by solid international guarantees; and (4) To combat Hanoi's regional expansionism by promoting a new structure of stability and peace in Indochina based on the absolute respect of the fundamental national rights of all people living in the region, as stipulated by the Geneva Agreement of 1954 on Indochina, of 1962 on Laos, and of the Paris Agreement of 1973 on Vietnam, and f the 1973 agreement in Vientiane on Laos.

Vang Pao concluded his speech with a passionate plea for help. "After eleven years of struggle without any help from the outside world," he said, "the Laotian people have proved themselves to be dedicated and committed to the full success of this noble mission. However, assistance is really needed to complete the task. The Laotian Resistance has proved that it deserves to be recognized and to receive enough financial support to fulfill the goal of freeing its homeland." With the "moral, political, and financial support from the world community, especially from the United States, People's Republic of China,

France, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, Japan, ASEAN, and other Western allies," Vang Pao concluded, "the Laotian people are sure that…the Resistance will be able to drive the Hanoi invasion troops out of Laos" and regain their freedom.[889] It is unclear whether Vang Pao or the ULNLF ever received any financial donation from the Foundation or how much money he raised from the speech. It is, however, unequivocal that Vang Pao was brought to Washington to speak at the Heritage Foundation because Vang Pao's ULNLF shared the same policy objective of overthrowing the Lao PDR government with the Heritage Foundation.

When the United States accused the Soviet Union of producing and supplying chemical weapons to Soviet-back regimes in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia as part of its larger campaign to roll back Soviet hegemony in the world, Vang Pao's ULNLF also seized the opportunity and succeeded to secure the U.S. Department of State to denounce the Lao PDR government, abetted by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), for its military use of chemical agents, notoriously dubbed "Yellow Rain," on the Hmong in the Lao jungle. The Soviet Union, Vang Pao's guerillas claimed, had supplied the chemical weapons that the Lao PDR and SRV governments used to gas defenseless Hmong families in Laos. By fighting against Yellow Rain, the ULNLF legitimized its leadership, involvement in global politics, and representation for the cause of the persecuted Hmong people in Laos.

The issue of Yellow Rain began in the summer of 1975 when Hmong refugees began telling doctors and relief workers in the refugee camps that the Vietnamese-backed Pathet Lao regime used Soviet-supplied chemical weapons to attack them in their villages and mountainous sanctuaries in the Lao jungle. Hmong refugees spoke of slow-flying aircraft attacking them in their villages with bombs and rockets that exploded overhead slightly above tree level, releasing a cloud of colored smoke, powder, or oily liquid that fell on a village or people working in nearby rice paddies. They mentioned smokes of various colors, including green, red, white, pink, blue, and yellow. "About 70 percent of refugee reports, however, described the agent as an oily yellow liquid with a relatively large droplet size that made a sound like rain when it struck the ground, vegetation, and

[889] General Vang Pao, *Against All Odds: The Laotian Freedom Fighters*, (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1987).

the roofs of houses," Jonathan Tucker writes. "For this reason, the Hmong called the agent 'Yellow Rain'."[890] As the vapors settled over huts and fields, they caused bizarre medical symptoms. Those caught in a shower of Yellow Rain frequently died, and so did those who ate food or drank water from sources contaminated with yellowish powder. Those on the periphery of an attack also sometimes died, and everyone described dizziness, skin infections, blisters, blindness, bleeding from the nose and mouth, stomach cramps, bloody diarrhea, and hemorrhaging.

Aid workers and doctors in the camps relayed these accounts of chemical attacks on Hmong refugees to U.S. Embassy officials in Bangkok as early as 1975. Such reports, however, remained fragmentary to 1976. In 1977, the number of reports on the Pathet Lao regime's use of Soviet-engineered chemical agents on the Hmong in Phou Bia Mountain increased dramatically. By 1978, the issue of Yellow Rain had reached the international press.[891] These reports led U.S. officials to raise the issue with the Lao Charge d'Affaires in Washington and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke to go to Vientiane in October 1978 to raise U.S. concern over human rights for the Hmong. In March 1979, the United States again raised the use of Yellow Rain on the Hmong at the 35th session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission. In May 1979, U.S. Foreign Service Officer Edward McWilliams went to refugee camps in Thailand to interview Hmong eyewitnesses and gather more evidences.[892]

On December12, 1979, the United States held its first congressional hearing on the military use of chemical agents in Southeast Asia since the Vietnam War.[893] At this hearing, Tou Yi Vang, a former sergeant in Vang Pao's secret army from 1961 to 1971

---

[890] Jonathan B. Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy: Lessons for Arms Control Compliance," *The Nonproliferation Review*, (Spring 2001): 26.

[891] For early press reports on Yellow Rain, see "Poison Gas Used by Vietnam in Laos," *The Times* (London), 27 September 1978; "Poison Attacks on Laos Tribes," *The Guardian*, 8 January 1978; "Poisonous Gases Reported Used on Laos Tribes," *The International Herald Tribune*, 23 October 1978; Neil Kelly, "Meos Lose Home in the Mountains," *The Bangkok Post*, 12 October 1978; Dominica Garcia, "In Thailand: Refugees' Horror and Misery," *New York Times*, 14 November 1978, A27; Odgen Williams, "The Allies We Abandoned in Laos Are Still Fighting and Dying," *The Washington Post*, 17 September 1978, B1ff; Hugh Davies, "Vietnam Troops 'Using Death Gas on Tribesmen'," *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 1979; Michael Parks, "Laos Mired in Fight with Hill Tribesmen," *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 October 1978.

[892] Robert L. Bartley and William Kucewicz, "Yellow Rain and the Future of Arms Agreements," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1983), 805.

[893] U.S. Congress, House, *Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia Since the Vietnam War*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 1st Session, 12 December 1979.

and 1973 to 1975, who came to the United States in October 1979, told Congress that the Vietnamese-Pathet Lao regime attacked his village and nearby villages in 1977 and 1978 with chemical poisons. Describing the effects of chemical poisons on him and others in his village, he said:

> When I breathed the gas, one time, I became very sick. Within an hour or two, I had diarrhea, headaches, my stomach jumped up and down, it was very difficult to breathe, it felt like heavy pressure on my whole body, my vision was blurred and my eyes felt like popping out. I swallowed ginger and opium and felt better in several days. In this attack eight people died from breathing too much gas. They had heavy bleeding from the nose. They could not stop their bodies from shaking and died in several hours.[894]

Expert testimonies from the U.S. Army medical team led by Dr. Charles Lewis and from State Department witnesses led by Deputy Assistant Secretary Evelyn Colbert, all corroborated Hmong refugees' testimonies regarding the use of chemical agents against the Hmong in Laos. These expert testimonies, as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Lester Wolff, pointed out, "placed squarely on the public record, for the first time, the U.S. Government conclusion that lethal chemical agents have been systematically used on the hill tribes people in Laos from 1975 to at least May 1979." The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), at the time, also confirmed that chemical agents had been used against the Hmong in Laos, declaring that strong evidences existed to conclude that "chemical warfare (CW) agents have been used in Laos by the Laotian and Vietnamese forces against dissident Meo tribesmen."[895]

For the next few years, the United States continued to collect reports of gas attacks against the Hmong in Laos by Pathet Lao and Vietnamese military forces. After the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia to depose the murderous Khmer Rouge regime in December 1978, the United States received similar reports about chemical attack from Cambodia, where Khmer Rouge forces were still holding out against Vietnamese.

---

[894] Tou Yi Vang, Statement on "Chemical Warfare in Indochina," through Interpreter Su Thao, in U.S. Congress, House, *Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia Since the Vietnam War*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 5th Session, 12 December 1979, 18.

[895] All of these expert testimonies are found in U.S. Congress, *Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia Since the Vietnam War*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 5th Session, 12 December 1979.

Similar reports about chemical warfare also started to pour out from Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Together, these reports from Laos, Cambodia, and Afghanistan of similar chemical attacks caused grave concerns for the Carter Administration.[896] In 1979, the State Department sent formal diplomatic protests to the governments of Laos, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. After the three countries rejected the charges out of hand, the Carter Administration went on public.[897] In 1980, the administration compiled a 131-page collection of refugee reports and newspaper accounts of chemical attacks. In this report was an interview with a defector from the Lao People's Liberation Army who said that he was directly involved in the kind of attacks that the Hmong had described. He had flown captured U.S. L-19 and T-41 aircrafts to dispense toxic chemicals over Hmong villages in the Phou Bia area in the late 1970s. Dubbed "Extinct Destruction Operations," he said, the missions his superior officer told him were to "wipe out the reactionary Hmong people."[898] In December of 1980, at the urging of U.S. and Canadian delegations and over the objections of the Soviet Union, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution to conduct an investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia.[899] The resolution was approved by 78 votes, with 17 opposed and 36 abstentions, and a multinational group of experts, led by Egyptian Major General Ezmat Ezz, was formed to conduct the investigation.[900]

Meanwhile, to speed up the United States response to the use of lethal chemical agents by the Pathet Lao regime against the Hmong resistance in the Lao jungle, Vang Pao joined Prince Sisouk na Champassak and other Lao and Hmong leaders from around the world to create the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) in 1981. The ULNLF, Hamilton-Merritt writes, "had two major goals: to break the 'conspiracy of silence' about Laos by informing the world of the atrocities taking place there and to call

---

[896] For a good chronology of the U.S. investigation, see Department of State, *Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan*, Report to the Congress from Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr, 22 March 1982, (Special Report No. 98), 4-5.
[897] Jonathan Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy," 28.
[898] U.S. Department of State, *Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, June 1980).
[899] Robert L. Bartley and William Kucewicz, "Yellow Rain and the Future of Arms Agreements," *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1983), 805.
[900] U.N. General Assembly Resolution 35/144 C, dated December 12, 1980; Jonathan Tucker, "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy," 29.

for world support for military resistance against the Kaysone regime."[901] In March 1981, the State Department issued an update on the use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan.[902] In the same month, Vang Pao, Jane Hamilton-Merritt, and Xeu Vang Vangyi met with several U.S. elected officials to urge them to hold a special hearing on the use of Yellow Rain on the Hmong in Laos.[903]

Their meeting with U.S. elected officials legitimized their leadership on the fight against Yellow Rain and gave them a seat at the table to present their case for the liberation of Laos from the communists. In 1982, when the U.S. Congress held a hearing on chemical weapons, both Vang Pao and Xeu Vang Vangyi were invited to testify. At the hearing, Xeu Vang Vangyi, executive director of the Lao Family Community, Inc. of Santa Ana, California, said:

> I am here today to convey the message of my fellow men, victims and sufferers from these man-made chemicals. The Hmong may be illiterate, but they are human beings who have feelings. They are defenseless, and their human rights are being violated, but few seem to care…. Our people have been the victims of the largest effort of chemical warfare in history—to the point of genocide.[904]

Vang Pao, in a prepared statement, made similar remarks on the use of Yellow Rain on the Hmong back home and the need for the United States government to protect Hmong victims of Yellow Rain. "Chemical warfare continues in Laos against our people—men, women, and children—who are defenseless against the communist aircraft that deliver the lethal poisons," Vang Pao said. "Our people are being eliminated by the Soviet-backed Pathet Lao and Vietnamese regime in Laos because we were the backbone of the U.S. military effort in Laos…. Some of our people have survived the gassings in Laos and are now in the U.S. as refugees. Often the survivors of gassing have chronic illnesses—pulmonary problems, eye problems, blindness, muscle and joint problems, loss

---

[901] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 426-427.
[902] U.S. Department of State, *Update to the Compendium on the Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, March 1981).
[903] Ibid., 427-428.
[904] Xeu Vang Vangyi, Prepared Statement, in U.S. Congress, *Foreign Policy and Arms Control: Implications of Chemical Weapons*, Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Cong., 2nd Session., 20 March and 13 July 1982, 77.

of hearing and other complications."[905] For both Xeu Vang Vangyi and Vang Pao, the Hmong experiences of Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS) in America, in which Hmong refugees mysteriously died in their sleep, were directly linked to Yellow Rain.[906] "Our people, as I remember, did not have a history of heart attacks, or sudden death due to the abrupt change of life style and the accompanying economic difficulties," Xeu Vang Vangyi said. "The Hmong are very tense and worried. We believe that the sudden death occurrences are a direct result of the assault with biological chemical warfare in Laos by the Pathet Lao-Vietnamese communists which had begun perhaps as early as 1974 and for certain 1975."[907] The survivors of Yellow Rain in America, Vang Pao added, had not received proper attention from the medical community in the United States, and they deserved to receive proper medical treatment because their pain and suffering were the consequences of their support for the U.S. military effort in Laos.[908]

In the summer of 1981, when the United Nations hosted an international conference on Cambodia, a nation under Vietnamese occupation since 1979, leaders of the ULNLF asked the United Nations to look into the use of poisons against the Hmong and the Vietnamese occupation of Laos. On July 7, 1981, Prince Outhong Souvanavong, the President of the Council Regents for the ULNLF, wrote to Kurt Waldheim, then secretary general of the United Nations, and sent copies of the letter to all member states of the United Nations, asking for time to present the "Laotian problems" at the U.N. conference on Cambodia.[909] In the letter, Souvanavong linked the Laotian problem to the Cambodian problem, writing:

> The United Lao National Liberation Front has the honor to inform your Excellency of our intention to bring the case of Laos before the General Assembly

---

[905] Vang Pao, Prepared Statement, in U.S. Congress, *Foreign Policy and Arms Control: Implications of Chemical Weapons,* Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Cong., 2nd Session., 20 March and 13 July 1982, 91- 92.

[906] Dr. Bruce Thowpaou Blitout, a Hmong psychiatrist, also reported in his 1982 study of the Hmong SUNDS that Hmong SUNDS was possibly linked to their exposure to chemical toxins or yellow rain in Laos. See Bruce Thowpaou Bliatout, *Hmong Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome: A Cultural Study*, (Portland, Oregan: Sparkle Publishing Enterprises, 1982).

[907] In U.S. Congress, *Foreign Policy and Arms Control: Implications of Chemical Weapons,* 81.

[908] Ibid., 91- 92.

[909] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains,* 429.

> for discussion, jointly with the Cambodian issue. We realize that the Cambodian and Laotian problems are of the same nature…. We ask for your kind consideration and support of our case and ask that we be allowed ample time to bring our issue before the member states of the United Nations for discussion during the International Conference on Cambodia which will be held on July 13, 1981.[910]

On July 13, exiled Lao and Hmong leaders of the ULNLF from Australia and France all came to New York to join leaders in the United States to present their case, believing that the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia would attract global interest in the attacks on the Hmong in Laos. Portraying Laos as a nation, like Cambodia, under Vietnamese occupation, leaders of the ULNLF argued that "the international community must link the Laotian and Cambodian problems for a global solution."[911] The United Nations, however, was clear that its focus that year was on Cambodia and not its neighbor, and it did not bring up the issue of chemical attacks on the Hmong in Laos for discussion at the conference.

Nevertheless, the issue of Yellow Rain in Laos remained on the agenda of various U.S. officials. Two months after the U.N. Conference on Cambodia, on September 13, 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, in a speech before the Berlin Press Association, declared:

> For some time now the international community has been alarmed by continuing reports that the Soviet Union and its Allies have been using lethal chemical weapons in Laos, Kampuchea, and Afghanistan…. We now have physical evidence from Southeast Asia which has been analyzed and found to contain abnormally high levels of three potent mycotoxins—poisonous substances not indigenous to the region and which are highly toxic to man and animals.[912]

On November 10, 1981, Richard Burt, director of politico-military affairs at the Department of State, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "Over the past five

---

[910] Letter from Prince Outhong Souvanavong to Kurt Waldheim, 7 July 1981. In the Special Collection on the United Lao National Liberation Front, at Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[911] The United Lao National Liberation Front, "White Paper on the Situation of Laos," 7 September 1981, 17.
[912] Alexander Haig, "A Certain Idea of Man: The Democratic Revolution and Its Future," *Current Policy* No. 311, U.S. State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs, 13 September 1981.

years and perhaps longer, weapons outlawed by mankind, weapons successfully banned from the battlefields of the industrialized world for over five decades, have been used against unsophisticated and defenseless people, in campaigns of mounting extermination which are being conducted in Laos, Kampuchea, and, more recently, in Afghanistan."[913] Alternatively, Dr. Matthew Meselson, Professor of Natural Sciences at Harvard University, testified that there were insufficient evidences to conclude, as the United States government did, that chemical toxins were used in Southeast Asia. The chemical toxins that Hmong refugees reported could very well be "natural occurrences" and "natural products." After all, he added, "nearly everything we know about the natural occurrence of trichothecene mycotoxins is known from food plants."[914]

In spite of Meselson's caution, the U.S. Government insisted that Yellow Rain in Southeast Asia was neither a natural occurrence nor a natural product. In 1982, Secretary of State Alexander Haig issued his report to Congress on the use of chemical agents and confirmed the military use of such lethal agents against the Hmong in Laos. "The U.S. Government has concluded from all the evidences that selected Lao and Vietnamese forces, under direct Soviet supervisions, have employed lethal tricothecene toxins and other combinations of chemical agents against H'Mong resisting government control and their villages since at least 1976," Secretary of State Alexander Haig declared. "Thousands have been killed or severely injured. Thousands also have been driven from their homeland by the use of these agents."[915] In November 1982, the new Secretary of State, George Schultz, released an update to the Haig report and drew similar conclusion about the military use of chemical agents against defenseless people in Laos, Cambodia, and Afghanistan. "Vietnamese and Lao troops," Shultz wrote, "under direct Soviet supervision, have continued to use lethal and incapacitating chemical agents and toxins against the H'Mong resistance in Laos throughout at least June 1982."[916] In 1982, James

---

[913] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Yellow Rain*, Hearing before Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Operations, and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 10 November 1981, 12.
[914] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Yellow Rain*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Oceans, International Operations and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 10 November 1981, 30.
[915] Department of State, *Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan*, Report to the Congress from Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr, 22 March 1982, (Special Report No. 98), 6.
[916] U.S. Department of State, Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan: An Update, Report from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, November 1982, (Special Report No. 104); U.S. Senate, *Yellow*

Phillips, Policy Analyst of the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think-tank in Washington, D.C. that aided the Reagan administration to translate its theory about Soviet expansionism and rollback into concrete policy, also published a report confirming the use of chemical weapons by Soviet-backed forces in Southeast Asia against the Hmong in Laos and defenseless Cambodians in Cambodia.[917]

In 1983, Meselson again challenged the conclusion of the State Department. For him, the Yellow Rain that Hmong eyewitnesses in the refugee camps and in the United States spoke of were no more than "bee feces, which fall in yellow clouds when bee colonies take mass defecation flights."[918] In the same year, Grant Evans, a Lao specialist, published *The Yellow Rainmakers* and charged that "neither the refugee evidence nor the scientific evidence is sufficient to conclude, as the Americans have done, that Vietnam or the Soviet Union are using lethal chemical weapons in Southeast Asia." For Evans, the refugee evidence of Yellow Rain from Laos was "largely a product of uncontrolled rumors among a tribal people, the Hmong, whose recent history and worldview predispose them to believe and recount gassing stories that have no basis in fact."[919] In response, H. Bruno Schiefer, a mycotoxin expert and veterinary pathologist at the University of Saskatchewan, said:

> Although one has to take into consideration the possibility of exaggeration in some of the refugee reports, and, further, that some part or all of the 'eyewitness reports' may be fabrications under the influence of hearsay and political pressure, one has to give serious attention to the apparently never-ending flow of reported

---

Rain: The Arms Control Implications, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Oceans, International Operations and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 98th Congress, 1st Session, 24 February 1983.

[917] James A. Phillips, *Moscow's Poison War: Mounting Evidence of Battlefield Atrocities*, (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1982).

[918] Ann Fadiman, Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, 133-134. For more on the "bee feces" theory, see Julian Robinson, Jeanne Guillemin, and Matthew Meselson, "Yellow Rain: The Story Collapses," *Foreign Policy* 68 (Autumn, 1987): 100-117; Matthew Meselson and Julian Robinson, "The Yellow Rain Affair: Lessons From A Discredited Allegation," in *Terrorism, War or Disease? Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons*, edited by Ann Clunan, Peter Lavoy, and Susan Martin, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 72-96; Phillip M. Boffey, "Yellow Rain: New Support for Honeybee Theory," *The New York Times*, 12 August 1985, A13; and Karen Lee Ziner, "Death from the Sky: Who or What Kill Bee Thao's Family," *The Rhode Islander Magazine*, 12 February 1995, 8-15 & 23; Southeast Asian Resource Center, "The Riddle of the 'Yellow Rain'," *The Southeast Asian Chronicle* 90, (June 1983), 1-29; Nicholas Tapp, "Yellow Rain: Bees or Bombs?" *Inside Asia*, (February-March 1985): 42-44.

[919] Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in SE Asia?* (London: Verso, 1983), 13 & 172.

> incidents. It appears highly unlikely that the essentials of the reports are all the products of imagination, fabrication or propaganda.[920]

In spite of the Meselson challenge and Evans' conclusion in *The Yellow Rainmakers*, a work that sought to repudiate the early findings by American journalist Sterling Seagrave in *Yellow Rain: A Journal through the Terror of Chemical Warfare*, U.S. officials insisted that chemical weapons were used in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan.[921] At the hearing on Yellow Rain and its implication for arms control on February 24, 1983, U.S. Ambassador Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, for instance, maintained that "toxin weapons are being used right now in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia…. But the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Laos continue to deny their acts which we and others have documented. We cannot, and will not, remain silent about the death and suffering caused by chemical and toxin weapons since the mid-1970s."[922] In 1984, the Reagan administration incorporated the charge that Soviet-backed forces in Southeast Asia were waging warfare toxins against defenseless people in Laos and Cambodia into the president's first *Report to the Congress on Soviet Non-Compliance with Arms Control Agreements.* If Yellow Rain was a natural phenomenon, they argued, the alleged attacks would not be limited to particular times and places. It would be more broadly distributed throughout the region. Yet, Yellow Rain incidents were reported only in areas where Soviet-backed Communists were engaged in brutal attacks on resistance forces. It was thus illogical to assume that honeybees would defecate selectively on rebel villages in Laos and Cambodia.[923] In 1987, the administration again repeated its conclusion that "the Soviet Union has been involved in the production, transfer, and use of trichothecene mycotoxins…in violation of its legal obligation under international law as codified in the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972."[924]

---

[920] H. B. Schiefer, "Possible Use of Chemical Warfare Agents in Southeast Asia," *Conflict Quarterly* 3 (1983): 34.
[921] Sterling Seagrave, *Yellow Rain: A Journey through the Terror of Chemical Warfare*, (New York: M. Evans, 1981).
[922] U.S. Congress, *Yellow Rain: The Arms Control Implications*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Oceans, International Operations and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 98th Congress, 1st Session, 24 February 1983, 2.
[923] William Kucewicz, "Bee-Feces Theory Still Has No Sting," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 1987.
[924] See Julian Robinson, Jeanne Guillemin, and Matthew Meselson, "Yellow Rain: The Story Collapses," *Foreign Policy* 68 (Autumn, 1987): 100.

To say the least, during the period of the Second Cold War, Pa Kao Her and Vang Pao were, doubtless, disunited because they had fundamentally different visions for Laos after the liberation. Their different visions had to do, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, with their different loyalties. Vang Pao crafted his vision for Laos after the liberation based on his loyalty to the Lao monarchy and his service for the deposed Royal Lao Government, but Pa Kao drew his inspiration from Yang Shong Lue and legitimized his political vision for the Hmong in Laos based on his relationship with the divine. Pa Kao, in other words, drew his mandate for political and military action for the Hmong from heaven. Meanwhile, Vang Pao received his mandate from a mundane source, the Lao monarchy. Inevitably, throughout the 1980s, Pa Kao and Vang Pao also used different tactics and issues to legitimize their leadership in Hmong communities and promote Hmong freedom and democracy back in Laos. Pa Kao Her legitimized his leadership and authority in the fight for Hmong liberation in Laos by forming alliance with Chinese officials, the Thai army, anti-Soviet guerrilla fighters in Angola, and General Singlaub's USCWF. Meanwhile, Vang Pao legitimized his authority and power by forming alliance with exiled Lao political and military leaders and other right-wing conservative leaders, groups and institutions, such as the Heritage Foundation, in the United States. While Pa Kao engaged in direct combat with his Chao Fa fighters against the armed forces of the Lao PDR government near the Thai-Lao border, Vang Pao engaged in indirect combat with the Lao PDR government through his advocacy against the use of "Yellow Rain" on the Hmong in Laos inside the halls of the United States Congress and the United Nations. By fighting against "Yellow Rain" in the United States and at the United Nations, Vang Pao and other exiled Lao and Hmong leaders of the ULNLF were also able to re-assert their leadership in the Lao and Hmong communities in the diaspora and legitimize their involvement in global politics and representation of the persecuted Hmong people in Laos to the outside world. Their different tactics, notwithstanding, both Pa Kao and Vang Pao were needed to bring protection to the Hmong people back home. Pa Kao and Vang Pao, in this sense, simply represented two separate roads to the same destination. Their activities did not undermine each other's leadership and movement. Rather, they complemented each other in the larger struggle for Hmong liberation in the homeland.

Conclusion

During much of the 1980s, the Sino-Vietnamese dispute, the Lao-Thai border conflicts, the communist insurgency, and the Second Cold War opened up spaces and opportunities for leaders of the ELOL and the ULNLF to mobilize resources from the Hmong communities and garner support, financial, political and military, from outside individuals, groups, institutions and governments. Because of the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute in 1979, Pa Kao Her and Vang Pao were able to gain the support of China for their resistance against the Lao PDR government and its ally, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In the early 1980s, the ELOL's freedom fighters and Vang Pao's guerilla soldiers received training in Yunnan Province and weapons from Beijing. Because of Thailand's border conflicts with Laos and its anxiety over Communist insurgency from within Thailand as well as from Laos, Pa Kao was able to secure a place in northeastern Thailand to set up his military training camp and solicit various Thai military officers to help train the Chao Fa Army at the camp. Vang Pao and his associates in the ULNLF, too, were able to travel back and forth between the United States and Thailand to mobilize and recruit Hmong fighters from the refugee camps in Thailand. Because of the Second Cold War, during which the United States actively sought to roll back global Soviet imperialism by supporting anti-Soviet insurgents in the Third World, Pa Kao Her was able to garner support from the right-wing anti-communist organization, the United States Council for World Freedom, and receive international publicity when millionaire Republican leader Lewis Lehrman flew him to the Angolan jungle to join forces with other anti-Soviet "freedom fighters" in the fight for independence from Soviet colonialism in June 1985. By allying himself with General Singlaub, Chairman of the USCWF, Pa Kao also gained money, credibility and power after Singlaub brought him to the anti-Communist conference in Dallas, Texas, in September 1985. His image as a credible leader in the fight for Hmong liberation in Laos, in turn, further encouraged the Hmong people to contribute to his cause. In a similar fashion, because of the Second Cold War, Vang Pao was able to get right-wing conservative leaders and organizations, like the Heritage Foundation, to provide him a platform to present his quest for the liberation of Laos from the imperialist Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Not only that, Vang Pao was able to reassert his leadership, justify his military defeat in the Secret War,

and legitimize his advocacy on behalf of the Hmong in Laos by fighting against Yellow Rain at a time when the United States were using the issue of Yellow Rain to charge the Soviet Union for violating international protocols banning the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons. His image as a credible power allowed Vang Pao to further collect money from his supporters for his fight for the liberation of Laos from Vietnamese imperialism. Overall, both Vang Pao's ULNLF and Pa Kao Her's ELOL were able to thrive and sustain their movements during much of the 1980s because the confluence of intersecting forces and pressures of the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, the Thailand-Lao conflicts along the border, the communist insurgency and repression in Thailand, and the Second Cold War in the United States.

CHAPTER 5

Changing Politics, New Realities, and the Decline of Hmong Transnational Politics

As the only organizations involved in political issues in the homeland, the ELOL and the ULNLF had dominated the scene of Hmong transnational politics throughout the 1980s. No other organization existed to compete for their members. The only competition that existed, if any, was the competition for membership and community loyalty between them. By the end of the 1990s, however, the ELOL and the ULNLF were no longer the only two organizations involved in transnational politics. By then, other organizations had emerged, and the ELOL and the ULNLF were no longer able to maintain their dominance in Hmong transnational politics. By that time, members of the ELOL and the ULNLF had also dropped substantially. In *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, Keith Quincy, for example, reported that in the early 1980s, nearly 80 percent of Hmong families in America were members of the ULNLF or Neo Hom. They regularly donated money to Neo Hom resistance. By 1986, however, only 50 percent were still giving money. By 2000, less than 20 percent were still doing so.[925] According to Nicolas Auclair, a senior Asian military/political analyst with the Department of Defense, in the early 1990s, the ULNLF had a mere 2,000 members left in Laos and Thailand.[926]

What happened, then, at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s that led to this precipitous fall in Neo Hom membership, the disintegration of the ELOL, and an overall decline in the strength and momentum of Hmong transnational politics? In this chapter, I argue that the ELOL and the ULNLF were in decline in the 1990s because of a confluence of various interacting forces in Southeast Asia and the United States that occurred after the end of the Second Cold War in 1989. First, the ELOL and the ULNLF were hurt by specific internal dynamics and evolutions within the organizations, namely elite divisions, financial corruption, and repeated failures to achieve the prescribed political objective to overthrow the Lao PDR government. Second, the political

---

[925] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong and the America's Secret War in Laos,* (Spokane, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000), 457.
[926] Nicolas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, (Washington, D.C: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), 279-280.

opportunities that had helped sustain their politics and movements in the 1980s had disappeared after the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989. More specifically, the politics and policies that China, Thailand, and the United States implemented at the end of the Second Cold War favored strong trade and diplomatic relations with Laos over supporting anti-Lao resistance insurgency in Laos and Thailand. This shift in policies, in turn, facilitated the closing of the ELOL military and refugee camps and the aggressive crackdown of Hmong anti-Lao PDR resistance activities in Thailand, resulting in the disintegration of the ELOL and the ULNLF in the 1990s. Most of all, the transnational movement of the ELOL and the ULNLF suffered from growing competition for the community's trust and loyalty by emerging new leaders and organizations and the diversion of the community's focus away from returning home and human rights in the homeland to civil, economic and political rights and community development in the United States because of welfare reform in the mid-1990s. By the dawn of the new millennium, the confluence of these various internal dynamics and external forces completely disintegrated the ELOL and forced the ULNLF into abeyance.

Military Defeats and Broken Promises

When Hmong refugees arrived in the United States in the mid-1970s, many left their family members and loved ones back in Laos and Thailand. Many wanted to return to the homeland to reunite with separated family members and loved ones while others longed to return to their home villages in the Lao highlands. Eventually they demanded General Vang Pao, their leader, to work to liberate Laos in order for them to return home. In turn, the general reportedly promised and prophesied that the communist regime of the Lao PDR would fall and Hmong would return to a liberated Laos within a decade (that is, by 1985).[927] The promise encouraged nostalgic Hmong families who found life abroad incessantly difficult and intolerable and those who wished to return home and resume their agricultural lifestyle to donate generously and regularly to Vang Pao's United Lao National Liberation Front. In May 1985, to fulfill that promise, Vang Pao ordered his father-in-law, Cher Pao Moua, who had escaped to Thailand earlier but had returned to

[927] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society, 2010), 275.

Laos, to send a thousand of his guerrillas deep into Xieng Khoung Province in northern Laos. "The force," Keith Quincy writes, "ran into two Vietnamese companies just southeast of Cher Pao Moua's old stronghold at Bouam Long. On May 14, after several days of hard fighting, the guerrillas broke and ran, leaving behind three thousand Hmong, Lao, and Khmu villagers who had been providing them aid. The Vietnamese herded the civilians into a cavern, blocked the entrance with logs, and fired chemical weapons into the cave. A handful of Hmong in the back of the cave survived the gassing, crawled out over the dead bodies, and escaped."[928]

In 1989, Vang Pao reportedly promised Hmong refugees in the United States again that they would be celebrating their next New Year festival back in the homeland. Hmong, Vang Pao declared, would be eating noodles back in Laos by the following year.[929] Vang Pao confidently made such a promise then because, as Quincy has written, "the time seemed propitious. The Soviet Union was near collapse, its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe were tumbling, and Vietnam had recently downsized its military presence in Laos, withdrawing thirty-five thousand of its forty-five thousand troops."[930] Vang Pao believed that the fighting forces of the ULNLF inside Laos, the Lao Liberation Army, would usher a democratic victory in Laos now that they would be facing mostly the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA), the armed forces of the Lao PDR. More importantly, Vang Pao was confident there would be an imminent victory over the communist regime in Laos because, by late 1989, the Lao Liberation Army had taken control of multiple liberated zones in six provinces in Laos, including Xieng Khoung, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Houei Sai, Vang Vieng, and Borikhane provinces. Vang Pao and other Lao and Hmong leaders were so confident that on December 6, 1989, they established a revolutionary provisional democratic government in Sayaboury Province, Laos.[931] "During a three-day ceremony," journalist and author Jane Hamilton-Merritt reported,

---

[928] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 455.
[929] Royal Calkins and Denice Rios, "The General and the Hmong: A Tale of Betrayal," *Fresno Bee* (Special Report), 23-24 July 1989; R. Calkins and D. Rios, "War Still Not Over for U.S. Hmong," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 July 1989.
[930] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 456.
[931] Robert Kamiol, "Laotian Resistance Emerges from Mist," *International Defense Review* 3, (1990): 270; Keith Richburg, "Insurgency in Laos Seeking to Emerge from Anonymity," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1990; Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare, House of Representatives, *The Vietnamese Use of Chemical-Biological Warfare in Southeast Asia*, (Washington, D.C.: 13 June 1990), 16.

"this provisional government announced that it would invite a son of the late Lao king, Prince Suriyonvong Vongsavang, exiled in France, to be the king. Lao Prince Phayaluang Outhong Vongsavang was designated as prime minister and Hmong General Vang Pao was named first deputy prime minister. General Vang Pao and Lao General Thonglith held the top positions in the Defense Ministry, responsible for the Lao Liberation Army (LLA)."[932] Aside from Vang Pao, other Hmong were also promoted and included in the provisional government. The newly promoted Hmong General Cher Pao Moua, Vang Pao's father-in-law in Laos, was designated as vice prime minister along with General Sing Manothip, General Thonglit, and Colonel Bounliang Khounsourivong. The newly promoted General Song Lue Xiong in Thailand was named the military leader of Region 1 in the future government.[933]

On the same day, shortly after the ULNLF proclaimed its provisional government, Kaysone Phomvihane, President of the Lao PDR, announced that it "would continue to drop bombs and seek to destroy" the Lao-Hmong resistance forces "until they were totally wiped out."[934] Kaysone apparently made good on his promise. By January, he fully engaged the Lao People's Liberation Army, with the help of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), to destroy the insurgents. According to Claudia Rosett of *The Wall Street Journal*, "Vietnam fields 10,000 to 20,000 troops in Laos fighting alongside the communist Pathet Lao" to help suppress the growing Hmong resistance in Laos.[935] Together, the Lao PDR and the SRV intensified their combat operations against the ULNLF's fighting forces inside Laos and the supporting Hmong populations near the Thai border. Jane Hamilton Merritt records the series of bombings on positions and armed forces of the ULNLF in January as follow:

> On January 9, 1990, 20 MiG-21s flying from Vietnam dropped high explosives and chemicals on several villages in the resistance area. The next day planes attacked five villages in Xieng Khoung Province. On January 6, two MiG-21s

---

[932] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 499.
[933] Lao National Liberation Army, "Proclamation of the Revolutionary Provisional Government," (1989), Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota; and Soua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 182.
[934] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 457; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 499.
[935] Claudia Rosett, "Yellow Rain in Laos: New Reports." *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 1990; Claudia Rosett, "A Lonely Lao Fight For Freedom" *Wall Street Journal*, 13 June 1990.

> bombed five villages in Borikhane Province, causing heavy destruction and casualties. On January 9, four MiG-21s and four MI-8 helicopters bombed and rocketed several villages and ULNLF positions. On January 10, Vientiane announced that its air force would "continue air raids on all strongholds of the resistance." Two days later, four MiG-21s bombed Neo Hom positions.[936]

In this campaign to "wipe out" the insurgents, the Lao PDR government also reportedly used chemical weapons again against the insurgents. In January and February 1990, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the Lao People's Liberation Army (LPLA) air force flew twenty-six missions to deliver chemical weapons against the Lao-Hmong resistance.[937] By January 13, the ULNLF had taken a terrible pounding from the PAVN and LPLA air forces. Nearly every stronghold of the ULNLF was destroyed. "Everywhere," Keith Quincy writes, "insurgents were on the run. It was a devastating and humiliating defeat."[938]

The repeated failures to liberate Laos dampened the hope of many Hmong supporters in the refugee camps in Thailand and in the urban communities in the United States. According to Donald Ranard of *The Atlantic*, nearly ten thousand Hmong refugees filed applications for resettlement in the United States within a few months after news of the defeat of Cher Pao Moua's forces in Xieng Khoung Province in May 1985 reached them in the refugee camps.[939] Other Hmong refugees, more determined to stay near their homeland, remained in Thailand and awaited the chance to return home. In 1986, the Committee for Coordination of Service to Displaced Persons in Thailand still recorded more than 40,000 Hmong refugees in Ban Vinai alone.[940] By 1988, thousands of Hmong refugees were still waiting for the political climate in Laos to change, so they could go home. In 1988, for example, 83.6 percent the Hmong refugees in Ban Vinai that P. Songpraset and N. Chongwatana interviewed for their study still indicated that they wished to return to Laos in the future rather than resettle in a third country, and that they would return if there were no communists or Vietnamese or "Red Laos" (39.4%), if Laos

---

[936] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains*, 499-500.
[937] Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, U.S. House of Representatives, *The Vietnamese Use of Chemical-Biological Warfare in Southeast Asia*, (Washington, D.C.: 13 June 1990): 18.
[938] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 457.
[939] Donald Ranard, "The Last Bus," *The Atlantic*, October 1987.
[940] The CCSDPT, *The CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*, (Bangkok, Thailand: The CCSDPT Secretariat Office, 1986): 84.

was liberated (31.1%), if their leader returned to liberate Laos (15.9%), and if there was no more war (31.1%).[941] After the ULNLF failed again to liberate Laos in late 1989, however, many Hmong refugees lost the hope of any chance for a safe return to a non-communist Laos. Until then, Vang Pao, Quincy writes, "may have even believed this was possible. But after Neo Hom's humiliating defeat in 1989, it was clear [for Vang Pao and many of his supporters] this would never occur."[942]

Financial Problems

Beyond the repeated failures of the ULNLF to liberate Laos and unlock the door to the homeland for those profoundly nostalgic Hmong in the diaspora to return home, the image of the ULNLF as a legitimate organization and of its officers as credible leaders was further tarnished by its internal financial problem, particularly the way that it raised and managed its financial resources. According to Ann Fadiman, the ULNLF required members to put a $100 down payment followed by $2 a month per family member thereafter.[943] Alternatively, freelance journalist Ruth Hammond documented, "To become members of Neo Hom, families were required to pay $100 down and then $10 a month. Those who paid $500 were given certificates that they believe entitle them to return to Laos after the 'liberation,' with the understanding that their airfare will be free and they will receive a return on their investment once back in Laos." By the mid-1980s, when donations started to dwindle, "Neo Hom leaders began direct sales of offices in Vang Pao's future government. Refugees paid $1,000 or more to secure positions as police chiefs, district leaders, army officers, and cabinet members. Some people are paying up to $1,000 a month to hold their positions."[944] Hmong political scientist Shoua Yang, based on original documents he obtained from former Neo Hom members, similarly documented that many aspiring Hmong government officers made a one-time payment of $250 to $12,000 to secure their positions and between $25 and $500 a month

---

[941], Phuwadol Songprasert and Noppavan Chongwatana, *Thailand: A First Asylum Country for Indochinese Refugees*, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, Institute of Asian Studies, 1988), 169-170.
[942] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 486.
[943] Anne Fadiman, *Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 1997), 160.
[944] Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 12-31 October 1989, 10-11; Ruth Hammond, "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1990, 12-13.

thereafter to hold those positions. Neo Hom leaders sold 17,139 civilian positions altogether for $6,097,800 and 1,200 military positions for $600,000. The combined revenue that the United Lao National Liberation Front generated from selling these "honorific leadership positions," as Yang called them, to Neo Hom members in the mid-1980s in the United States was nearly $6.7 million.[945] In his 2000 study, Quincy identified an even higher number for the total revenue that Neo Hom generated from selling these fictitious offices. "By the end of 1988," he wrote, "the sale of fictitious offices had earned Neo Hom nearly $9 million." Quincy's total was considerably higher, perhaps, because he also included the number of offices sold "at much lower prices to refugees in the camps" in Thailand.[946]

By all accounts, people did not have any problem making their membership contribution to the ULNLF. They willingly gave the $100 down payment and $10 a month thereafter to the organization because they shared the same desire for transformation and homeland liberation as well as the nostalgia and hope of return with leaders of the ULNLF. Nevertheless, members had problem with the lack of financial accountability and its related problem of financial skimming by top money collectors in the organization. They felt deceived and cheated because the money they thought was going to help the resistance did not reach the people in the Lao jungle but ended up in the pockets of the money collectors. As Lor Mong Lo, a Hmong city council member in Omaha, Nebraska, once declared: "If the money gets there, I say fine, Ok. If the money is used for what it is intended for, I have no problem at all. But the money is not being used for its proper intention. There's no accountability. Nobody can ask for the statement of financial transactions. Anyone asking for that is asking for trouble."[947]

According to Quincy, "Vang Pao never skimmed money for himself. It was a political virtue he had learned in Laos because it was good politics. He never took; he only gave."[948] Nevertheless, because there was no way to track all the collections and financial transactions, Vang Pao's subordinates who did the actual collection periodically

---

[945] Shoua Yang, "Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations," (Ph.D Dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006), 184-192.
[946] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong and America's Secret War in Laos,* (Spokane, Washington: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000), 454.
[947] Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "The General's Last Stand: Revered Hmong General Vang Pao Dreams of Freedom in Laos," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 28 July 1996.
[948] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 453.

kept a portion of the collections to themselves. To cite an example of the skimming that the ULNLF fundraisers and agents engaged in, a Hmong man reportedly told Ruth Hammond, a freelance journalist in Minneapolis, that, in the mid-1980s, two men, claiming to be representatives for the ULNLF from California, flew to Minnesota and Wisconsin, raised about $10,000 from the Hmong in the two mid-western states, and purchased a brand new minivan with the money they raised, and drove home to California. According to Hammond, while "some observers of Neo Hom accuse Vang Pao's subordinates of cheating him by skimming off funds, others say Vang Pao is not particularly concerned about the alleged skimming because that benefit ensures loyalty of his aides."[949]

According to Vajtsua Shouayang, his father, Colonel Shoua Yang, the second-in-command to Vang Pao during the U.S. Secret War in Laos and a Neo Hom representative in France after the war, broke away from Vang Pao in 1982 because of what he called "financial corruption." That year, before their meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, Vang Pao had reportedly asked Shoua Yang to collect donations from Hmong supporters in France to help the Hmong resistance in the Lao jungle. At their meeting, Shoua Yang presented Vang Pao with 60,000 francs, at which point Vang Pao told Yang to "put the 60 thousand francs in his pocket." Describing his father's reaction to Vang Pao's suggestion to pocket the money, Vajtsua wrote:

> With great horror and humanism, my father said no, he cannot do that. It is money from members, you cannot steal money this way, the money is to go to the Chao Fa to help the Hmong in the jungle. Vang Pao [then] began to shout [at] my father that he doesn't care about Hmong Chao Fa. It's time to get full pockets, that the war is over, and it's time to earn a living this way. My father left… and he had no more contact with Vang Pao.[950]

Besides the lack of financial accountability and the financial skimming by top money collectors in the organization, people also had problem with the sale of government positions which the ULNLF reportedly began to practice in the mid-1980s as a way to raise more money. According to Dr. Yang Dao, former deputy-secretary general of the

---

[949] Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 25-31 October 1989, 11.
[950] Vajtsua Shouayang, email correspondence with author, 20 October 2008, and phone interview with author, 5 November 2008.

ULNLF, people begun to defect from the ULNLF as soon as it began selling government positions to aspiring Hmong government officials in the United States and the refugee camps. An early defector from the ULNLF, Yang Dao explained:

> Not just me, but many, many others defected from the organization when Neo Hom began giving Hmong positions in the government. This was part of why I defected, but for me, I defected largely because of politics. I saw that we could not use a military approach to the conflict in Laos. I wanted to find a political solution there. For most people, however, they defected because of, first, financial corruption. This person went to collect, and the money disappeared. That person went to collect, and the money again disappeared. Then people saw that the collectors were buying fancy cars and purchasing homes and everything. Not only this, Neo Hom gave positions to people. As long as they paid the right price, Neo Hom would appoint them as generals. Even if they were uneducated and illiterate, as long as they paid, Neo Hom gave them positions. As a scholar, I cannot accept this. This was something that made me uncomfortable and unhappy. Some Lao elites also defected because of this.[951]

As a Hmong scholar, Yang Dao also felt that it was intellectually unwise and militarily unfeasible to topple the Lao PDR. The path to achieve democracy in Laos and, thereby, the dream of returning home was to work with the communist Lao PDR government to find a political solution to the fighting in Laos and negotiate through diplomatic channels for the government to accept the return of the Hmong diaspora back to their homeland. By 1983, Yang Dao told me, he had told General Vang Pao that he no longer backed armed resistance against the Lao PDR government. Two years later, when the only other non-military officer in the organization, Prince Chao Sisouk na Champassak, passed away, Yang Dao felt he was the only voice among all the military leaders to encourage political diplomacy rather than armed resistance against the Lao PDR government. Having no support for his political solution in an organization dominated by ex-military officers, Yang Dao officially split from Vang Pao and defected from the ULNLF in 1985. His more conciliatory approach toward the communist regime represented a third position unique from both Vang Pao and Pa Kao Her. Unlike Vang Pao and Pa Kao Her,

[951] Yang Dao, interview with author, 2 February 2009.

Yang Dao did not believe in armed resistance against the homeland government, and unlike them, he believed that peaceful coexistence with the communist regime was not impossible.[952] This was a position that Yang Dao had maintained ever since. In 2005, at the tenth Hmong National Development Conference in Fresno, California, Yang Dao reiterated this position and urged the Hmong to join him to find a peaceful solution to the fighting in Laos. For him, the fate of the several thousand Hmong still in the jungle was not only in the hands of the Lao PDR government. It also depended on the willingness of their leaders inside and outside the country to give up the resistance and to adopt a political solution to the current problems. "I am ready to work with all of you to promote peace and national reconciliation in Laos," he said, "and I believe that we Hmong Americans have a historic mission in the social and economic development of our Hmong people in Asia."[953]

By the mid-1980s, many Hmong who initially supported the ULNLF had also grown to mistrust and become disillusioned with the organization. Many questioned how top money collectors for the ULNLF were able to purchase expensive homes and cars despite having no visible means of support besides welfare and a low-wage job, and they questioned the legality and morality of the ULNLF's sale of future government positions to anyone who could come up with the money to purchase the positions. Membership contribution, thus, plummeted in the 1980s. According to Quincy, "In the early 1980, nearly 80 percent of Hmong families in America had donated money to the resistance. By 1986, only 50 percent were still giving money."[954] By the mid-1980s, Hammond similarly reported, "regular contributors to Neo Hom have declined from about 80 percent of the U.S. Hmong in 1981, to less than half… Detractors complain that there are no public records available of how funds are spent."[955]

By 1988, Hmong families were not just asking questions and complaining to one another about the lack of financial accountability in the ULNLF. According to

---

[952] Yang Dao, interview with author, 2 February 2009. For a newspaper account of the split between Vang Pao and Yang Dao, see Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "Leaders' Differences Split Hmong Community," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 29 July 1996, 1A.
[953] Yang Dao, "The Hmong Odyssey From Laos to America," Speech at the Hmong National Development Conference, Fresno, California, 8 April 2005.
[954] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 457.
[955] Ruth Hammond, "Sad Suspicions of a Refugee Ripoff," *Washington Post*, 16 April 1989.

Hammond, some had privately lodged complaints with local authorities, blaming Vang Pao for the Hmong's high welfare-dependency rate, the slow Hmong acculturation into American society, and the persistent refusal of Hmong refugees in Thailand to accept resettlement in the United States.[956] In April 1989, Hammond published an article in the *Washington Post*, where she cited a 53-year-old Hmong man, Pasee Lee, questioning where all the money went and another man, 34-year-old Nhia Thong Yang, blaming Vang Pao for the repatriation of numerous Hmong refugees in Thailand who Vang Pao branded as "communists" back to communist Laos. In his words, Pasee Lee asked,

> Hmong organizations through the United States have collected money from 1976 through 1988 to fight the communists in Laos, but have they ever let anyone see a single thing they did with that money? Have they ever let us know the total collected and annual expenses? What was the money used for? How much money is left? Where is the money kept?

In the same *Washington Post* article, Hammond revealed that after she "published a three-part series in the weekly *Twin Cities Reader* [in June 1988] in which anonymous sources blamed Vang Pao in part for the Hmong's high welfare-dependency rate," she received "a phone call from Tong Vang, then the Hmong president of Lao Family Community of Minnesota, warning [her] that Vang Pao 'has the right to get back at you now'." A Hmong person also called the *Reader*'s managing editor and threatened him that he, his wife and children would "die very soon." "I received three more calls from an anonymous Hmong man who vowed that I would be killed if I didn't stop writing about the Hmong," Hammond added. "A few of the sources of unrelated information in my series also say they received death threats. No one was ever physically harmed, however."[957]

In October 1989, Hammond, in spite of the threats, summed up her findings in a two-part article in the *Twin Cities Reader*. The article, based on eight months of interviewing Hmong refugees in Wisconsin, California, and Minnesota and viewing copies of Neo Hom correspondence provided by former members, was the most detailed of all of her reports on the elaborate fundraising schemes of the ULNLF and its intimate

---

[956] Ruth Hammond, "Strangers in a Strange Land: Minnesota's Troubled Hmong," *Twin Cities Reader*, 1-7 June 1988, 6-10.
[957] Ruth Hammond, "Sad Suspicion Of A Refugee Ripoff," *Washington Post*, 16 April 1989, B1.

relation with the Lao Family Community. Historian Paul Hillmer recently described the details revealed in Hammond's October 1989 report as "stunning."[958] In the first part, Hammond described how Vang Pao and the ULNLF used the Hmong hierarchical clan organization to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars from Hmong families, many of whom were on welfare, for the ULNLF; how members were required to pay $100 down payment and then $10 a month thereafter to be a member; how, since the mid-1980s, the ULNLF raised money by selling fictitious government certificates to their members.; and how some people paid as much as $1,000 to secure a position and $1,000 or more to hold the position. In the same report, Hammond added that, on October 7, 1989, she received a letter, postmarked in Fresno, California, from an anonymous source, telling her that a 'hit list' was drawn at a meeting with more than thirty Vang Pao sympathizers from the United States in Malaysia or Singapore in August. Included in the list of twenty-six potential targets were Hammond along with "two Hmong sources from St. Paul who were quoted in [her] Washington post article last April, a Pa Kao Her supporter in St. Paul, and two Twin Cities Hmong intellectual leaders."[959] In the second part, Hammond detailed the intricate connection between the ULNLF and Lao Family Community, noting that many of the Board members and staffs at the Lao Family Community were also officers and supporters of the ULNLF. The Lao Family Community, Hammond charged, inappropriately extracted money from Hmong families and funneled it to the ULNLF.[960]

In response, authors of a letter, signed as the Yangs and the Vangs for Better Understanding and Causes, charged that Hammond "does not understand the real information about [their] culture and history" and "tries to put the blame on Gen. Vang Pao." Moreover, Hammond was misled by her informants who were communist spies and against Vang Pao and the Hmong community. They used her to "write an article to promote communist propaganda and nothing else." To justify Vang Pao's action, authors of the letter explained that Vang Pao was just "trying to help the Hmongs and the Laotians" who were "being wiped out" in Laos. "These are part of his duties that he owes to the people who are still in Laos," they said. "For those who are in the United

---

[958] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, 270.
[959] Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 12-31 October 1989, 10-11; Ruth Hammond, "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1990, 12-13.
[960] Ruth Hammond, "Family Secrets," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1989, 8-10 & 12-14.

Stats, he paid his dues by leading them to safety… We, the Hmongs, think that nothing is wrong for us to give to our leader, whom we look upon as our father." The letter ended with a threat, intimidation, and warning to Hammond:

> We want Ruth Hammond to know that the Hmong community will take action and lawsuit against her to find out whose side she is on, what she stands for, and what is her real purpose in damaging the Hmong leadership, community, and fellowship. We want her to also know that we have no control of our people now. Some of them have suffered mental instability due to the long war and also from being refugees for long periods of time. Her additional actions hurt them to the point where it may cause her to live only with Laotian communists here. Ms. Hammond knows how to hurt people with her talents of writing and her language capabilities. The refugees are opposite, and they deal in direct retaliation because it is an easier way for them. Ms. Hammond must stop her artful behavior for damaging others.[961]

Immediately, Koua Yang, President of the Minnesota Branch of Yang Wang Meng Association, fired back that "the Hmong of last name Yang in the Twin Cities—the purported 'Yangs,' co-signers of 'A Response From the Hmong'—had nothing at all to do with that letter. At no time had the Yangs ever discussed or initiated the idea of such response with the Vangs." Moreover, Yang explained, as far as he knew, "the authors of this petty-minded letter belong to a small group of power-hungry people who are constantly stirring up trouble among the Hmong community and the society at large." Most of all, Yang attacked the very justification that the authors of the letter cited for Vang Pao's action. "The authors," Yang wrote, "pretend to be defenders of social justice and human rights, but they openly practice discrimination against their own people. They merely accused and branded as communists those who do not agree with their ideology."[962] By this point, Yang Dao and Colonel Shoua Yang, leaders of the Yangs, had defected from Vang Pao and the ULNLF. Yang Dao was also a co-founder of the Yang Wang Meng Association, an ethnic self-help organization that sought to unite all

[961] "A Response from the Hmong," *Twin Cities Reader*, 3-9 October 1990.
[962] "Response from the Yang," *Twin Cities Reader*, 10 October 1990.

the Yang families in the United States. Koua Yang's reply, thus, displayed the larger division between supporters of Vang Pao and those of Yang Dao at the time.[963]

While the Hmong were battling over Hammond's reports in Minnesota, the Civil Rights Bureau of the California Department of Social Services had launched its own investigation into how finance was raised and handled at the various branches of the Lao Family Community in California—an investigation that eventually caused problem for the ULNLF. The problem emerged for the ULNLF in part because of the relationship between the ULNLF and the Lao Family Community, a self-help organization which General Vang Pao also founded. To understand that relationship and the problem that eventually emerged, it is important first to understand the historical development of the Lao Family Community. To help Hmong refugees adjust to American culture and society, Vang Pao founded the first Lao Family Community in Santa Ana, California, in 1977, two years after Vang Pao resettled in on a 450-acre cattle ranch in the remote Bitteroot Mountains outside of Missoula, Montana, where his CIA contact, Jerry Daniels, lived.[964] "When we arrived in this country," Vang Pao explained, "it was like we were born again, not only the new ones, but the old men. We had to think what to do to survive in this country; therefore, we set up the Lao Family Community Inc. in Santa Ana to teach our people survival skills, English as a second language, even Hmong literacy."[965] Soon, the organization expanded to incorporate branch offices in nearly every metropolitan Hmong community in the United States, including Garden Grove, Sacramento, San Diego, California; Missoula, Montana; Denver, Colorado; Kansas City, Kansas; Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Salt Lake City, Utah; Des Moines, Iowa; St. Paul, Minnesota; Alexandria, Virginia; Appleton, Wisconsin; Providence, Rhode Island; Amarillio, Texas; and Opelika, Alabama.[966] Today, there are four Lao Family organizations in California; they are located in the

---

[963] Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "Leaders' Differences Split Hmong Community; Vang Pao's Greatest Goal is Democracy in Laos—One of the Few He Shares With His Greatest Rival," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 29 July 1996.
[964] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 445-7; Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos*, (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1996), 282.
[965] Alex Pulaski, "Revered Hmong Leader Vang Pao Stands Tall in Two Worlds," *Fresno Bee*, 1 January 1995, A15.
[966] Refugee Studies Center Collection, IHRC, U of MN-Twin Cities, Box 2, Folder 91.

cities of Fresno, Merced, Stockton and Sacramento. There is one Lao Family in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and another one in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Until the mid-1980s, the ULNLF was able to collect donations from Hmong refugees in the United States relatively free from state and federal interventions. According to George Vinson, the head of the Fresno FBI office in 1989, most Hmong in American kept their complaints about the fundraising schemes of the ULNLF to themselves. Only a few had lodged any complaint with local authorities. Of the Hmong who filed complaints with local authorities, none was willing to defy Vang Pao in public or testify against him in court. Many were intimidated by Vang Pao. Consequently, no investigation into the fundraising scheme of the ULNLF was initiated. "We can't get people to talk," Vinson told reporters in July 1989. "We hear things…but you can't prosecute without someone willing to come forward as a victim."[967] Things, however, changed around 1988 when Hmong clients at the Lao Family Community in Garden Grove, California, began to complain to local authorities, alleging that staffs at the LFC forced them to contribute to the ULNLF as a condition for receiving social services at the non-profit organization.[968] The clients at the self-help organization also unhappy with the way that staff at the Lao Family Community attempted to raise funds for the ULNLF by coercing them to contribute to the ULNLF when services at the Lao Family Community should be free.

In June 1990, the Civil Rights Bureau of the California Department of Social Services issued a twenty-one page report confirming that staff at the Lao Family Community in Garden Grove had illegally terminated Hmong welfare support solely because they refused to contribute to the ULNLF and not because they failed to meet federal and state eligibility requirements.[969] "Five months later," Keith Quincy added, "the ax fell on Neo Hom and LFC. The Department of Social Services declared that LFC

---

[967] R. Calkins and D. Rios, "War Still Not Over for U.S. Hmong: Refugees Give Cash to General's Resistance Campaign that May Be A Fraud," *The Sacramento Bee*, 23 July 1989.
[968] Steve Johnson, "Extortion Probe Botched, Refugees' Complaints Were Ignored, State Says," *San Jose Mercury News*, 4 November 1990; Ruth Hammond, "Sad Suspicions Of A Refugee Ripoff," *Washington Post*, 16 April 1989, B1; Ruth Hammond, "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1990, 12-13.
[969] Seth Mydans, "California Says Laos Refugee Group Is A Victim of Leadership's Extortion," *New York Times*, 7 November 1990, A20; Patrick Hoge, "State Probes Lao Refugee Aid Group," *Sacramento Bee*, 17 October 1990.

offices in San Bernadino, Riverside, and Sacramento counties had extorted money from Hmong on behalf of Neo Hom and ordered all social service agencies in the state to cease funding LFC organizations."[970] Soon after the Bureau issued its report and recommendations, California authorities arrested Kao Thao—Vang Pao's son-in-law and then executive director of the LFC in Garden Grove—for misappropriating public money, embezzlement and grand theft. In late 1990, Thao pled guilty to embezzling more than $70,000 from the LFC.[971] Immediately, leaders of Lao Family Community organizations across the country disassociated themselves and their branch from their parent group, the LFC in Santa Ana, California, which Vang Pao founded in 1977. Calling the Garden Grove financial scandal a localized misdeed, Chahnia Yang, then President of the Lao Family Community of Minnesota, changed the name of the agency to Hmong Center, Inc. "We don't like the idea of using an organization as a step to develop resistance in Laos," Yang said. The name of the organization was later changed back to Lao Family Community after several protests by die-hard supporters of Vang Pao in July 1991. The protestors charged that Yang changed the name of the organization in order to take over the organization and wrestle it away from the larger Hmong community, a controversy again that was symptomatic of the larger division between supporters of Vang Pao and those of Yang Dao.[972]

In the end, the lack of financial accountability, financial skimming, the sale of "honorific leadership positions" to the Hmong in the United States and in the refugee camps, and the coercion of Hmong clients at various Lao Family Community organizations in California by staff of the Lao Family Community to contribute to the ULNLF all worked against the ULNLF. Many Hmong, like 53-year-old Pasee Lee who Hammond cited in her April 1989 article in the *Washington Post*, questioned where all the money went.[973] Others wondered whether the money that the ULNLF collected ever reached the people in the resistance. A Hmong man in California, for example, once told reporters Royal Calkins and Denice Rios in 1989: "The resistance is nothing. The

---

[970] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 458.
[971] Seth Mydans, "California Says Laos Refugee Group Is A Victim of Leadership's Extortion," *New York Times*, 7 November 1990, A20; Patrick Hoge, "Laotian Aid Unit Facing Funds Cutoff," *Sacramento Bee*, 26 June 1991.
[972] Wendy S. Tai, "Feeling More At Home in America: As Hmong Ties to Lao Fade, Support for Resistance Ebbs," *Star Tribune*, 20 October 1991, B1.
[973] Ruth Hammond, "Sad Suspicion Of A Refugee Ripoff," *Washington Post*, 16 April 1989, B1.

people report from Laos: no money, no food, no shoes, and no resistance."[974] Still, many questioned the strength of the resistance and whether the ULNLF had exaggerated its strength altogether in order to get supporters to continue to contribute to the ULNLF.[975] The military defeat of the ULNLF's armed forces inside Laos in early 1990 further served to confirm the suspicion of the defectors that the money did not reach the resistance and that the resistance was "nothing." Together, the military defeat and the financial problem in the ULNLF caused a blow to the image of the ULNLF as a credible and legitimate organization and officers of the ULNLF as moral and capable leaders to bring about the transformation and the liberation of the homeland for the nostalgic and traumatized Hmong to return home. The financial problems in the ULNLF, in turn, aversely affected how people perceived Pa Kao's Chao Fa movement and the ELOL. Supporters of the ELOL also became more reluctant to contribute to the ELOL, fearing that the same corruption would occur within the ranks of the ELOL. Consequently, top officers of the ELOL had to rely on the income that their wives generated by selling *pajntaub* and greens to continue the work of the ELOL.[976]

POW/MIAs, Repatriation, and the Closing of the Refugee Camps

As the credibility of the ULNLF dwindled in the mid-1980s, Vang Pao quickly changed his course of action and strategy. Instead of using one organization, the ULNLF, to advocate for all Hmong rights in the United States and back home, Vang Pao set up multiple organizations across the country, each for a specific function or responsibility.[977] One of the new organizations Vang Pao helped to set up was the Lao Human Rights Council, which Vang Pao encouraged Vang Pobzeb, then a Ph.D candidate in International Studies at the University of Denver, to found and chair in 1987. The only Hmong person to study international studies at the time (and maybe even to date), Vang Pobzeb was chosen both for his expertise on international human rights laws and Lao

[974] Royal Calkins and Denice Rios, "War Still Not Over for U.S. Hmong," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 July 1989.
[975] Royal Calkins an Denice Rios, "The General and the Hmong: A Tale of Betrayal," *Fresno Bee*, 23-24 July 1989; Ruth Hammond, "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 12-31 October 1989, 11-13.
[976] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009; Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[977] Xang Vang, interview with author, 20 October 2008.

politics. In 1996, Vang Pobzeb completed a dissertation on Sino-Lao relations in world politics since 1954.[978] After graduating from his doctoral program, Vang Pobzeb relocated to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where he remained the executive director of the Lao Human Right Council until his untimely death from heart failure in 2005.[979] The Lao Human Rights Council, Vang Pobzeb later declared, was established to, among other objectives: (1) promote and defend human rights, democracy, freedom, justice and liberty for Hmong and Lao people in Laos and refugees in Thailand and other parts of the world; (2) promote, engage in and support human rights for Hmong and Lao people and refugees in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights principles; (3) inform and educate the U.S. government, United Nations and the world that the Communist Lao government in Laos has and is committing "crimes against peace and crimes against humanity" in Laos; and (4) oppose and end forced repatriation (mandatory return) of Hmong and Lao refugees from Thailand to Communist Laos.[980]

Another important new organization that Vang Pao encouraged to establish in order to keep the link between the Hmong in the diaspora and those back home through the conflict in the Lao jungle was the United Lao Movement for Democracy (ULMD). Formed in 1991, the ULMD was designed as "a charitable and educational [organization] for the people of Laos." Among other goals, the ULMD sought to promote democracy and human rights for the people of Laos; engage in nonpartisan research, study, and analysis for the benefit of the general public regarding U.S. foreign policy, international law, and the relations of other nations regarding southeast Asia and, more specifically, the nation of Laos; and act as a humanitarian and charitable corporation in order to assist refugees from Laos in coping with their medical, nutritional, educational, social, vocational and economic problems.[981] In 1994, the ULMD established a chapter in Minnesota. Pao Thao, now an academic advisor for the Southeast Asian students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Hauly C. Moua, Tou Sue Lee, were named the three

---

[978] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Denver, 1996).
[979] Wameng Moua, "Dr. Pobzeb Vang: A Life of Service," *Hmong Today*, 25 August 2005.
[980] Vang Pobzeb, "Nine Principles of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.," at http://www.laohumrights.org/laoact01.html. Retrieved 19 September 2005.
[981] "Articles of Incorporation of United Lao Movement for Democracy," filed and notarized on 3 October 1991; Membership Application for United Lao Movement For Democracy, in Organizations Files, Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

incorporators of the Minnesota chapter.[982] For Quincy, the formation of these organizations, particularly the Lao Human Rights Council transformed Vang Pao's image "from failed warlord and machine boss to that of human rights advocate."[983]

Nevertheless, the formation and the advocacy for Hmong rights through these organizations alone were insufficient to counter the damage that the ULNLF had suffered from its military defeats in Laos and the internal financial problems that surfaced in the late and early 1990s. More importantly, despite the formation of these organizations, the ULNLF could not control the shift in regional and global politics that erupted at the end of the 1980s—a shift that eventually facilitated the closing of the ELOL military and the refugee camps and the aggressive crackdown of Hmong anti-Lao PDR resistance activities in Thailand which, in turn, resulted in the disintegration of the ELOL and the declining power of the ULNLF in the 1990s. That shift in regional and global politics was the shift in the diplomatic and trade relations among the United States, Thailand, and Laos at the end of the 1980s. To understand how that shift came about and how that shift eventually led to the disintegration of the ELOL in Thailand and furthered the declining influence of the ULNLF in the United States, it is important to understand the events that led up to that shift.

During the Second Cold War, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, both Pa Kao Her's freedom fighters and Vang Pao's armed forces in Laos and Thailand received training and weapons from China, and both found sanctuaries in Thailand. They also found different allies and gained credibility, prestige, power, and unspecified amount of money from their alliance with right-wing individuals, groups and institutions in the United States. For the ULNLF, the United States supported its push to condemn the Vietnamese and Lao PDR governments for using "Yellow Rain" against the Hmong resistance in the Lao jungle.[984] As a part of its larger campaign to cripple the Soviet Union, the United States tacitly supported the Hmong resistance against communist Laos and actively used Hmong refugees' testimonies about Yellow Rain to condemn the Soviet

---

[982] "Articles of Incorporation of United Lao Movement for Democracy," signed and notarized on 12 August 1994.
[983] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 473.
[984] Department of State, *Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan*, Report to the Congress from Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr, 22 March 1982, (Special Report No. 98); U.S. Department of State, Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan: An Update, Report from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, November 1982, (Special Report No. 104).

Union for violating international treaties that banned the production, stockpile and use of chemical weapons.[985]

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, it represented the triumph of U.S. democracy over Soviet communism, bringing an end to the Second Cold War. Accordingly, the United States no longer needed to continue to support anti-Soviet "freedom fighters" in the Third World and to use the issue of Yellow Rain to roll back the power and influence of the evil empire. With the Soviet Union no longer a threat to peace, freedom and democracy, the United States immediately dropped the controversy over "Yellow Rain" in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan. When President George H.W. Bush took office in 1989, the focus of the administration inevitably shifted from Yellow Rain to POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia.

For years, the United States Government had received mounting pressures from POW and MIA groups for actions to locate missing U.S. servicemen from the Vietnam War. From 1960 to 1975, Hamilton-Merritt reported, "some 555 Americans, most airmen, remained unaccounted for in Laos and were listed as missing in action. Families who believed their loved ones were still alive constantly pressured the U.S. government for information on the whereabouts and status of these men. If alive, of course, families sought their release; if dead, they requested their remains for burial."[986] Even before the Communists took power in Laos, POW and MIA groups had already been inquiring about American POWs in Laos. On October 17, 1973, Vang Pao reportedly told a visiting National League of Families Delegation in Vientiane that the North Vietnamese were holding some American POWs in North Vietnam.[987] On January 16, 1974, Vang Pao told Ben Gilman in Long Cheng that the North Vietnamese were holding eight to ten young American pilots to extract technical information and to use them to help diffuse landmines. In a letter to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Persons Missing in Southeast Asia in August 1976, Congressman Paul McCloski of the 12th District, California, wrote: "We cannot write off the possibility of 8 to 11 American POWs still

---

[985] Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in SE Asia?* (London: Verso, 1983), 172-194.
[986] Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret War for Laos, 1942-1992*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 429-430.
[987] Letter from Bruce Heller to Roger Shields, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Defense, 10 August 1976, in Segwick Tourison Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, Item #: 2860115022.

being held in a remote area of Laos by the North Vietnamese. I believe this possibility to be fairly remote, but one which we cannot ignore."[988]

Until the end of the Second Cold War, however, U.S. efforts to locate missing U.S. servicemen in Laos had been sporadic and unfruitful. Repeatedly, the U.S. responses to the pressures from POW and MIA groups was to point to the non-cooperation of the Lao PDR government in its effort to find missing U.S. servicemen in Laos or the inconclusive nature of the evidences that any American was still being held alive as prisoners in Indochina.[989] In December 1976, the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane, in a memo to the State Department, noted, for example, that "the Lao response has not changed during the past nine months. They maintain that they have returned all the Americans whom they captured during the war; that the Government and people are concentrating on the reconstruction of the country to heal the wounds of war; and that they therefore are not able to devote much effort to a search for information on missing Americans."[990] In 1973, the Subcommittee on National Security Policy and Scientific Developments of the House Foreign Affairs Committee concluded, after fifteen months of investigation, that "no Americans are still being held alive as prisoners in Indochina, or elsewhere, as a result of the war in Indochina." Moreover, the committee declared, "Because of the nature and circumstances in which many Americans were lost in combat in Indochina, a total accounting by the Indochinese Governments is not possible and should not be expected."[991] At a congressional hearing in 1979, General Eugene Tighe, Director of Defense Intelligence Agency, similarly testified that:

> As far as Laos is concerned, we have spent a considerable amount of attention to reports particularly up near the Samnui area where the Communist government operated during the war and where there was strong U.S. belief that there were

---

[988] Letter from Paul McCloski, Jr., to G.V. Montgomery, Chairman, Select Committee on Persons Missing in Southeast Asia, 3 August 1976, in Sedgwick Tourison Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, Item #: 2860115023.

[989] For a good overview of U.S. investigations and hearings on POW/MIAs from 1969 to the end of the 1980s, see U.S. Congress, Senate, *POW/MIA's*, Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993, pp. 827-864.

[990] Memo From Embassy Vientiane to the Department of State on "Background of U.S. Relations with Laos at End of 1976," 31 December 1976, in Douglas Pike Papers, Vietnam War Archives, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, Item #: 2431203015.

[991] U.S. Congress, Senate, *POW/MIA's*, Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993, 837-838.

> prisoners of war held which were never subsequently accounted for. We have really no way of knowing today whether there are or aren't in Laos and the attitude of the Laotian Government, I am sure they are not interested in cooperative arrangements to allow us to find out.[992]

In June 1981, Donald S. Jones, Director of the East Asian and Pacific Region, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, added that "there has been no progress in obtaining even the slightest assistance in accounting for our men in Laos despite energetic and persistent efforts on the part of our government."[993] In the early 1980s, instead of paying for legitimate lead on missing U.S. servicemen in Indochina, key figures of the Reagan administration used the money they solicited from private donors to buy arms and equipments for Lao resistance forces to fight the communist government of the Lao PDR. In the end, little intelligence was gathered on missing U.S. servicemen in Indochina.[994]

Largely because of the pressures from POW and MIA groups, including the National League of Families, the U.S. Government created the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs in August 1991 to investigate whether American prisoners were left behind and if so, whether they remained alive somewhere in captivity. According to the Senate Select Committee on POW-MIA Affairs, the disintegration of the Soviet Empire opened new doors and created new compelling incentives for cooperation—almost 20 years after the last American was withdrawn. In 1993, the U.S. spent at least $100 million on POW/MIA efforts.[995] The incessant demands by POW and MIA groups to full access to all State Department, CIA, and Pentagon files on MIAs and POWs and for a commitment from Washington to send teams into Vietnam and Laos to locate the remains of American soldiers, claims Keith Quincy, also "forced the Bush Administration to authorize 'the most rapid and extensive declassification of public files

---

[992] U.S. Congress, House, *POW/MIA's: U.S. Policies and Procedures*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 1st Session, 10 April, 7 May, 5 June 1979, 85.

[993] U.S. Congress, House, *Prisoners of War/Missing in Action: Oversight*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Congress, 1st Session, Part I, 25 June 1981, 15.

[994] U.S. Congress, Senate, *POW/MIA's*, Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993, pp. 303-310; Michael Ross, "Probe Links 'Reagan Doctrine' to Covert Aid to Lao Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1993; and "Report Says Reagan Aid Sent POW Funds to Rebels," *Washington Post*, 14 January 1993.

[995] U.S. Congress, Senate, *POW/MIA's*, Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993, 9.

and documents on a single issue in American history' and to enter into negotiation with Vietnam and Laos to seek cooperation in locating the remains of MIAs."[996]

For the Hmong involved in transnational politics, this shift in U.S. policy from Yellow Rain to POWs and MIAs in Southeast Asia became conspicuous at the Yale Law School on December 8, 1990 when Yale University's Schell Center for International Human Rights sponsored the first U.S. conference on human rights in Laos. Over 200 Hmong refugees and activists from all over the United States gathered at the law school to listen to expert testimonies and to give their own personal testimonies on the use of Soviet-engineered chemical toxins by the Lao PDR and Vietnamese governments on the Hmong in Laos. Vang Pobzeb, founder and director of the Lao Human Rights Council, was the only Hmong person allowed to testify. "From 1975 to 1990, the Soviet Union and Vietnam provided chemical weapons to the Pathet Lao government to kill more than 75,000 citizens in Laos," Vang Pobzeb said. "The Soviet fighter planes carried 'yellow rain' from Moscow and Hanoi to drop in Laos…. Between January and May 1990, the Soviet fighter planes and Mig 21's dropped many chemical bombs on civilians, domestic animals and farming areas in the Xieng Khoung, Borikhan and Van Vieng provinces and many other areas in the countryside. The bombings killed 5,000 people, women, men, children and civilians and thousands of domestic animals."[997] The Hmong had brought a video of Hmong victims of chemical warfare in Laos to show at the conference. The video, for them, was conclusive evidence of Yellow Rain in Laos. Yet, the video was never shown. When they tried to show the video, Drew Days III, Schell Center Director, told them to turn off the television. When they showed it to Scott Marciel, the State Department official at the conference, he refused to watch it, declaring that the State Department had a copy and that he had already seen the video. For Jane Hamilton-Merritt, Marciel's statement was untrue. The video, she told Marciel, was "brand new information."[998] According to Marciel, the State Department was no longer interested in Yellow Rain in Laos. At the top of the State Department's priority were, he said,

---

[996] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 468-469.
[997] Vang Pobzeb, "Address to the Conference on Human Rights in Laos, Yale Law School, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, December 8, 1990." This address is included as Appendix 1 in Vang Pobzeb, "White Paper on Human Rights Violations in Laos Since 1975," Presented and Presented to the First Conference on Human Rights in Laos, Yale Law School, 8 December, 1990, pp. 55-65.
[998] Susana Martins, "Conference A Mixture of Truth, Lies," *Southern News*, 31 December 1990, 8.

programs "to achieve the fullest possible accounting of Americans missing in the Vietnam War and to decrease drug trafficking."[999] Hmong refugees and activists were so disappointed that by the end of the conference, a Hmong leader shouted into the microphone: "The next time there is a conference, we will not attend."[1000]

In exchange for its assistance to locate American POW/MIAs in Laos, the Lao PDR government insisted that the United States work with Thailand and Laos to close down all the refugee camps in Thailand, which until the end of the Second Cold War had served as the centers for anti-Lao resistance activities for the Hmong in the diaspora. Immediately, the Bush administration severed all official and unofficial ties with all the Lao resistance groups and began negotiation with Thailand and Laos to shut down the refugee camps. On October 19, 1992, the State Department issued an official warning to all the Lao resistance groups, particularly to Vang Pao and his anti-communist group, that any resident supporting any resistance abroad would violate the U.S. Neutrality Act, which prohibited anyone from furnishing money for, or taking part in, any military attack against any foreign state or people with whom the United was at peace. Any resident who violated U.S. neutrality laws could face up to three years of imprisonment, a three-thousand-dollar fine, or both.[1001] After President William J. Clinton became president, he continued the Bush administration's policy of appeasement to improve diplomatic relations with the Lao PDR government. The U.S. State Department under the Clinton administration "abandoned most, if not all, official or unofficial dialogue in Thailand or the United States with Hmong/Lao veterans who served with the United States during the Vietnam War and who were linked to the post-War anti-Communist resistance."[1002]

In the meantime, Thai leaders were much more confident about the nation's security than they had been a decade earlier. The Soviet Union had disintegrated, the Communist insurgency in Thailand had ended, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

---

[999] Ibid..
[1000] Jean Falbo, "Laos Human Rights Conference Sponsored by Yale, Southern," *Southern News*, 13 December 1990, 1 & 12; Paul Boudreau, "Human Rights: Issue of Real People," *Southern News*, 13 December 1990, 9 & 11. See also Yale Law School, *Laos: Human Rights in a Forgotten Country*, 8 December 1990, Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota (Item #: 1999.9.45).
[1001] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 469.
[1002] Tim Bartl and Phillip Smith, *Report to the Congress of the United States: Fact Finding Mission to Thailand Regarding the Status of Hmong/Lao Refugees and Asylum Seekers, December 28, 1994 to January 2, 1995*, (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 1995), 15.

was withdrawing its troops from Laos and Cambodia. The claims that Thailand was the "next domino," as Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley have pointed out, had lost its credibility. Thailand's economy was also booming. As such, Thai leaders were determined in the late 1980s to "turn their country's relations with the Communist countries of Indochina away from Cold War confrontation into a more constructive engagement."[1003] Speaking of Thailand's economic and political motives for such a turn in Thailand's approach in Indochina, Evans and Rowley wrote:

> Influential Thai businessmen were eyeing the natural resources, markets and investment opportunities that the Indochinese countries could offer, especially as Thailand's forest and maritime resources were being depleted rapidly. Such thinking was encouraged by Vietnam's economic reforms. The Thai also noted that the Indonesians were taking advantage of the opening door in Vietnam, and feared that unless they joined in they would be left behind.[1004]

In 1988, Thai prime minister Chatichai Choonhaven, determined to improve Thailand's trade and diplomatic relations with Laos, abruptly turned the conflict that Thailand had with Laos over a disputed territory in Ban Rum Kao the previous year into "a wave of goodwill gestures and business ventures."[1005] In late November, Chatichai warmed relation between Laos and Thailand with a visit to Vientiane, the first visit by a Thai prime minister since Prime Minister General Kriangsak Chomanand's visit in 1979.[1006] In 1989, Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane, in turn, paid an official visit to Bangkok, the first since the brief rapprochement with Prime Minister Kriangsak in 1979. These gestures were followed by visits from Thai Princess Maha Chakri to Vientiane in March 1990 and Thai Crown Prince Maha Wachirolongkon in June 1992.[1007]

For Thailand and Laos, two issues stood in the way of their rapprochement in the 1980s. The first was "the continuing issue of Laotian immigrants and refugees [including the Hmong who constituted half of the camp dwellers] remaining in temporary camps—whom Thailand had no desire to accept as immigrants," and the second was the "Laotian

---

[1003] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 263.
[1004] Ibid., 264.
[1005] MacAlister Brown and Joseph Zasloff, "Government and Politics," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 248.
[1006] Grant Evans and Kelvin Rowley, *Red Brotherhood At War*, 270.
[1007] MacAlister Brown and Joseph Zasloff, "Government and Politics," in *Laos: A Country Study*, 248.

and Hmong resistance groups who used the camps as a base."[1008] With Laos as a communist state in name only and its markets free and open to foreign investments, including money from Thailand, Thailand was willing to negotiate with Laos and the United States to end the problem of Hmong refugees and Hmong anti-Lao resistance in Thailand. For Laos and Thailand, shutting down the refugee camps would strengthen their trade and diplomatic relations. The intersection of their political interests—Laos being the end of Hmong insurgency from Thailand, Thailand being the end of Hmong refugee problem on its soil and the strengthening of its relation with Laos, and the United States being the cooperation and assistance of the Lao PDR in locating missing U.S. servicemen in Laos—led the three countries to the Second Conference on Indochinese Refugees in Geneva in 1989. At the international conference, seventy governments, including the United States, Thailand, and Laos, adopted a new regional approach, which became known as the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA). The CPA was devised with five main objectives. The first was to deter or reduce clandestine departures from Vietnam and promote increased opportunities for legal migration under the Orderly Departure Program. Under this program, Vietnamese, after first obtaining their exit permit from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, could enter the United States either as refugees under the Refugee Act of 1980 or holders of immigrant visas under the Immigration and Nationality Act. The second was to provide first asylum to all asylum seekers until their status had been established and a durable solution found. The third was to establish consistent and efficient measures to determine the refugee status of all asylum seekers in accordance with international standards and criteria. The fourth was to continue the resettlement of all those found to be genuine refugees in third countries as well as all Vietnamese who were in first asylum camps prior to the regional cutoff dates, and the fifth was to repatriate those determined not to be refugees and reintegrate them in their countries of origin.[1009] For the "Laotian refugees" in Thailand, the CPA proposed to

---

[1008] Ibid., 248.

[1009] W. Courtland Robinson, "The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees, 1989-1997: Sharing the Burden and Passing the Buck," *Journal of Refugee* Studies 17, no. 3, (2004): 320; Sara Davies, *Legitimizing Rejection: International Refugee Law in Southeast Asia*, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008)198; S.A. Bronee, "The History of the Comprehensive Plan of Action," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 5, no. 4, (1993): 540.

expedite the repatriation of all those determined not to be refugees to Laos and the resettlement for all those determined as genuine refugees in a third country.[1010]

Plans to resettle and repatriate the Laotian refugees, most of whom were Hmong, were immediately initiated in Thailand. In June 1991, Thailand, Laos, and the United States High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed the Luang Prabang Tripartite Agreement, which the U.S. State Department helped to broker in an attempt to help clear Thailand of its remaining Laotian refugees.[1011] The Tripartite Agreement called for the repatriation of all the refugees who refused to resettle in a third country by the end of 1995. According to a report that Philip Smith of the Center for Public Policy Analysis and Tim Bartl, Legislative Assistant to U.S. Congressman Steve Gunderson, submitted to Congress on their fact finding mission trip to Thailand in late 1994 to early 1995, the "Tripartite Agreement will return to the LPDR the Hmong/Lao refugees in Thailand it wishes to *suppress, control and eliminate*—including large numbers of anti-LPDR political dissidents and opposition leaders as well as former Royal Lao soldiers and anti-LPDR rebels and their families. Thailand will rid itself of the refugees, former Royal Lao soldiers and the anti-LPDR insurgents, leading ultimately to normalization of relations with the LPDR."[1012] According to Vang Pobzeb, Executive Director of the Lao Human Rights Council, who by this point had taken over the task of advocating for human rights in Laos and Thailand rather than Vang Pao and the ULNLF, the Tripartite Agreement proposed to repatriate all Hmong refugees to Laos in three phases. During the first phase, from July 1991 to May 1992, 6,000 refugees would be repatriated to Laos. During the second, from June 1992 to May 1993, 3,600 families would be repatriated, and during the third, from June 1993 to the end of 1994, another 5,000-6,000 families would be repatriated.[1013] "To help things along," Quincy wrote, "the Bush administration contributed $15 million to subsidize the cost of closing the camps and transporting Lao and Hmong back to Laos. When Clinton replaced Bush, the White House continued the commitment, donating $3 million between 1993 and 1994 to help defray the costs of

---

[1010] Refugee Policy Group (RPG), *The Second International Conference on Indochinese Refugees: A New Humanitarian Consensus?* (Washington, D.C.: The RPG, 1989), 30.
[1011] Thana Poopat, "Laos Urged to Relocate 60,000 Refugees," *The Nation*, 28 June 1991.
[1012] Tim Bartl and Phillip Smith, *Report to the Congress of the United States*, 13.
[1013] Vang Pobzeb, "White Paper on Forced Repatriation on Hmong Refugees From Thailand to Laos," Lao Human Rights Council, 7 March 1992, 5.

repatriation."[1014] In 1992, the UNHCR also devoted nearly half of its $900 million budget to repatriation initiatives.[1015]

Before Laos, Thailand, and the UNHCR signed the Luang Prabang Tripartite Agreement in 1991, Hmong leaders and activists in the United States had received words from Hmong refugees in Thailand that the Thai government, with the aid of the United States and UNHCR, would soon close all the camps. In May 1991, two months before the Luang Prabang meeting, a Hmong man in Chiang Kham refugee camp wrote a letter to relatives in the United States to plea for help. "We are very, very angry, and we're just crying for help," he wrote. "When the Thai came to the camp to arrest us, they took us to the headquarters, they forced us to fingerprint saying that we are willing to go back to Laos… If you don't do anything to protect us, then we will be…sent back to Laos against our will. If you don't anything and just listen to our news, then our lives will die in Laos."[1016] Another Hmong refugee, Chong Kong Vang in Chiang Kham refugee camp, sent an audiocassette to his brother, Tong Seng Vang, in Fresno, California,

> We are now having a bad situation in this camp. We heard that the Thai Authorities will deport all of us back to Laos. They did not tell us what date or when, but it seems like we all will eventually be deported. All we can do now, my elder brother, is to cry and ask god and ancestors to help us. We heard that if your name is called to go back to Laos and you refuse, then you will be beaten. Elder brother, you keep an open ear for the news of us. We do not know that we will be still alive when we reach Laos. I would rather die than go back and be tortured by the Lao Government. If you get this message, please do everything possible to help us. The Thai Authorities said that they would send some refugees to Phanat Nikhom, but we know that it is not true because of the way they act and treat us refugees.[1017]

[1014] Keith Quincy, *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat*, 469.
[1015] Court Robinson, "Buying Time: Refugee Repatriation in Thailand," in U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey* 1992, (Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Service, 1992), 18.
[1016] Wendy S. Tai, "Returning to Laos Frightens Hmong: Refugees' Please Reach Twin Cities," *Star Tribune*, 24 June 1991, 1B. See also Kevin Duchschere, "St. Paul Hmong Fear for Refugees Facing Ouster From Camps," *Star Tribune*, 24 April 1992, 1B.
[1017] Transcripts of cassette correspondence sent from Hmong refugees in Chiang Kham camp to relatives in Fresno, California. In Brigitte Marshall Files on Southeast Asian Refugees, MA-SEA013, Special Collections and Archives, the UC-Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.

With the formation of the Lao Human Rights Council and the United Lao Movement for Democracy, Vang Pao and other Hmong leaders were able to keep the focus of Hmong politics in the United States on issues in the homeland. They, however, could not stop the United States, Thailand, and Laos from closing the refugee camps, the traditional bases for Hmong resistance against the Lao PDR government.

From 1989 to 1995, Vang Pobzeb and the Lao Human Rights Council, assisted by Vang Pao and the ULNLF, did whatever he could to stop the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos. In June 1991, for example, Vang Pobzeb, with the help of other Hmong leaders in the ULNLF, organized a demonstration in Washington, D.C. to protest the repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos. Xang Vang, an advisor and interpreter to Vang Pao and the ULNLF organized ninety Hmong supporters from the Twin Cities to Washington to join the several thousand Hmong from California, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and other states that day. At the protest, Xang Vang carried a sign that read: "Help! Vietnamese Are Eating My Motherland." Here, the implication is that Laos was still under Vietnamese control, and that the refugees would face persecution and death if they were sent back to Vietnamese-controlled Laos.[1018] Explaining the purpose of the demonstration in Washington, D.C., Vang Pobzeb, said:

> We the Hmong and Laotian Americans and refugees are demonstrating in Washington, D.C., the capitol of the United States, and the world because we believe in democracy, human rights, and freedom of the people. We are here…[because] those refugees should have the right to stay inside Thailand as long as they want…. We are here to request that the U.S. government must request the Thai government to stop the objective of forced repatriation of Hmong and Laotian refugees to Laos without the consent of the returnees.[1019]

On August 15, 1991, Vang Pobzeb sent a letter to President George W.H. Bush to ask the president to help stop the repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos. "The refugees, returnees and the dead in Laos need your support and help," Vang wrote. "The U.S. Government should consider that neither the policy of voluntary repatriation nor forced repatriation is acceptable to the refugees and returnees. These two policies are forcing

---

[1018] Les Suzukamo, "Hmong Fight Plan to Send Refugee Kin Back to Laos," *Pioneer Press*, 8 June 1991.
[1019] Vang Pobzeb, "White Paper on the Purposes of Hmong and Laotian Demonstrations in Washington, D.C., on June 9-10, 1991," Lao Human Rights Council, 3 June 1991.

the refugees to death roads."[1020] On September 25, 1991, Vang submitted a white paper on the murders and persecutions of the Hmong and Laotian returnees in Laos to U.S. Congress and President Bush. In this white paper, Vang claimed that between 800 and 2,000 Hmong repatriates had died between 1989 and 1991.[1021] On July 21, 1992, Vang joined other Hmong in a demonstration in Green Bay, Wisconsin, during which he declared that the UNHCR and the U.S. Department of State had authorized Thailand to force Hmong refugees to Laos to be "exterminated" and called upon Congress to "stop forced repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos before it is too late."[1022] In April 1994, while the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos was underway, Vang joined other Hmong leaders in Washington, D.C., to testify before the Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee during a hearing on Hmong repatriation. At the hearing, Vang claimed that there were "about 4,500 cases of forced repatriation from 1991 to 1994" and presented a petition with 56,000 signatures and fingerprints from refugees in Thailand who opposed the repatriation.[1023] From December 26, 1994 to January 2, 1995, the Lao Human Rights Council cooperated with the office of Congressman Steve Gunderson of Wisconsin in sending a team on a fact-finding mission to visit the Napho refugee camp and the six prisoners in Bangkok, Thailand. The delegates urged the Thai government and the UNHCR to release the prisoners, stop the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Napho refugee camp to Laos, and resettle more refugees from Napho in the United States.[1024]

In a similar manner, leaders from the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) did whatever they could to stop the United States, Thailand, and Laos from closing the camps and repatriating Hmong refugees to Laos. At the Congressional

---

[1020] Vang Pobzeb, Letter to President George H.W. Bush, 15 August 1991.
[1021] Vang Pobzeb, "White Paper on the Murders and Persecutions of the Hmong and Laotian Returnees in Laos," Submitted to U.S. Congress and President, 25 September 1991.
[1022] Statement of Vang Pobzeb, Chairman of the Lao Human Rights Council in the United States, to the Hmong-American Demonstration in Green Bay, Wisconsin, 21 July 1992. Included as Appendix I in Vang Pobzeb, "White Paper on Demonstrations of Hmong Refugees and Letters From the Napho and Ban Vinai Camps, Thailand, to President Bill Clinton in 1993," (Eau Claire, WI: Lao Human Rights Council, 1993).
[1023] U.S. Congress, House, *Indochinese Refugees*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, 26 April 1994, pp. 73-75.
[1024] Vang Pobzeb, "Accomplishments of the Lao Human Rights Council, 1987-1997," http://www.laohumrights.org/laoact02.htm, accessed 19 September 2005; Tim Bartl and Phillip Smith, *Report to the Congress of the United States: Fact Finding Mission to Thailand Regarding the Status of Hmong/Lao Refugees and Asylum Seekers, December 28, 1994 to January 2, 1995*, (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 1995).

hearing on Hmong repatriation in June 1994, Soua X. Her, a representative for the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos (a.k.a. Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos), from Fresno, California, was also on hand to testify. In his testimony, Soua reminded members of Congress that the Democratic Chao Fa Party was formed because "the Lao leaders, both in the past and present, intentionally destroyed the Hmong culture, religion, language, written alphabet, and places of worship" and requested that "those Hmong refugees in Thailand who have served in the Chao Fa militant since 1975 to the present time…be qualified for third country resettlement."[1025] Pa Kao Her, President of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, sent a written statement with Soua Her to be included in the Congressional record. In his statement, Pa Kao reminded Congress that "Laos is still a communist country. There is no freedom, peace, or security for those [who] fought the communists." Not only that, but "for many generations, the Hmong and many other ethnic groups have faced serious discrimination. Now, under the single party system of the Pathet Lao, the situation for the Hmong is much worse than before." Pa Kao urged the United States to cease its support for the Thai repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos until it was safe to do so. In his words, he wrote:

> Since many refugees in the camps in Thailand are dependents of the Chao Fa freedom fighters, the Pathet Lao government does not welcome them. To lay down the Chao Fa's arms would be like suicide. The Democratic Chao Fa Party experienced this since June 1975 after the U.S. pulled out of Southeast Asia, and I will never let this happen again to my people. I urge that the UNHCR and Thailand be more sensitive to this issue and find a peaceful political solution to this matter before putting a repatriation program into effect. The Democratic Chao Fa Party will lead refugees back to Laos when we can assure their security and well-being.[1026]

Former CIA Director William Colby also sent in a prepared statement reminding Congress of the great sacrifices that the Hmong had made for the United States during the

---

[1025] U.S. Congress, House, *Indochinese Refugees*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, 26 April 1994, 78-79.
[1026] U.S. Congress, House, *Indochinese Refugees*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, 26 April 1994, 226-229.

Secret War.[1027] Most of all, Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt, journalist and author of *Tragic Mountains* and a long-time supporter of Vang Pao, was on hand to remind Congress of the Hmong alliance with the United States and Thailand and their sacrifice for the United States during the secret war. "It was the Hmong, or 'Meo,' with U.S. backing, who kept the North Vietnamese Army at bay in northern Laos, gathered critical intelligence, rescued downed aircrews, and defended navigational sites in Laos that allowed precise, all-weather U.S. air strikes against enemy targets in northern Laos and North Vietnam," Hamilton-Merritt said. "The Hmong did this at great loss of life and property." To coerce Hmong refugees "who have fought against [the Lao Communist] regime for years back to this totalitarian environment, to a government which has vowed to 'wipe out' those had allied themselves with the U.S. in the fight against the communist forces now in power, cannot in any way be justified." To do so, Hamilton-Merritt declared, "is against all concepts of justice and human rights and should be stopped immediately."[1028] These efforts had little effect on U.S. policies toward Hmong refugees in Thailand. They did not sway the United States away from colluding with Thailand and Laos to shut down the refugee camps and repatriate those they determined not to be refugees to Laos.

In a similar manner, Hmong protests in the refugee camps had no effect on Thailand's policy to close the refugee camps. In Thailand, as in the United States, a group of about 1,500 to 2,000 Hmong in Na Pho camp in northeast Thailand staged a peaceful demonstration in front of the UNHCR office on July 16, 1992. Some carried signs saying, "No Need to Go to Nong Saeng. No Need to Go to Laos. Request to UNHCR-MOI for Humanity." The MOI, or the Thai Ministry Of Interior, was the main organ in the Thai government in charge of coordinating all refugee programs. Nearly 1,300 Thai troops responded with force to quell the protestors, and many Hmong were severely beaten. The group dissipated only after the Thai camp commander, Sati Phonyiam, told "the group to go home, in exchange for which he would meet with their designated leaders." Three months later (on September 21), 1,000 Hmong refugees staged another peaceful protest in Ban Vinai refugee camp against forced repatriation. A

[1027] U.S. Congress, House, *Indochinese Refugees*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, 26 April 1994, 120-134.
[1028] U.S. Congress, House, *Indochinese Refugees*, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, 26 April 1994, 47-51 and 139-156.

thousand Thai troops and some UNHCR officials responded. Again, countless Hmong were severely beaten. Four demonstrators were so severely injured that they were thought to have been killed.[1029]

In September 1994, 5,000 refugees at the Na Pho camp in northeast Thailand signed a petition to the U.S. Congress, pleading with American lawmakers to intervene and stop the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos. A year earlier, on September 11, 1993, Vue Mai, the Ban Vinai camp leader who championed and led the repatriation of Hmong refugees from Ban Vinai to Laos, had mysteriously disappeared. He was last seen receiving a phone call from a Lao girl and walking out from his home in Vientiane to meet that person. Lao, American, and UNHCR officials blamed the Hmong resistance for Vue Mai's disappearance. However, the Hmong believed that Lao security forces had abducted and killed Vue Mai, an indication that repatriation was unsafe and must be halted.[1030] The Hmong refugees in Na Pho, thus, cited the disappearance of Vue Mai to show that it was unsafe for refugees to return to Laos and urge the United States to intervene to stop the repatriation. Soon after the petition arrived in Washington, the Thai Interior Ministry police, with the assistance of UNHCR personnel, arrested six of the petitioners. On September 20, the petitioners were taken to Suan Plu Immigration Jail in Bangkok. After the arrest, a U.S. Embassy spokesman said that these men "will be kept at IDC (Suan Plu) until they sign up voluntarily to return to Laos." For an unidentified non-governmental source with many years in Thailand, the arrest of the six petitioners was a disgrace, stating that "The UNHCR is way, way out of bounds on this case. Since when does the UNHCR arrest and imprison those it is mandated to protect?"[1031]

In the end, the United States was determined to satisfy its end of the bargain with Laos and Thailand, which was to assist in the closing of the refugee camps, and there was little the Hmong in the refugee camps and in the United States could do to stop the

---

[1029] "Hmong Protest Against Repatriation," *Washington Inquirer,* 18 December 1992, 4; *Refugee Reports* 13, no. 8, (August 28, 1992): 3-4.

[1030] Marc Kaufman, "Hmong Leader's Vanishing In Laos Reverberates in U.S.," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 1 May 1994, A01; Marc Kaufman, "Allies Abandoned," *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine,* 27 February 1994, 20; Alex Pulaski and Michael Doyle, "Hmong Leader's Disappearance Worries Family," *Fresno Bee,* 22 May 1994, B1.

[1031] "Hmong Refugee Fear Forced Repatriation," *Bangkok Post,* 4 December 1994, 24; Marc Kaufman, "U.S. Lawmakers Turn Up the Heat for Hmong Fighting Repatriation," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 3 October 1994.

repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos.[1032] For many Hmong in America, the U.S. support for Thailand's repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos was "an act of betrayal." The United States, they said, had forgotten the endless sacrifices that they had made for the United States and the American people during the secret war by repatriating legitimate Hmong refugees to die at the hands of communist Laos.[1033] In 1992, 7,500 Hmong refugees were resettled in the United States, and 1,700 Hmong were repatriated. Meanwhile, 10,000 Hmong refugees who rejected resettlement and repatriation moved to Wat Tham Krabok, a Buddhist monastery north of Bangkok, to seek sanctuary, and as many as 8,000 others took to the mountains to secretly live among the Hmong Thai in Hmong villages in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Tak, Phetchabounn, and Phitsanoulok provinces.[1034] Between 1992 and 1994, over 25,000 Hmong entered the United States. During the same period, more than 14,000 Hmong refugees were repatriated to Laos under the terms of both the CPA and the 1991 Luang Prabang Tripartite Agreement.[1035] By the end of 1995, all the refugee camps that historically housed the Hmong, including Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham, and Napho were closed. For Vang Pao's ULNLF and Pa Kao Her's Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, the closing of the refugee camps was a devastating blow to their politics and resistance. With the camps gone, they had no place to recruit fighters for the resistance and no base to launch their attacks on communist Laos.

Thailand's Crackdown on Hmong Resistance

As part of Thailand's effort to strengthen its diplomatic and trade relations with communist Laos, it not only closed the refugee camps to end the bases for Hmong

---

[1032] Brian Jacob, "Win or Lose: Plight of Hmong Refugees," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 16, no. 139, (1996): 139-166.
[1033] Marc Kaufman, "Those Other Refugees: Why America Owes A Special Debt to the Forgotten Hmong," *Washington Post*, 28 August 1994; Michael Johns, "Acts of Betrayal—Persecution of Hmong," *National Review*, 23 October 1995, 24&26; Steven Rosenlind, "Fresno Man Thinks Hmong Subject to Violence in Laos; Tou Ger Vang Worries the U.S. Has Forgotten His People," *Fresno Bee*, 9 June 1995, A12; Michael Lewis, "Homeland Lost to U.S. Promises," *Modesto Bee*, 30 April 1995, A3; Michael Johns, "Let's Not Forget Laos," *The World & I*, September 1995, 74-79.
[1034] Hiram A. Ruiz, "Tough Times for Refugees in Thailand," *News From the U.S. Committee for Refugees*, 1 July 1993; Marc Kaufman, "Allies Abandoned," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1994, 22.
[1035] Sucheng Chan, *Remapping Asian American History*, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003), 209.

resistance against the Lao PDR. It also severed all ties and support to Hmong resistance groups in Thailand and, in fact, actively cracked down Hmong fighters and suppressed their activities along the Lao-Thailand border—the presence of whom the Lao PDR had repeatedly declared were major obstacles to improved diplomatic and economic relations between Laos and Thailand since the end of the Vietnam War. In 1992, according to Nicholas Auclair, a senior Asian military and political analyst with the Department of Defense, "Thailand reportedly made good on its promise to arrest border violators, and the brother of General Vang Pao and a group of Hmong were taken into custody in northern Thailand as they were attempting to stage a cross-border incursion."[1036] In September 1993, Thailand "expelled 320 members of [Vang Pao's] movement and its masses from Thai territory" and captured "such ordnance as 60-mm mortars, M-16s, AK-47s, ammunition, landmines and hand grenades."[1037] In February 1994, the Royal Thai Government's Supreme National Command and senior military leadership publicly called for the arrests of General Vang Pao and Lao General Thonglit Chokbengbun for their anti-Lao PDR activities.[1038] Lieutenant-General Thiradej Meepian, the Director of the Army Intelligence Department, formally lodged a complaint with Crime Suppression Division Chief Major-General Wannarat Koljarak. He asked that General Vang Pao be arrested immediately for illegally using Thai territory to build up arms and manpower for subversive activities aimed at toppling the Lao government. The complaint coincided with the arrival of Lao Foreign Minister Somsavath Lengsavad in Thailand for an official visit. The arrest of General Vang Pao, the Lao Foreign Minister said, would "benefit both Thailand and Laos since it would eradicate one of the problems obstructing good bilateral ties."[1039] The complaint effectively barred Vang Pao from returning to Thailand. The same complaint also called for the United States to "consider legal action against anti-Vientiane fighters General Vang Pao and General Thonglit Chokbengbun for alleged

---

[1036] Nicholas Auclair, "National Security," in *Laos: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea M. Savada, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), 286.
[1037] "Thai Army Unit Expels 320 Anti-Lao Rebels," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 September 1993.
[1038] "Military Wants Action Against Vang Pao's Men," *Bangkok Post*, 24 February 1994; "Wimol Says Vang Pao Faces Arrest in Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, 25 February 1994.
[1039] "Thai Military Goes to Court to Rein In Lao Rebels," *The Straits Times*, 26 February 1994, 21; and "General Vang Pao," *Indochina Chronology* 13, no. 2, (April-June, 1994): 37, found in Box 10, folder 20, Special Collections, Refugee Studies Center, Immigration History Research Center (IHRC), University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

illegal activities in Thailand."[1040] In 1975, after the Communists came to power in Laos, the LPDR government had sentenced both Vang Pao and Thonglit as enemies of the Lao state in absentia.[1041]

When Thailand sought to strengthen economic and diplomatic relations with Laos in the late 1980s, it also moved to close down Pa Kao Her's ELOL military camp and end Chao Fa resistance against the Lao PDR Government. After the border dispute at Baan Rum Kao in 1987, according to Yang Thao, the ELOL general secretary and military strategist, "Thai and Lao have established strong diplomatic relations. Their first objective was to cooperatively eliminate all resistant groups along the border, especially Chao Fa and Red Thai."[1042] To demonstrate Thai sincerity toward Laos, with hope of becoming Laos' primary trade partner, Thailand shut down Pa Kao's ELOL military camp and drove major Hmong concentrations in the Nan and Phitsanulok Provinces across the Lao border to the rugged terrain in Sayaboury province.[1043] The first expulsion took place in 1991—a year after Pa Kao had changed the name of the organization from ELOL to the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos.[1044] In June 1991, Major Montry Chinnaseng, Commander of the Special Force Unit 32 of the Thai Army, led some 100 troops to the Chao Fa military camp and forced them to move out of Thailand to Laos. Major Montry gave Chao Fa three days to move out or face serious consequences from the Thai military. After an unsuccessful negotiation with Major Montry, Chao Fa soldiers and their families moved to one of the highest border mountain called "Happy Mountain," a location surely not "happy" because it was filled with landmines. "We slowly cleared landmines feet by feet," Yang Thao wrote. "When ten square kilometers

---

[1040] "Police and Military Announce Action Against Lao Resistance in Sara Buri," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 28 February 1994; "Laotian Officer Welcomes Thai Action Against Former Generals," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 7 March 1994; "Governor Urges Thailand to Further Move Against Rebel Generals," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 March 1994.
[1041] Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "No Hiding from the Fear," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 2 April 1995, 12A; Brian Bonner and Yee Chang, "The General's Las Stand," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 28 July 1996, 1A.
[1042] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).
[1043] "Thai Army Official Says Aid to Lao Resistance Now Cut Off," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 22 July 1992; "Raids Staged From Thailand," *South China Morning Post (Hong Kong)*, 30 October 1993.
[1044] Pa Kao Her, "Summary Biography of President Pa Kao Her," Special Collections, Hmong Archives, (File #: X21.1999.43.27); and Yang Thao, "Biography of President Pa Kao Her, Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos," Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).

of land were free of landmines, we started to clear the land for farming. We set up camp right on the border."[1045]

Still, the Thai military Unit 32 was not satisfied. Shortly after the Chao Fa settled in Happy Mountain, the Thai military unit set up an operation post about three kilometers away from the Chao Fa post. Their goal was to terminate completely Thai relation with the Chao Fa and seal off Chao Fa supply lines. "Many civilians were caught and jailed while they tried to sneak out to nearby Thai village to buy medical supplies for their sick children," Yang Thao recalled. "Two Chao Fa messengers, Mr. Thao Lia and Chanvang Thao, were put in prison for three months with no specific reason. Many people died of starvation and malaria. The action of Unit 32 caused tremendous hardship to Chao Fa people." The Thai military Unit 32 also "came to Happy Mountain and burned down any shack they found along the border. They knew so well that the area was full of landmines, but they did not care. They forced us at gunpoint. As a result, four Chao Fa men and four women were killed with landmines. Many others lost their legs."[1046]

In 1992, when Tom Marks, a journalist for the *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, visited the Chao Fa in their new location at Happy Mountain, in Na Waeng district, Sayaboury province, he recorded that the Chao Fa leadership was "fighting a battle on two fronts." On one front, they had to coordinate "a large-scale, desperate effort to gather food and other necessities for their families." On the other front, they had to keep "a wary eye" on both the Thai military and their traditional rival—the Lao People's Army, the ground forces of the Lao government. In October 1992, one division of the LPA troops attacked Chao Fa fighters and their families at Happy Mountain. After two weeks of fighting, with no ammunition or grenades left, Chao Fa fighters retreated to Thailand. What concerned the Chao Fa leadership most at the time, Tom Marks said, "was that it may have to lock horns with the Thai, a particularly distasteful prospect since Bangkok has long been intimately involved with the tribesmen."[1047] While Thailand did not open fire on them, the Thai military was unhappy about the Chao Fa's retreat back across the Thai border. Immediately after surveying the area, Major Ramet Santibut, Commander of the Thai Border Patrol Unit, gave Chao Fa a deadline to move out of Thailand. The

[1045] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection), 14.
[1046] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection), 14.
[1047] Tom Marks, "Chao Fa: SOF Joins H'mong," *Soldier of Fortune*, January 1992, 56-57.

deadline was set for April 4, 1993. In three separate meetings with the Thai military, represented by Lt. General Athit Rongsouvan, Chief Commander for the Third Regional Army and other high-ranking Thai military officers at Ban Nampone in February 1993, Chao Fa leaders asked for more time to move out of Thailand. They reminded the Thai military leaders of the great sacrifices that the Chao Fa made in the past to protect the Kingdom of Thailand, and they promised to negotiate with the Lao PDR to find a place in Laos for Chao Fa women and children to live. In the end, the Thai military authorized the Chao Fa temporary asylum in Kiewnya, about 20 km east of Ban Nampoun, while the Thai military contacted the Lao People's Liberation Army, the armed forces of the Lao PDR government, for negotiation with the Chao Fa under Thailand's monitoring.[1048]

Three months later, the Thai military returned and informed the Chao Fa that the LPLA had denied their request for negotiation. In July 1993, Major Ramet Santibut of the Thai Border Patrol Unit then led 100 troops to Chao Fa sanctuary and forced Chao Fa men and their families again at gunpoint to move out of Thailand. After the Thai military forced the Chao Fa out, Lieutenant General Phairot Chanurai, commander of the Third Region Army of Thailand admitted that Thailand had previously aided Hmong resistance groups in the late 1970s and allowed them to recruit followers from the refugee camps. However, Lt. General Chanurai explained, "It's pointless to continue the fighting now. We don't want to see any more proxy wars, which were imposed on us by superpowers…. We told them (those fighters under the leaderships of General Vang Pao and Pa Kao Her) that we would scale down our assistance and would finally stop it and we did."[1049] From Thailand, Chao Fa fighters and their families entered Laos at about 50 kilometers south of Happy Mountain. "This new location was no different from Happy Mountain," Yang Thao recalled. "Landmines were found in every square yard. We suffered many casualties from those landmines."[1050]

In early 1994, the fear that Chao Fa previously had about having to lock horns simultaneously with both the Lao People's Army and the Thai military came true. On their back was the Thai military Unit 32, and on their front was one division of the Lao People's Army. After this armed clash with both Lao and Thai forces, the Chao Fa

---

[1048] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection), 16.
[1049] "Thai Army Official Says Aid To Lao Resistance Now Cut Off," *The Nation*, 18 July 1992, A1.
[1050] Yang Thao, "Personal History," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).

decided to abandon their Sayaboury territory and move to the Golden Triangle. From there, fighters of the Chao Fa Democratic Party of Laos fled to various locations. Few moved across the border to seek shelter with the Wa and Karen minorities in Myanmar. Most, including Pa Kao Her and Yang Thao, the secretary general and military advisor for the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, risked their lives returning to Thailand to secretly live among friends and relatives in Hmong villages in various provinces throughout Thailand. By 1995, the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos was but a moribund organization with its members dispersed all over northern Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. The early 1990s, Yang Thao told me, was the most difficult period for the Chao Fa.[1051]

For Yang Thao, the Thai persecution of the Chao Fa and their families in the early 1990s was a betrayal. In 1987, when the Thai Army enlisted the help of the ELOL help drive the Lao People's Army away from Baan Rum Kao, the Thai promised the Chao Fa leadership that they would make the entire Sayaboury Province a "Hmong Liberation Land." As such, the Hmong would live under the tutelage of Thailand for fifty years. After fifty years, they would govern the province on their own and turn it into a sovereign Hmong state. This was a part of the plan outlined in the Operation 3091. Not only did the Thai Army break the promise after the Chao Fa expelled the Lao People's Army from Baan Rum Kao, it intended to dismantle completely the Chao Fa resistance in Thailand as a way to silence and discredit them. "It is absolutely clear that the Thai has been using Chao Fa as human shield to protect their country," Yang Thao declared. "The Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos sacrificed their people to protect the Kingdom of Thailand. We fought at the Tri-Villages, at Rum Kao, and dissolved the entire Red Thai Party in Thailand. Thai military not only broke their promises, but they wanted to eliminate us as well."[1052]

By the time the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, Chao Fa fighters had also lost their support from China. In the early 1980s, China had provided arms and training to three Lao resistance groups: Pa Kao Her's Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos, Lao General Kong Le's the Procession for the Revolution of the Lao National Neutrality, and

[1051] Yang Thao, interview with author, 31 January 2009.
[1052] Yang Thao, "Personal History," Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).

Vang Pao's the United Lao National Liberation Front. By 1983, China was fed up with their political and military factionalism. China felt that the possibility of victory over the Lao People's Army, the armed forces of the Lao PDR Government, who had the backing of the People's Army of Vietnam, with each group fighting on its own, was slim. China terminated military aid to all groups and sent them packing back to Laos and Thailand in 1984.[1053] Like Thailand, China had been trying to improve its own trade and diplomatic relations with Laos since 1986. By the end of the Second Cold War, like Thailand, China was more interested in normalizing trade relations with Laos than encouraging another proxy war in Laos. In 1989, Lao Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihan paid a state visit to Beijing, and in the same year, Laos and China normalized their diplomatic and party-to-party relations. In 1989, China officially severed all ties and ended its support for the freedom fighters inside Laos.[1054] To further strengthen Sino-Lao relations, Kaysone again spent his vacation in China in 1991 instead of making his customary visit to the Soviet Union. China officially expanded its trade and commercial investments in Laos in 1993 and 1994 after they established the Laotian-Chinese Joint Border Committee in 1991 and signed an agreement to delineate their common border in 1992.[1055]

In the end, the political opportunities that gave Pa Kao's messianic fighters and Vang Pao's guerilla fighters in Laos and Thailand weapons and training in China and sanctuaries and military bases in Thailand, and credibility, prestige, money, and power in the United States, including the Second Cold War, the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, Thai-Lao border conflicts, and communist insurgency in Thailand, had disappeared in the late 1980s. After the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, China, Thailand, and the United States shifted their approach from Cold War confrontation to rapprochement with the communist countries of Indochina. They favored strong trade and diplomatic relations with Laos over the support of anti-Lao resistance movements against the Lao PDR within Laos and from Thailand. This shift in policies and approach by Thailand and the United States toward communist Laos facilitated the closing the ELOL military camp, the

---

[1053] Tom Peterson, "Lords of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune*, August 1990, 47; Blong Vang, interview with author, 25 September 2008.
[1054] Vang Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954: The Theory and Practice of Peaceful Coexistence," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Denver, 1996), 310.
[1055] MacAlister Brown and Joseph J. Zasloff, "Government and Politics," in *Laos: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea Matles Savada, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), 250.

refugee camps, and the aggressive crackdown of Hmong anti-Lao PDR resistance activities in Thailand. In the end, the ELOL disintegrated and the ELOL went into abeyance as their sanctuaries and bases for resistance in Thailand were eliminated.

Ethnic (Domestic) Politics in the United States

In Southeast Asia, the ELOL and the ULNLF suffered a devastating blow because of the change in the approach and policies by Thailand and the United States toward Laos. In the United States, the transnational politics of the ELOL and the ULNLF suffered yet another blow because of the change in political climate and community dynamics in America. In the mid-1990s, the ELOL and the ULNLF also suffered from growing competition for the community's trust and loyalty by emerging new leaders and organizations and the diversion of the community's focus away from returning home and human rights in the homeland to civil, economic and politics rights and community development in the United States, a diversion facilitated by the welfare reform. To fully appreciate the declining influence and power of the ELOL but particularly the ULNLF in the 1990s, it is necessary to not only look at how their transnational movements were shaped by the events in Southeast Asia. It is also necessary to understand how events in the United States shaped the dynamics and life of the organizations and movements. Changing international and domestic relations in both Southeast Asia and the United States combined and reinforced each other to destabilize the power and momentum of Hmong transnational politics in the 1990s. To understand how the rise of new ethnic leaders and organizations and the welfare reform in the United States affected Hmong transnational politics, it is necessary to know something about how those new leaders and organizations came about, the events that led up to the welfare reform, and what welfare reform was about.

In some ways, Hmong transnational politics was destined to encounter a setback in the 1990s because while the transnational movement was surging on the forefront, another political movement was developing in the background. That other movement was the movement of Hmong ethnic politics. It was a movement that focused on advancing the interests of the Hmong in the United States and a movement whose goal

was to integrate the Hmong population into American society. Unknowingly, leaders of Hmong transnational politics were also involved in the buildup of this flow of Hmong ethnic politics in America. In fact, Vang Pao was the first to start this flow with the formation of the Lao Family Community in Santa Ana, California, in March 1977. Eventually, as mentioned earlier, branches of the Lao Family Community were set up in all states where a sizable Hmong population lived. In one case, an existing Hmong self-help organization was renamed. On June 28, 1980, at Vang Pao's advice, the Association of Hmong in Minnesota (AHM), originally incorporated as a non-profit organization in September 1977, was renamed as Lao Family Community. Xang Vang, the past Executive Director of the Lao Family Community and the current Executive Director of the Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association in Minneapolis, remembered, "General Vang Pao came to town to talk about Lao Family. He said that since we are citizens of Laos, we should include services for the Lao. It is important that Hmong and Lao are still brothers. In the summer of 1980, we turned Hmong Association to Lao Family."[1056]

Leaders of the different branches of Lao Family Community were primarily men. Few women were appointed to the board of directors of these organizations. As such, issues and challenges directly affecting the lives of Hmong women, particularly the issue of gender inequality, were not addressed. To fill this need, Hmong women created their own women's organizations. In 1981, a group of Hmong women established the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota in Minneapolis (AAHWM). On the St. Paul side of the Twin Cities, Hmong women founded the Women's Association of Hmong and Lao (WAHL) in 1982.[1057] Meanwhile, college students were involved in creating their own student organizations on campus to help them deal with the specific set of problems and challenges that they encountered in college. Hmong students in the 1980s were the first wave of Hmong college students in the United States, and many were the first from their families to go to college. They were what Ines Miyares has called "the Rising Sun" generation. Educational pioneers, these students initially created Hmong student associations to "study together, encourage each

[1056] Chia Y. Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora," 101.
[1057] Ibid., 102.

other, and foster the group identity that is central to Hmong culture."[1058] As the presence of Hmong students on college campuses grew, they assumed the tasks of educating their universities about their culture and community, encouraging other Hmong students still in high school to pursue higher education, sharing information about financial aid and scholarships with students and parents in the community, and facilitating the matriculation and adjustment process of new students at their college. In January 1987, at the urging of General Vang Pao and Hmong clan leaders, Vang Pobzeb, then a Ph.D student at the University of Denver, formed the Hmong Council Education Committee (HCEC) in Colorado. Unlike the student associations, the Hmong Council Education Committee was to serve as a national Hmong educational organization.[1059]

While the extent of Hmong ethnic politics in the 1970s and 1980s was limited to the creation of self-help organizations to assist Hmong refugees to adjust to American society and student associations to help Hmong college students adjust to college life and encourage others to follow, these early engagements paved the way for Hmong civic engagement and electoral politics later. These early self-help organizations and student associations were the start of a movement to prepare and push the Hmong community in the United States in a direction that later countered the flow of the transnational movement of organizations like the ELOL and the ULNLF. Rather than focusing on a return to the homeland and changing the political climate back home, these early organizations and associations were focused on advancing the interests of the Hmong in the United States. They sought to gradually integrate the Hmong into American society, and they were preparing Hmong families for life in America, not a life back in the homeland. The stated goal of the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota (AAHWM), for example, was to assist Hmong women and their families to adjust to life in Minnesota. To that end, the organization offered programs to help Hmong women become self-reliant so they could ease "the transition to American life" for themselves and their families. Women were taught language skills, interviewing

---

[1058] Ines M. Miyares, *The Hmong Refugee Experience in the United States: Crossing the River*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), 98-99.

[1059] Vang Pobzeb, "The Hmong Council Education Committee: Grassroots Advocacy," in *Refugee Empowerment and Organizational Change: A Systems Perspective*, ed. Peter W. Van Arsdale, (Arlington, VA: Committee on Refugee Issues, General Anthropology Division, American Anthropological Association, 1993), 37-49; Information about the formation of the HCEC is also found in Box 2, Folder 63, Refugee Studies Center Collections, at the IHRC, the University of Minnesota.

techniques and job planning. Meanwhile, teenage girls were taught pregnancy prevention, and teens were cautioned about drug use and gang activities.[1060] Similarly, the stated goal of the Hmong Council Education Committee was to promote higher education, scholarship opportunities, and economic self-sufficiency for all Hmong in the United States. To this end, the HCEC conducted orientations and organized meetings, workshops, and conferences in California, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Colorado to "encourage young people to attend colleges and universities, or vocational and technical schools for job training" and provide advice to young people on "possible professional fields."[1061]

By 1990, when the ULNLF suffered a military defeat in Laos, key leaders in student associations and self-help organizations in the 1970s and 1980s had also become the new leaders in the community. The ring of leaders was no longer restricted to the clan leaders and the ex-military leaders and ex-politicians from the homeland.[1062] Contrary to the ex-military leaders and politicians of the elder or first generations, the new leaders of the "rising sun" or 1.5 generation were focused on pushing the Hmong community toward civic engagement through the formation of Hmong self-help organizations. This was evident in the burgeoning formation of self-help, student, and cultural/ethnic organizations in the 1990s. According to Chia Youyee Vang, apart from the Lao Family Community and two Hmong women organizations, most of the Hmong ethnic self-help organizations in Minnesota were established after 1990.[1063] From 1977, when Vang Pao first formed the Lao Family Community in Santa Ana, to 1990, according Vang Pobzeb, there were 95 Hmong self-help organizations or mutual assistance associations (HMAAs), including the many branches of the Lao Family Community throughout the United States and Hmong student associations. In the early 2000s, the Hmong National Development, established in 1993 in Washington, D.C. with funding from the State Department, listed 111 Hmong self-help organizations or mutual

---

[1060] Information about the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in MN is found in Box 2, Folder 15, Refugee Studies Center Collections, at the IHRC, the University of Minnesota.
[1061] Vang Pobzeb, "The Hmong Council Education Committee: Grassroots Advocacy," 40.
[1062] Jeremy Hein, "Leadership Continuity and Change in Hmong American Community," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 6, no. 2, (1997): 213-228; Timothy Dunnigan, "Segmentary Kinship in an Urban Society: The Hmong of St. Paul-Minneapolis," *Anthropological Quarterly* 55, no. 3, (1982): 126-136.
[1063] Chia Y. Vang, "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora: Narratives of Hmong American/Refugee Resistance and Human Agency," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2006), 104.

assistance associations (MAAs), 50 Hmong student associations, and 37 Hmong media organizations throughout the United States.[1064]

The push of the new leaders of the "rising sun" generation for the Hmong community to integrate into American society was also evident in the entry of the new leaders into mainstream U.S. electoral politics. Already, in the summer of 1988, younger leaders of the community had launched the Hmong American Republican Association in Santa Ana, California, the main objective of which was "to organize and recruit the Hmong Americans in the United States to participate and become members of the Republic Party and/or to encourage the Hmong American citizens living in the United States to register with and support the policies and candidates of the Republic Party."[1065] Within two years, the organization proliferated to seven states with large Hmong communities and become an effective organization to provide leadership training, conduct voter registration drive, and get Hmong citizens out to vote for their candidates.[1066] By 1991, Hmong voters in St. Paul were sufficiently organized to give Choua Lee, then a 23-year-old Hmong woman, a seat with the St. Paul Public School Board. With her victory, the Hmong people were galvanized politically, and they were convinced that it was time for an entirely new political agenda. The new agenda would be one less fixated on the struggle to change the political climate in Laos so that they could return home and more concerned with the struggle to advance the interests and improve the lives of the Hmong in the United States, an agenda best accomplished by putting people from their community in public office or building alliance with mainstream American candidates and mobilizing their community to vote for those candidates. Consequently, by 1991, in light of the recent financial scandal and the military defeat of the ULNLF in early 1990, many Hmong, disenchanted with the

---

[1064] Hmong National Development, *National Directory of Hmong Organizations*, (Washington, D.C.: HND, n.d). The directory is believed to have been published in the early 2000s because it listed Bo Thao as the Executive Director and Mai Zong Vue as the Board President at the time of its publication. In email to the author, dated 28 April 2010, Mai Zong indicated that she was Board President of HND from 2000 to 2003 and Bo was ED of HND from 2001 to 2004.

[1065] Vang Pobzeb, "The Politics of Hmong Organizations in America," Paper presented at the "Conference on the Hmong in Higher Education" on July 27-28, 1990, at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire.

[1066] Tou Yer Moua, "Hmong Values and Political Leadership as Perceived by the U.S. Hmongs," (Ph.D Dissertation, United States International University, 1994), 49-54.

ULNLF as well as the dream of returning to a liberated Laos, were talking openly about their future in America. As Wendy Tai of the *Star Tribune* reported:

> For years, they dreamed of going back to the lush mountains of Laos, where the Hmong lived off the land. Life in Minnesota offered a temporary shelter from years of war, but the cities, the snow and the alien culture were not home. Many Hmong hoped the resistance fighters would wrest Laos from the Communists so they could go home. But over the years those hopes have dimmed, and support for the resistance has waned. Many Hmong now talk openly about their future here.

One of those who talked "openly about their future here" was Yang Dao, former deputy-secretary general of the ULNLF. "This is our home," he said. "The majority of Hmong are moving to…adjusting themselves to American society, especially the young." The promise to regain Laos, added Christopher Thao, a Hmong attorney in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, "is like…someone's always talking about a dream. After a while, it gets boring."[1067]

Inspired by Choua Lee's success, other Hmong in the United States initiated their own political campaigns to represent the people in their community, and many were also successful in their bid for political offices in Minnesota, Wisconsin, California and elsewhere. In 1994, the Hmong community thus saw the election of Lormong Lo to the Omaha City Council in Omaha, Nebraska, where the Hmong population was tiny compared to cities like St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, or Fresno, California. A year later, they saw again the successful bid by Neal Thao to the St. Paul Public Board, following the footstep of Choua Lee, who did not seek reelection. Since Neal Thao's election to the St. Paul Public Board in 1995, he had won another term with the St. Paul Public Board and he served until 2003. In Wisconsin, Joe Bee Xiong won a seat in the Eau Claire City Council in 1996 and served until 2000. In 2000, the Hmong saw Neng Lee, following Joe Bee's footstep, elected to the City Council in Eau Claire, followed by Saidang Xiong from 2002 to 2004 and Thomas Vue from 2006 to the present. In 2000, the Hmong also saw the successful election of Chong Chang Her to the Eau Claire Public

---

[1067] Wendy S. Tai, "Feeling More at Home in America: As Hmong Ties to Laos Fade, Support for Resistance Ebbs," *Star Tribune*, 20 October 1991, B1.

School Board. In the meantime, in 2002 in Minnesota, the Hmong saw the victories of Cy Thao to the Minnesota State House and Mee Moua to the Minnesota State Senate. Both had won several reelections and are still serving in 2010. In California, the Hmong saw the election of Anthony Vang to the Fresno Public School Board in 2002, Blong Xiong to the Fresno City Council in 2006, Paul Lo to the Merced School Board, and Noah Lor to the City Council in Merced in 2007. The list did not include other Hmong candidates who ran but were unsuccessful in their bid for public offices, including Bao Vang, Tou Moua Lee, and Chris Moua (who ran as a Republican candidate) for the St. Paul City Council in 2004 and Pa Kao Hang in 2008.[1068] In short, as new and seemingly more credible leaders emerged in the Hmong American community, Vang Pao's influence inevitably waned. The repeated failures to liberate Laos and the mishandling of money in the ULNLF did not help but hurt his standing in the community as a credible leader.

Encouraged by the political successes of Hmong candidates, Hmong refugees turned their attention away from the hope of return to the homeland to becoming American citizens in the United States. No force was more powerful and more influential to compel Hmong refugees to become American citizens than the sweeping welfare reform in the United States in the mid-1990s—a reform that began with the signing by President William J. Clinton into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, commonly known as the Welfare Reform Act or PRWORA, on August 22, 1996. The Welfare Reform Act, Victor Hwang wrote, "proposed to 'save' $54.2 billion in spending from the federal budget over a five-year period… Under the purported goals of 'promoting self sufficiency' and 'deterring illegal immigration,' the Welfare Reform Act [also] proposed to slash thirteen billion dollars in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and nearly four billion dollars in food stamps."[1069] Under the PRWORA, all citizens would continue to remain eligible for benefits. Legal

---

[1068] For studies that chronicle and analyze the electoral victories of these Hmong candidates and others after them, see Taeko Yoshikawa, "From a Refugee Camp to the MN State Senate: A Case Study of a Hmong American Women's Challenge," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2006): 1-23; Steven Doherty, "Political Behavior and Candidate Emergence in Hmong-American Community," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8, (2007): 1-35; and Yang Lor, "Hmong Political Involvement in St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California," *Hmong Studies Journal* 10, (2009): 1-53.

[1069] Victor M. Hwang, "The Hmong Campaign for Justice: A Practitioner's Perspective," *Asian Law Journal* 9, no. 83, (2002): 95.

immigrants, however, would lose their benefits unless they were: (1) recent refugees and political asylees within seven years of their entry into the United States; (2) immigrants and their families who could be credited for forty quarters (or roughly ten years) of work history in the United States; or (3) immigrants and their families who had served in the United States armed forces.[1070] Still, these exempted refugees, political asylees, legal immigrants and their families who were receiving federal benefits as of the date of passage of the Welfare Reform Act would have to either naturalize to continue to receive benefits or find a way to become self-sufficient. If they become naturalized citizens, they would have to work at least part-time to continue to receive benefits or demonstrate that they were seeking welfare assistance only to supplement the low wages they earned from their employment.

For the Hmong, many of whom had been in the United States for more than seven years and had not worked for at least forty quarters or ten years in the United States, they understood that they only way they could continue to retain their benefits was to become U.S. citizens or demonstrate that they had served in the U.S. armed forces. This, then, began the long and intense struggle of the Hmong to gain recognition by the United States as veterans of U.S. armed forces for their services in the U.S. Secret War in Laos in the 1960s and to relax the requirements for naturalization for Hmong veterans and their families. From 1996 to 2000, the Lao Veterans of America (LVA), an organization that Colonel Wangyee Vang, at the urging of Vang Pao, founded in 1990 in Fresno, California, among other organizations, led the fight to get Congress to pass legislation to ease the process for Hmong veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens. Only by becoming U.S. citizens could Hmong veterans and their families who were at risk of losing their welfare and Social Security Income (SSI) benefits, as a result of the Welfare Reform Act, retain their benefits.

The LVA, in the words of Wangyee Vang, was "formed by former military, servicemen, and intellectuals from various Lao ethnic backgrounds who served in the U.S. Special Forces in the U.S. secret war in Laos during the Vietnam Conflict…to advocate for veterans who fought alongside the United States in the fight against communism in Laos and Vietnam." It sought to gain veteran benefits for the Lao-Hmong veterans by,

[1070] Ibid., 95-96.

among other means, "reuniting all former soldiers of the U.S. special forces in the U.S. secret war in Laos who were scattered throughout the world after the communists occupied Laos" and by "supporting legislation in Congress which will recognize the distinguished service of those who fought in the U.S. Secret Army against the communists in Laos."[1071] In 1991, a chapter of the LVA was established in Minnesota and another in Wisconsin. The mission of the Lao Veterans of American in Minnesota was "to assist the veterans and their families from Southeast Asia to better adapt and be successful in America. LVAM provides citizenship classes, English classes, employment services, elderly services, legal assistance, information, and referral advocacy."[1072]

The creation of the LVA in Fresno in 1990 and its chapters in Minnesota and Wisconsin reflected the change of strategy and approach that Vang Pao and other Hmong veteran leaders adopted after the defeat of the ULNLF's armed forces in Laos in early 1990s. It was an attempt by Hmong veteran leaders to maintain their power and reassert their leadership in the Hmong community. As such, leaders of the various chapters of the LVA were the first to urge U.S. elected officials to pass a legislation to recognize the Hmong as U.S. veterans and enable Hmong veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens. After the LVA was formed, Wangyee and other Hmong veteran leaders, thus, urged Rep. Bruce Vento and Rep. Gerry Sikorski of Minnesota introduce the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act in the House in April and Sen. Rudy Boschwitze in the Senate in May of 1990 .[1073]

Wangyee and other Hmong veteran leaders based their argument for Hmong citizenship on established precedents for modifying naturalization requirements for U.S. military service by non-U.S. citizens. They pointed to previous U.S. laws that allowed non-citizen nationals who served during World War I, World War II, and the Korean War

---

[1071] "Questions & Answers About the Trust of the Lao Veterans of America, Inc.," Flyer with also a Message From the Provost by Wangyee Vang, in Organizations Files, Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[1072] Lao Veterans of America in Minnesota, Inc., Flyer, in Organizations Files, Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[1073] U.S. Congress, House, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1990,* 101st Cong., 1st Session., H.R. 4513, *Congressional Record*, 4 April 1990; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1990,* 101st Cong., 2nd sess., S. 2687, *Congressional Record*, 24 May 1990; Bruce F. Vento and Gerry Sikorski, letter to Congressional Colleagues, 16 April 1990, Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1990, Special File Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN; and Rudy Boschwitze, Statement to President Clinton, [no date], Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1990, Special File Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

to be naturalized regardless of age, period of residence or physical presence in the United States. Specifically, they pointed to the 1990 legislation that Congress passed to grant U.S. citizenship to Filipinos who fought during World War II.[1074] Hmong veterans, leaders of the LVA argued, were similar to the Filipinos and other veterans who had been granted citizenship. The only difference was that, in Wangyee Vang's words, "the Hmong and Lao veterans were fighters in a 'SECRET WAR,' and so were never 'OFFICIALLY' part of any country's armed forces."[1075] To encourage his colleagues to pass the legislation, Rep. Vento of Minnesota reminded them in a letter of the extreme sacrifices that the Hmong had made for the United States during the war. "The Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act recognizes the extreme sacrifices made by thousands of Hmong and other Laotian highland groups who served in Special Guerilla Units in the Vietnam War from 1960 to 1975," Vento wrote. "The Hmong stood by the U.S. at a crucial time in our history; now we have an opportunity to repay their loyalty."[1076] The Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act, nonetheless, did not receive serious support and consideration in Congress until after the Welfare Reform Act was passed. The Welfare Reform Act in August 1996, thus, made it all the more urgent and necessary for both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate to pass the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act lest Hmong refugees would lose their welfare and SSI benefits.

In January 1997, Rep. Bruce Vento of Minnesota again introduced the Hmong Naturalization Act of 1997 (HR 371) in the House. In April 1997, the House Ways and Means Committee unanimously passed a resolution to recognize Hmong and Lao veterans of the Secret War as U.S. veterans. A month later, 3,000 former Hmong soldiers and 1,000 Lao veterans received Vietnam Veterans National Medals at the Vietnam War Memorial, and they were honored with a small granite plaque at Arlington National

---

[1074] Jean Hopfensperger, "Bill Would Help Hmong Vets Get Citizenship," *Star Tribune*, 5 April 1990, 1B & 7B.
[1075] "Questions & Answers About the Trust of the Lao Veterans of America, Inc.," Flyer with also a Message From the Provost by Wangyee Vang, in Organizations Files, Special Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.
[1076] Bruce F. Vento, letter to Congressional Colleagues, 10 March 1994, Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1990, Special File Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

Cemetery.[1077] The inscription on the granite planted at Arlington National Cemetery reads:

> Dedicated to the U.S. Secret Army in the kingdom of Laos, 1961-1973, in memory of the Hmong and Lao combat veterans and their American advisors who served freedom's cause in Southeast Asia. Their patriotic valor and loyalty in defense of liberty and democracy will never be forgotten. You will never be forgotten (in Lao and Hmong), Lao Veterans of America, May 15, 1997.

These recognitions, notwithstanding, Hmong were still neither given veteran benefits or naturalized citizenship. On May 8, 1997, Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota introduced a companion bill to Rep. Vento's bill in the Senate. On June 26, 1997, the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims of the House Judiciary Committee held a hearing on the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act. Rep. Vento was on hand to testify while Wangyee Vang of the Lao Veterans of America and Congressmen Calvin Dooley and Richard Pombo of California, among others, sent prepared statements to plead the committee to pass the bill.[1078] In June 1998, the House Judiciary Committee finally approved a legislation to recognize the difficulty the Hmong had in obtaining U.S. citizenship due to language barrier and to waive the English literacy and residency requirements for eligible Hmong veterans and their widows or spouses.[1079]

Still, to become law, both the House and the Senate had to approve the bill. In May 1999, some 4,000 Hmong and Lao veterans gathered near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. to rally for more support from Congress to pass the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1999, which Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota, Senator Chuck Robb of Virginia, and Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin

---

[1077] "U.S. House Approves Vet Status for Hmong," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 30 April 1997, 4D; Bill Salisbury, "U.S. Closer to Recognizing Hmong Vets," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 24 April 1997, 3D; Marc Kaufman, "At Long Last, U.S. Honor the Hmong: Bittersweet Ceremony Salutes Ethnic Group's Aid in Vietnam War," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 15 May 1997, A03; Ben Barber, "U.S. Honors Hmong Soldiers: Gift of Citizenship Promised to Veterans From Laos," *The Washington Times,* 15 May 1997, A13; and Bill Salisbury, "Silent Sacrifice, Hmong and Lao Veterans Are Finally Honored for Fighting in the CIA-Run Secret War in Laos," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 15 May 1997, 1-4.

[1078] U.S. Congress, House, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1997 and Canadian Border Boat Landing Requirements*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, Committee of the Judiciary, 105th Congress, 1st Session, 26 June 1997.

[1079]Greg Gordon, "House Panel Acts to Help Hmong Vets Who Fought for CIA Gain Citizenship," *Star Tribune,* 12 June 1998, A16; Bill Salisbury, "Committee Approves Break for Hmong Vets," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 18 June 1998, 2B; Bill Salisbury, "We Waited For This Day for 10 Years," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 21 June 1998, 3B.

had introduced in the Senate and Rep. Bruce Vento introduced in the House earlier that year.[1080] Just when Hmong were thrilled that the day when they could take the citizenship tests with the help of an interpreter was imminent, the bill that Senator Wellstone introduced was stalled in the Senate. The Republican senator from Minnesota, Rod Graham, had pushed his own version of the bill to the Senate. There were essentially two disagreements between the two senators. The first was over the English literacy requirement. While Senator Wellstone agreed to waive the English language requirement, Senator Grams insisted that Hmong veterans must pass the English language test to become U.S. citizens. The second disagreement they had was over the specific group or agency to certify Hmong veteran status. Wellstone wanted to leave the decision to the Lao Veterans of America, but Graham insisted that the decision be made by the Department of Defense or the Central Intelligence Agency. After both agreed to waive the literacy requirement, they continued to disagree on the group that would determine the veteran status of the Hmong.[1081] In May 2000, a compromise was finally reached. In the final version of the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act, no specific advocacy group was identified as the agency to certify Hmong veteran status. The certification was left for the U.S. Attorney General who, as stated in the final bill, "may consider any documents provided by organizations maintaining records with respect to Hmong veterans or their families."[1082]

[1080] U.S. Congress, House, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1999,* 106th Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 371, *Congressional Record,* 19 January 1999, in Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1999 Folder, Special File Collections, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN; Heather Fors, "Minnesota Hmong, Lao Veterans Rally in D.C. for Citizenship Bill," *Star Tribune,* 14 May 1999, A14; "Legislation Is Introduced in U.S. Senate To Assist Hmong Veterans," *Asian American Press,* 30 April 1999, 1; Gregg Salisbury, "Hmong Veterans Rally in D.C.," *Asian American Press,* 21 May 1999, 1.

[1081] Frederic J. Frommer, "Ventura Expedites Hmong Citizenship Bill," *Asian American Press,* 3 March 2000, 1; Sean Madigan, "Hmong Citizenship Bill Clears House Committee," *Star Tribune,* 31 March 2000, A21; F. Frommer, "House Committee Passes Bill to Ease Citizenship Rules for Hmong," *Asian American Press,* 7 April 2001; Rich Shefchik, "Vets May Finally Be Citizens," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 10 April 2000, 1A & 5A; Sean Madigan, "House Eases Citizenship Rules for Hmong Vets," *Star Tribune,* 3 May 2000, A1 & A12; Tom Webb, "Wellstone Aims to Pass Hmong Bill Quickly," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 4 May 2000, 3B; Tom Webb, "Fate of Hmong Citizenship Bills Remains Up in the Air," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 8 May 2000, 1A; David Hanners, "Hmong Put Pressure on Grams," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 9 May 2000, 1B & 2B; Rob Hotakainen and Sean Madigan, "Showdown Set Over Hmong Citizenship Rules," *Star Tribune,* 11 May 2000; R. Hotakainen and S. Madigan, "Grams Gets Hatch's Backing on Hmong Citizenship Bill," *Star Tribune,* 12 May 2000, A6.

[1082] S. Madigan, T. Hamburger and R. Hatakainen, "Deal Reached on Hmong Vets Bill," *Star Tribune,* 19 May 2000, A1.

After four long years of lobbying, Hmong veteran leaders finally convinced the U.S. Congress to pass the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 2000 and President Clinton to sign into law on May 20, 2000. The Act, President Clinton said as he signed the legislation, "is a tribute to the service, courage and sacrifice of the Hmong who were our allies in Laos during the Vietnam War…. [It] is a small step but an important one in honoring the immense sacrifices that the Hmong people made in supporting our efforts in Southeast Asia."[1083] Under the provisions of this bill, as many as 45,000 eligible Hmong veterans could take the citizenship exam with the help of an interpreter. As those who had served "with a guerrilla unit, or irregular forces, operating a base in Laos in support of the United States military" from February 28, 1961 to September 18, 1978, Hmong veterans and their widows or spouses could become American citizens without learning to read, write and speak English. Under the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 2000, Hmong veterans also received "special consideration" on the civics test. They would retain and be eligible for SSI, welfare, and Medicaid/Medicare benefits when they became U.S. citizens although the legislation did not automatically grant them citizenship and veterans' benefits.[1084]

In short, the creation of the LVA in 1990 and the initiative by Hmong veteran leaders, including Vang Pao, enabled the veteran leaders to reassert their leadership and maintain the image that they were still working to advance the interests of all Hmong veterans and their families in America. It also enabled the veteran leaders to keep alive the original cause of their displacement and ensure that it was remembered and passed on to the next generation. Ironically, however, the initiative of the LVA to push Congress to recognize the Hmong as veterans of the U.S. armed forces and to relax the requirements for Hmong veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens eventually worked against the flow of Hmong transnational politics. It did so by diverting the attention of the Hmong community and the focus of Hmong politics away from the homeland for at least four years, from 1996 when President Clinton passed the Welfare Reform Act to 2000

[1083] "Statement by President Clinton on the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 May 2000, in Hmong Veteran Naturalization Act of 2000 File Folder, Special Subject File Collection, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota.

[1084] Tom Webb, "Citizenship Bill Goes to President For Signature," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 24 May 2000, A1; Tom Webb, "Clinton Signs Hmong Citizenship Bill into Law," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 May 2000, 3B; and Sean Madigan, "Clinton Signs Citizenship Bill for Hmong Veterans," *Star Tribune*, 27 May 2000, A4.

when Clinton signed the Hmong Veterans Naturalization into law. Instead of fighting for human rights in Laos and Thailand and the liberation of the homeland, Hmong veteran leaders ended up fighting for civil, political and economic rights for the Hmong in the United States. Their fight for Hmong veteran benefits and citizenship also reinforced the push by leaders of the "rising sun" generation to advance the interests of the Hmong in the United States. When Congress approved the bill and President Clinton signed it into law, it further legitimized the claim by leaders of the new generation that the best way to the future of Hmong politics in America was by building alliance with mainstream American candidates and mobilizing their community to vote for those candidates. Thus, the flow, strength, and momentum of Hmong transnational politics were disrupted.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I show that the 1990s was the decade of declension for Hmong transnational politics. To fully appreciate and understand this decline, I suggest that it is necessary to not only look at the changing internal dynamics and structural problems within the organizations. It is also necessary to examine the external forces, political and institutional, that affected the flow of the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora. In doing so, it is also important to not just look at the forces in the homeland or Laos alone but to also consider the forces outside of Laos, including Thailand and the United States. The decline of Hmong transnational politics in the 1990s, I argue, is the result of a confluence of internal and external interacting forces, pressures and events in Southeast Asia and the United States that came to light after the end of the Second Cold War. More specifically, the movement of the Hmong transnational politics was hurt by the internal financial problem endemic in the ULNLF and its repeated failures to fulfill the promise of liberation of the homeland. The lack of financial accountability, the financial skimming by top money collectors, and the sale of government positions destroyed the image of the ULNLF as a legitimate organization and its officers as moral and credible leaders. As people questioned the morality and legality of the sale of government posts, whether the money they contributed to the resistance ever reached the fighters in the resistance, and the overall strength of the resistance due to the lack of

financial, medical and food resources, some defected entirely while other stopped making any more contribution to the organization.

Externally, the transnational politics of the Hmong in the diaspora lost its strength and momentum in the 1990s because the political opportunities that gave Pa Kao's messianic Chao Fa fighters and Vang Pao's guerilla fighters in Laos and Thailand weapons and training in China, sanctuaries and military bases in Thailand, and credibility, prestige, money, and power in the United States, including the Second Cold War, the Sino-Vietnamese border dispute, Thai-Lao border conflicts, and communist insurgency in Thailand, had disappeared at the end of the 1980s. After the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989, China, Thailand, and the United States altered their approach from Cold War confrontation to rapprochement with the communist countries of Indochina. They favored strong trade and diplomatic relations with Laos rather than provided financial and military support to anti-Lao resistance movements against the Lao PDR in Laos and Thailand. This shift in policies and approaches by Thailand and the United States toward communist Laos, in turn, facilitated the closing of the ELOL military and the refugee camps and the subsequent aggressive crackdown of Hmong anti-Lao PDR resistance activities in Thailand. The closing of the ELOL military camp and the refugee camps resulted in the end of the use of these sanctuaries to recruit and train Hmong resistance fighters for the resistance in Laos. Meanwhile, the crackdown on anti-Lao resistance operations in Thailand barred Vang Pao from returning to Thailand and forced Chao Fa men and their families to scatter in different locations throughout the greater Mekong region.

Most of all, the transnational politics of the Hmong diaspora suffered from growing competition for the community's trust and loyalty by the emerging leaders of the rising sun or 1.5 generation and an evolving flow by Hmong Americans toward increased civic engagement and electoral politics in the United States. As new leaders emerged, the Hmong community no longer had to exclusively look to the ex-military and political leaders from Laos for leadership. The successes of the new leaders in creating and managing self-help organizations and in running for political offices in the United States further legitimized their credibility and leadership in the community and their vision to push the Hmong toward integration into American society. The 1996 welfare reform in

the United States further disrupted the flow of Hmong transnational politics as new leaders as well as the old leaders fought to get the United States government to recognize them as veterans of the U.S. armed forces and relax the requirements for Hmong veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens. As they fought for Hmong citizenship, Hmong ex-military leaders inevitably turned their focus away from a fight to return to the homeland and for human rights back home to civil, economic and politic rights and community development in the United States. By the dawn of the new millennium, the confluence of the various aforementioned internal dynamics and external structural, political and institutional forces and pressures in Southeast Asia and the United States completely disintegrated the ELOL and reduced the members of the ULNLF from 80 percent of Hmong families in America in the early 1980s to less than 20 percent and forced the ULNLF into a state of abeyance.

EPILOGUE

Since Vang Pao and Pa Kao Her went into exile in 1975 and 1978, respectively, they never had any face to face encounter. In the 1970s, Pa Kao organized with Zong Zoua a resistance against the Lao PDR government in the Lao jungle to establish a base for Vang Pao to return from exile in the United States to help with the fighting and lead the Hmong as he did during the war. In the early 1980s, after they formed their own separate organizations, Pa Kao and Vang Pao each sent their own soldiers to Yunnan Province together to receive training and arms from China. In the 1980s, Pa Kao attempted to meet Vang Pao on several occasions when Vang Pao returned to Thailand to visit Hmong refugees in the camps. Vang Pao's subordinates, however, prevented him from meeting Pa Kao each time they tried to meet. They feared that Pa Kao would try to harm Vang Pao.[1085] Consequently, Pa Kao and Vang Pao led their own separate movement against the communist regime, and they each formed their own alliance with different groups and institutions in Thailand, China, and the United States. Even after the ELOL was disintegrated and the ULNLF forced into abeyance in the early 1990s, Pa Kao and Vang Pao remained estranged from each other. Both Vang Pao and Pa Kao understood the importance of Hmong unity; they regularly spoke against factionalism. Yet, they never met to clarify their position to each other. Disunited in their goal and vision for the Hmong people in Laos, they never came together to form a united front against the Lao PDR government.

We will never know what it would be like if Pa Kao and Vang Pao came together in their struggle against the Lao PDR government. Vang Pao is still alive, but Pa Kao had, unfortunately, passed away at the age of sixty-nine in 2002. On October 23, Pa Kao was gunned down near his farm in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, while his wife was standing nearby.[1086] The assassination, according to Yang Thao, secretary general of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos who helped to eventually secure U.S. permission to bring Pa Kao's lifeless body to Fresno, California, for funeral and burial, was the work of assassins bribed and sent by the communist Lao PDR government. The assassins were

[1085] Sue Her, interview with author, 10 November 2009.
[1086] Hlee Vang, "Wife of Slain CIA Fighter Fears Retribution," *Gannett Wisconsin Media*, 4 September 2009; Donald E. Coleman, "A Hero's Rites in Fresno," *Fresno Bee*, 19 December 2002.

never caught. For their assassination of the Chao Fa leader, the assassins, all of whom were ethnic Hmong from Laos and Thailand, received unspecified amount of money from the Lao PDR government. Pa Kao died from 28 gunshot wounds to his body. Thao believed there were three or four assassins, and they shot Pa Kao with two AK-47s and at least one shotgun.[1087]

In December, with permission from the State Department, Pa Kao's body was transported from Thailand to California to prevent desecration. On December 24, 3,000 Hmong from California, Minnesota, Wisconsin and other states attended his four-day funeral service in Fresno, where he was eventually buried. "He had deep sympathy for the innocent people who have suffered the hardships caused by the turmoil," said Soua Her, a Chao Fa leader in Fresno who worked to bring Pa Kao's body to California and a potential replacement for Pa Kao Her as president of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos. "He had a solution to solve the complications in Hmong society. In the wake of his passing, he has called upon you and I, his people, to firmly unite and follow his blueprint to complete the job." The job, according to Soua Her, was to unite 68 ethnic groups in Laos in a democracy.[1088]

With the death of Pa Kao Her in 2002, we will also never know if Pa Kao and Vang Pao would ever set aside their differences and come together for the Hmong people in light of events and the rise of Hmong nationalism since his death. We can, however, reasonably conclude that their unity alone would not be sufficient to liberate Laos and achieve Hmong self-determination in the homeland. After the United States left, both the armed forces of Pa Kao and Vang Pao inside Laos relied primarily on remnants of the military equipments from the war. Throughout the 1980s, both Pa Kao and Vang Pao would remain militarily weak without the support, in terms of arms, training and money, from Thailand, China, and the United States. Yet, Thailand, China, and the United States never assisted the Hmong to promote their self-determination and autonomy in Laos or save them from communist persecution. They only used the Hmong to protect their geopolitical borders and fight their wars for them. In the 1990s, when Thailand's and China's borders were no longer threatened, they dropped and disarmed the Hmong.

[1087] Yang Thao, "Pa Kao Her's Criminal Case," in Yang Thao Papers (personal collection).
[1088] Diana Marcum, "Hmong Chief Laid to Rest in Fresno," *Fresno Bee*, 24 December 2002.

Similarly, when the United States no longer needed to fight to the Soviets at the end of the Second Cold War, it dropped the Hmong and moved toward rapprochement with Laos along with Thailand and China. Without the support from Thailand, China, and the United States, the Hmong resistance in Laos remained militarily weak, which became apparent after these more powerful countries dropped and disarmed the Hmong in the 1990s.

Still, why did Vang Pao and Pa Kao not set an example for succeeding generations of Hmong political actors by coming together to form a united front against the Lao PDR government? What prevented them from reaching a common goal and finding a common solution to the fighting in Laos? The answer to these questions is found partly in their different political roots and their vision and goal for Laos and the Hmong people in Laos. Pa Kao belonged to that long separatist tradition of Hmong messianic nationalism which promoted Hmong cultural and political autonomy through the establishment of a separate and independent Hmong nation in Laos. Meanwhile, Vang Pao belonged to that long tradition of Hmong political thought which sought to integrate the Hmong population into Lao society. Pa Kao's Chao Fa group unveiled multiple goals, including a democratic Lao society, a Hmong nation within a Lao nation, and a completely separate and independent Hmong nation. The ULNLF, in contrast, wanted a constitutional monarchy in Laos.

New Groups and Organizations

Since Pa Kao's death, many more groups and organizations had emerged to continue the work that he had left behind. The new groups included not just the first or elder generations of the Hmong. They also included some 1.5 generation and even second generation Hmong Americans. Undoubtedly, some 1.5 generation and particularly second generation Hmong Americans were not interested in returning to Laos. They did not participate in transnational politics so that they could go "home." For the second generation Hmong Americans, "home" was the United States, where they were born. Unlike their elders, some 1.5 generation and second generation Hmong Americans did not engage in the transnational politics of return in the sense of a back-to-Laos

movement. They engaged in transnational politics solely and largely to promote human rights and democracy. Nevertheless, the politics that they fashioned did constitute a *turning* toward Laos, the homeland of their parents and grandparents. They no longer restricted their political involvements to domestic politics in the United States. By participating in transnational politics, they asserted, consciously or not, that the destiny of the Hmong in the diaspora was inextricably bound with the destiny of the Hmong back in Laos. In spite of their geographic separation, they were one and the same nation of people.

One of those new groups was the Voices of Sorrow in St. Paul, Minnesota. The leader of the group, which consisted primarily of high school and college students, was Amee Xiong, a twenty year-old Hmong student at Hamline University. Born in Laos, Amee arrived in Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand with her parents seven months after she was born. Two years later, Amee and her family immigrated to Minnesota, where they had lived ever since their resettlement in the United States in 1986. Voices of Sorrow, Amee told me, started with the work of two high school students (May Her and one other student who Amee could not remember) at Roosevelt High School. Concerned about the plight of the Hmong in the jungle, the two high school students had initiated a petition to gather signatures in the community to send to elected U.S. officials. In December 2003, Amee and a few of her friends also organized a meeting at Hamline University to discuss the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle after having read about it in Hmong newspapers. During the meeting, she came to know about the petition that May Her and her classmate had initiated. After the meeting, Amee contacted May and her friend and expressed interest in working with them on the petition. Shortly after they started working together, however, May and her friend stopped working on the issue. Relentless, Amee continued the petition. In the process, she rallied her friends to help gather the signatures. In the end, they gathered 8,000 signatures and sent the petition to the State Department and members of Congress.[1089]

In the spring of 2004, the Hmong student association at the University of Wisconsin-Stout held a conference on Hmong international issues, and Amee went there to participate. At the conference, she met Phillip Smith, the Executive Director of a

[1089] Amee Xiong, interview with author, 8 January 2010.

think-tank and lobby organization in Washington, D.C., called Center for Public Policy Analysis. The students at UW-Stout had invited Smith to come speak about the persecution of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. After telling Smith about the petition, Amee was asked to join the protest that Smith had organized with other Hmong veterans in St. Paul in front of U.S. Rep. Betty McCullum's office. At the time, Amee did not know anything about Normalized Trade Relations, or why some of the Hmong veterans protested against the United States' consideration to give Normalized Trade Relations (NTR) status to Laos, a proposal that Rep. McCullum had supported. It was after the protest that Amee mobilized her young friends together into a group called the Voices of Sorrow whose primary objective was to bring national attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle.[1090]

At the NTR protest in St. Paul in April 2004, Amee also met Zhong Khang Yang, a 42-year-old local Hmong activist in St. Paul, Minnesota. To bring attention to the persecution of the Hmong in the Lao jungle, Amee and her friends in Voices of Sorrow joined Zhong Khang to organize and raise fund for the "Long Walk for Freedom," a walk that ultimately forced both Amee and Zhong Khang from obscurity to the public spotlight. Asking for donations at local Hmong flea markets and washing cars at different parking lots in front of Hmong grocery stores and gas stations in the Twin Cities, they raised enough money to begin the walk to bring public attention to the plight of the Hmong people in the Lao jungle. On the morning of June 15, 2004, fourteen Hmong teens gathered at the steps of the state capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota, with Zhong Khang and their parents, many holding signs that read "Stop Killing the Hmong" and "Save the Hmong People." "Know in your hearts that the Hmong in the jungles of Laos appreciate your compassion and determination to set them free," Mai Sue Xiong, another young organizer from Voices of Sorrow, said to the crowd of Hmong supporters. [1091] "Just remember that while you go on living a decent life, a decent job with a nice family, these Hmong people are dying in Laos," Amee Xiong added. "These Hmong people are killed because they were part of the 'Secret War' and did not get the opportunity to come to

[1090] For coverage of the protest, see, for example, Wameng Moua, "500 Demonstrators Rally Against NTR In Front of Rep. Betty McCollum's Office," *Hmong Today*, 22 April 2004.
[1091] Mai Sue Xiong, prepared statement, speech delivered at state capitol, St. Paul, MN, 15 June 2004, in Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

America, as you and I. These Hmong people are still waiting for all of us to help them from the Lao People's Democratic Republic."[1092]

At the steps of the state capitol in St. Paul, the fourteen Hmong teens and Zhong Khang, dressed in Hmong cloth to show pride in Hmong culture and identity, began their "Long Walk for Freedom" passing Senator Betty McCollum's office on Selby and Western avenues and heading east toward Highway 61 into Wisconsin. By the time they reached Washington, D.C., on August 18, they had walked through the hottest stretch of the summer for 1,200 miles, survived the torturous rigors of walking up-and-down steep mountainsides, and overcome numerous death threats. Some had even managed to lose some weight along the way.[1093] By organizing and completing this walk, they transcended geographical boundaries and made it painfully clear that their freedom in the United States was inextricably bound with the freedom of their brethren back in Laos. At the end of the walk, it became clear that transnational politics was now no longer restricted to just the first or elder generation like General Vang Pao and Pa Kao Her. Increasingly, 1.5-generation and even second generations were taking part in Hmong transnational politics. Most of all, they were gaining credibility and popularity as the emerging leaders in the fight for human rights on behalf of the starving and suffering Hmong in the Lao jungle.

After the "Long Walk for Freedom," the group, Voices of Sorrow, reorganized themselves as Humanity Helping Humanity or Hmoob Hlub Hmoob (Hmong Love Hmong).[1094] In 2005, HHH joined other groups and organizations, including the Innovative Community Elevation, Fact Finding Commission, and *Hmong Today*, and released a CD entitled, "The H Project: Silence No More." "The H Project," they said, "was created to raise awareness about the suffering and genocide of Hmong people who are still trapped behind enemy lines in Laos today," and it was the result of invitation by project members and volunteers to artists from all over the country to create original

---

[1092] Amee Xiong, prepared statement, speech delivered at state capitol, St. Paul, MN, 15 June 2004, in Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.
[1093] Wameng Moua, "Long Walk For Freedom Takes The First Steps to Washington, D.C.," *Hmong Today*, 17 June 2004; Wameng Moua, "The Long Walk Approaches Washington DC," *Hmong Today*, 29 July 2004; Wameng Moua, "Arrived! The Long Walk for Freedom reaches Washington D.C." *Hmong Today*, (August 26, 2004): 1 & 10; Ching Lo, "Amee Xiong—Study, Work, Volunteer," *Hmong Today*, (March 10, 2005): 11; Tom La Venture, "Trek To Help Save Hmong Allies," *Asian American Press*, 18 June 2004.
[1094] Amee Xiong, interview with author, 8 January 2010.

songs or poems for the project. "Each track on this CD represents the artist's personal response to the suffering of the Hmong in Laos. We encourage you to listen to every track on this CD in order to better understand the situation and unite with us in finding a solution," they said.[1095] Shortly afterward, young people in HHH released two VCDs, depicting the suffering of the Hmong in jungles of Laos under communism in the past 30 years. One was entitled, "The War Goes On," and the other one "Beyond the Mekong." Since then, they uploaded numerous clips of the Hmong in the jungle onto Youtube to give worldwide access to Hmong political issues in the homeland, solicit sympathy, and mobilize the international community to help liberate the Hmong in the homeland.

Another student-led organization that emerged to fight for human rights and democracy for the Hmong in the Lao jungle after Pa Kao's assassination was Hmong Human Rights (HHR). Born in Rockford, Illinois, James Chang went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2003 and helped found the Hmong Human Rights in the summer of 2004. After graduating from UW-Madison in 2008, Chang became the policy associate for Senator Mee Moua in Minnesota. In early 2009, student advocates in HHR joined Jane Hamilton-Merritt, activist and author of *Tragic Mountains*, college students from University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and other Hmong human rights activists in Washington, D.C., to urge President Barrack Obama to "resolve the atrocities afflicting Hmong political asylum refugees in Thailand and the innocent Hmong people being persecuted in Laos."[1096] In December 2009, they organized a Human Rights Speaker Forum, in which they invited speakers, including Jane Hamilton-Merritt, Joseph Davy (co-founder of the Hmong International Human Rights Watch), Vaughn Vang (Executive Director of Lao Human Rights Council), and T. Kumar (Advocacy Director for International Issues at Amnesty International USA), to come and speak on campus on Hmong human rights issues in Laos and Thailand.[1097] According to James Chang, they also collaborated with other organizations, including Fact Finding Commission in

---

[1095] "The H Project: Silence No More," Produced by Matthew Thao, CD, 2005.

[1096] Ger Yang, Email Letter Writing Campaign, 10 April 2009; Lee S. Jadaan, "UWP Students Take Action in Washington, D.C. for Displaced Hmong Population," *Daily Pioneer News*, 17 March 2009; Ellyn Ferguson, "Hmong Want Obama's Support Fighting Thailand's Forced Deportations," *Post-Crescent Washing Bureau*, 7 February 2009.

[1097] Hmong Human Rights, "Hmong Human Rights Speaker Forum, December 5, 2009," brochure. Also see event advertised on their website at http://hasa.rso.wisc.edu/HHRspeakerforum.html (accessed 23 February 2010). Author attended the forum on December 5, 2009.

Oroville, California, to smuggle video cameras to the Hmong in the Lao jungle for the people there to tape future attacks by Lao government forces. The HHR, in turn, shared any video that they received from the Hmong in the Lao jungle with NGOs like Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders.[1098]

After Pa Kao's assassination in 2002, second-generation Hmong Americans were not the only ones forming their own groups and organizations, such as Voices of Sorrow and the Hmong Human Rights, to fight for democracy and human rights in Laos. Many 1.5 generation Hmong Americans also formed their own organizations. Unlike second-generation Hmong Americans, however, many 1.5 generation Hmong Americans engaged in transnational politics not only to bring human rights protection and democracy to the Hmong in Laos but also to change the political situation back home so they could go "home." Like their elders of the first generation, many 1.5 generation Hmong Americans engaged in politics in the homeland were interested in returning to Laos. They, however, were not interested in coexistence with the Lao. More often than not, they promoted Hmong nationalism; they sought Hmong cultural and political autonomy separate and independent from the Laotians and the Lao society.

One of those groups of 1.5 generation Hmong Americans that emerged from anonymity in Hmong communities in the United States after Pa Kao's assassination was the World Hmong People's Congress (WHPC). Cheng (Tousouyeng) Yang, a college-educated realtor in the Twin Cities, was the co-founder and a spokesperson for the WHPC. Like him, other officers in the WHPC were 1.5 generation Hmong Americans. Many members of the organizations were former supporters of Pa Kao's Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos and its cognate, the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos. The WHPC, Yang told me, was already formed before the turn of the century. Many of the founders were well aware and deeply concerned about the persistent and serious atrocities that the Lao PDR government and Vietnamese soldiers had committed against the Hmong in Laos. For a long time, they had contemplated on the need to form an organization to advocate for human rights and democracy in Laos. Yet, no concrete action was taken to form the organization until July 4, 1998. The organization was created on July 4 largely out of convenience and efficacy; it was a time when friends and

[1098] James Chang, interview with author, 8 May 2009.

colleagues from other states were gathering in St. Paul for the annual Hmong soccer tournament.[1099]

The WHPC did not garner widespread support and begin their advocacy work on behalf of the persecuted Hmong in the Lao jungle until after the "Long Walk For Freedom" was completed. Following the "Long Walk for Freedom," founders of the WHPC recruited Zhong Khang into the organization. Zhong Khang brought unprecedented publicity to the WHPC. Other leaders of the organization were afraid to publicly challenge the Lao PDR government, but Zhong Khang took the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle to the United Nations and confronted the Lao PDR government publicly. In May 2005, for example, Zhong Khang, dressed in traditional Hmong cloth, brought fifty-two Hmong supporters with him to the United Nations to participate in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and lobby UN officials to intervene to stop the persecution of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. On the morning of June 21, 2005, Zhong Khang, representing the WHPC, brought seventy supporters, young and old, man and woman, to Washington, D.C., to participate in a demonstration with more than six hundred members of the Montagnards, Khmer Krom, and Tai Dam communities. Gathering at the Freedom Plaza, a few blocks from the White House, from 11:30 A.M. to 2:30 PM, during which the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Phan Van Khai, met with President George W. Bush at the White House, the demonstrators chanted, sang, danced, marched, and called for the humane treatment of their peoples in their homelands. Driving for nearly twenty-two hours from St. Paul to Washington, D.C. to participate in this demonstration, Hmong demonstrators—some dressed in traditional Hmong cloths—marched and danced to the drumbeat of the Montagnards with banners in their hands reading, "Vietnam Must Get Out of Laos." At the demonstration, one after another, representatives of the four distinct indigenous peoples declared that they wanted "the right to own our ancestral lands, the right to religious freedom, freedom of assembly and the right to democracy in order to be able to run the affairs of our communities in accordance with the freely expressed will of our people." For members of the Tai Solidarity, International Montagnards Foundation Inc., World Hmong People's Congress, and Khmer Kampuchea Krom Federation, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was the core

[1099] Cheng (Tousouayeng) Yang, interview with author, 6 March 2009.

and common adversary to their freedom. Vietnam continued to perpetuate a policy of persecution and genocide towards members of the Hmong, Khmer Krom, Montagnard Degar and Tai Dam peoples in Southeast Asia.[1100]

In October 2005, four months after the protest in Washington, the WHPC brought Jebra Muchhary of the Bodo people in the northeastern Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya to Minnesota and California to educate WHPC leaders and members about the Bodo struggle for self-determination and train them on strategies to achieve Hmong self-determination in northern Laos.[1101] Mucchary was a trainer in conflict resolution and peace negotiation in the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).[1102] Colonel Shoua Yang, the second-in-command to General Vang Pao during the U.S. Secret War and an early defector from Vang Pao and the ULNLF, even flew from France to join the WHPC. His son, Vajtsua Shouayang, had been working with other leaders of the WHPC for nearly a year by the time when Shoua Yang came to St. Paul in October 2005. Shortly after the training, Zong Khang, who by then had become a leader and spokesperson for the WHPC, traveled to northeastern India to continue to study the struggle of the Bodos, conflict resolution, peace negotiation, and steps toward self-determination. The plan at the time was to model the struggle of the Hmong for self-determination in northern Laos after the struggle of the Bodos in northern India. After his return from India, the WHPC sent a delegation to the Golden Triangle for a clandestine operation without him. The operation was a disaster, and the delegation returned to the United States empty-handed.[1103]

In February 2007, the WHPC received widespread attention when it became a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). On its website, the UNPO is described as an organization founded in February 1991 by representatives from all parts of the world to provide a forum for its members to voice their concerns to international bodies or institutions mandated to protect international human rights and

---

[1100] Author went with the group. After the event, author published an article in the local newspaper. See Her Vang, "Another Step toward Freedom for Hmong People: Demonstration in Washington, D.C.," *Hmong Times*, 1 July 2005. There was also a press release about the event, entitled "Indigenous People's Organizations Demonstrate For Freedom and Democracy in Vietnam in Washington on Tuesday June 21," 14 June 2005.
[1101] Author attended one of the sessions as an observer.
[1102] Tousouayeng Yang, interview with author, 6 March 2009.
[1103] Zong Khang Yang, interview with author, 01 March 2009.

address global conflicts, such as the United Nations. UNPO had more than sixty nationalities and over 150 million people worldwide, including the "Hmong Chao Fa" of Laos, as members.[1104] By joining UNPO, the WHPC hoped to gain credibility among the Hmong people and power to continue to advocate for the Hmong people in Laos. To give the impression that the WHPC was a viable political organization, leaders of the organization, shortly after they joined UNPO, drew up a Lao PDR map marking Chao Fa territory on it (Figure 3). Pointing to the Lao PDR map that the WHPC drew, Zhong Khang explained to me, "We marked this area to indicate Xaisomboune Special Zone where Hmong Chao Fa were under attack. We marked it to call for the deployment of international aid to the Chao Fa under attack in the area." Nevertheless, the demarcation of the Chao Fa territory on the map sparked outrage for some and confusion for others in Hmong communities in the United States. Some feared that such a demarcation could expose Chao Fa fighters and their families to more attacks than they already were. Others wondered why the WHPC marked such a tiny land area for the Hmong Chao Fa state. To clarify, Zhong Khang added, the WHPC did not mark the area to claim it for the creation of a Hmong Chao Fa state. They did it solely to indicate the area where Chao Fa fighters and their families had lived and were under attack.[1105]

On April 20, 2007, the WHPC again joined hundreds of Degar Montagnards, Cambodians and Hmong peoples of the Montagnard Foundation, and the Khmer Kampuchea-Krom Federation, outside the U.S. Capitol and the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington D.C. in a protest against the Vietnamese government. Dressed in their traditional costumes—Degar Montagnards in loin clothes, Cambodian monks in orange robes and Hmong in Chao Fa costumes—the demonstrators called the nation's attention to their desperate longing for freedom and democracy in their homelands. It was, as Scott Johnson, the spokesman and advisor for the U.S. based Montagnards Foundation, said, "a demonstration aimed directly against the Vietnamese communist government and…a plea for the United States to use its diplomatic leverage to help its former allies—the oppressed peoples of South East Asia." The Montagnards joined the demonstration because the Socialist Republic of Vietnam had confiscated their ancestral lands in the

[1104] For website of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), see http://www.unpo.org.
[1105] Zong Khang Yang, interview with author, 01 March 2009.

Figure 3: WHPC's Map of Chao Fa Territories under Communist Attacks, 2007.

Central Highlands and stripped them of their rights to their lands. Likewise, the Tai Dam wanted Vietnam to restore "land and liberty back" to their people and "abandon the Son La Dam project." For the Khmer Krom, Vietnam represented the epitome of human rights violations. Not only had Vietnam confiscated farmlands and properties from the Khmer Krom, it intentionally disseminated a contagious and deadly disease in the provinces of Soc-Trang and Bac-Lieu to decimate Khmer Krom residents in these provinces. For the WHPC, Vietnam was the backbone of all acts of military aggression against the Hmong people in Xaisomboun Special Zone, Houaphan province, and other restricted areas in Laos. Most of all, for the few religious leaders at the demonstration, Vietnam epitomized the worst violator of religious freedom. Its government continued to arrest, imprison, and persecute Christian leaders in the country.[1106]

In early 2008, the WHPC split into two organizations. Leaders of the organization accused each other of stealing money from the organization. More than $75,000 was missing from the organization's bank account.[1107] Disagreement among the leaders forced most of them to defect from the WHPC. The defectors later formed their own organization called the Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP). To the inattentive observers, these were the same organization because their names were nearly identical. The new organization simply took the last word of the former organization's name and put it in the front. To differentiate their organization from the CWHP and minimize public confusion, leaders of the old organization, the WHPC, later took out the word "people" from its original name and changed the name of the organization to simply World Hmong Congress (WHC). In spite of the separation, they still shared the common belief about Chao Fa nationalism and the goal of promoting Hmong self-determination and a Hmong state in northern Laos. Both promoted the use of the Pahawh writing script that the Hmong prophet Yang Shong Lue devised in the late 1950s as the Hmong national language, the flag that Yang Shong Lue designed and Pa Kao Her later promoted as the Hmong flag, and the Chao Fa national anthem as the Hmong national anthem. Both were inspired by Chao Fa ideals of messianism and millennialism, and they shared the

---

[1106] Scott Johnson, "Hundreds Demonstrate Outside Vietnamese Embassy Demanding Freedom," *World Press* (April 27, 2007). http://cih07.wordpress.com/2007/04/27/hundreds-demonstrate-outside-vietnamese-embassy-demanding-freedom/ (accessed on August 29, 2007).
[1107] Pat Pheifer, "Hmong Nonprofit Charges Fraud," *Star Tribune*, 5 March 2008.

common Chao Fa ethics of Hmong unity and love for one another. As it stated in its brochure, "The Congress of World Hmong People is to promote Hmong culture, Hmong Pahawh language, the faith of Shongluism and Chao Fa National Flag. We stand together in solidarity as brothers and sisters as one nation under the creator embracing for the coming of a Hmong kingdom."[1108] Gymbay Moua, the spokesperson for the CWHP, the new organization, also consistently insisted to me that the WHC and the CWHP were just one group, working toward the same goal and for the same cause, with two different names.[1109]

After the split, the WHC slowed down its activities and faded from public view. Its latest appearance occurred on March 18, 2009, when it staged a rally in front of Sun Foods Market, a grocery store on University Ave in St. Paul, Minnesota, to support the hunger strike that Hmong refugees at Huay Nam Khao staged to protest the forced removal of the Hmong from the makeshift camp to other locations and the imminent deportation of many of them to Laos.[1110] The CWHP, on the other hand, stepped up its activities. On January 15, 2008, after right they defected from the WHC, CWHP leaders unveiled their plan to create a Hmong Chao Fa State in northern Laos, calling for Laos "to be partitioned at the 18 degree parallel along Highway 8, Laxao, Bolikhamxai Province." The northern part of Highway 8 will be a Chao Fa state and the southern part below Highway 8 will be a Lao and Communist state (see Figure 4).[1111] The leaders of the CWHP partitioned Laos along Highway 8 because they claimed that the Hmong had historically occupied the area north of Highway 8. For the CWHP leaders, therefore, they were not making any claim over foreign territory. They were simply reclaiming Hmong historic territories. "Hmong had lived in all the areas here north of Highway 8," Gymbay Moua explained. "What we are doing is simply claiming what was historically ours. This was our land, not ethnic Lao's."[1112] Included in the areas that the CWHP

[1108] Brochure of the Congress of World Hmong People in author's possession.
[1109] Gymbay Moua, interview with author, 9 March 2009.
[1110] "Hmong Rally in Support of Hunger Strike," *UNPO News*; available at http://www.unpo.org/content/view/8266/236; accessed on 18 March 2009.
[1111] Congress of World Hmong People, "Call for the Creation of a Hmong State—Partition Laos," International Communication, No. 615/99, 15 January 2008, 1-4; UNPO General Assembly Member Resolution, introduced by Hmong Chaofa, at IX UNPO General Assembly, Brussels, Belgium, 16-17 May 2008.
[1112] Gymbay Moua, interview with author, digital tape recording, Minneapolis, MN, 9 March 2009.

claimed were historically the land of the Hmong was the "Meo City" that the French designated as an autonomous Hmong zone in 1946.[1113] Moreover, the CWHP called for the partition of Laos along Highway 8 because, since the LPDR government took power in 1975, it had done nothing to develop the provinces north of Highway 8, compared to the drastic changes that the LPDR government had made to the provinces south of the demarcation line. The condition of the provinces in the north was in no better shape than their condition in the mid-1970s. If anything, they argued, the LPDR government, in recent years, perhaps out of fear of losing its northern territory to the Hmong, opened up the north for international drilling. Foreign companies now drill the north for gold and other natural resources. The CWHP, thus, believed that they must protect the lands and natural resources in the north, that is, the Hmong people's historic lands, from further foreign invasion and destruction.[1114]

In the meantime, Yuepheng Xiong and some of his friends and colleagues had also formed their own organization, Hmoob Mojthem Foundation. Xiong was a Ph.D student in Asian History at the University of Minnesota, but he terminated his study to start a business to support his family and became involved in Hmong transnational politics. In the early 1990s, Xiong had joined the ULNLF to persuade its leaders to embrace and promote Hmong nationalism and later the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos to help the organization and its leaders promote Hmong nationalism and find the means and strategies to achieve Hmong self-determination in Laos. Since the disintegration of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos in the mid-1990s, Xiong had sought largely to promote Hmong nationalism through the documentaries in Hmong language that he produced and sold at his store in St. Paul. In 2006, Xiong and his friends and colleagues, most of whom were college educated 1.5 generation Hmong Americans, created the Hmoob Mojthem Radio to promote their message of Hmong unity and nationalism.

[1113] Xai Yang, interview with author, digital tape recording, Minneapolis, MN, 15 February 2009. For discussion of the Meo City, see Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration, and Legitimacy Under French Colonialism," (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 319-324.

[1114] Sue Her, interview with author, tape recording, St. Paul, MIN, 10 November 2008; Gymbay Moua, interview with author, digital tape recording, Minneapolis, MN, 9 March 2009.

Figure 4. Congress World Hmong People, Partition of Laos along Highway 8 into Hmong Chao Fa State in the North and Lao PDR in the South, 2008

Since then, Hmoob Mojthem had used the radio to discourage Hmong soldiers and their families from coming out of the jungle of Laos. First, Hmoob Mojthem explained that the United States had made no plan to resettle any Hmong from Thailand. Should they come out, those Hmong soldiers and their families would still be trapped in Thailand. They would have nowhere to hide, and they could expose themselves and their families to more harms than if they stayed in the jungle. Not only that, Hmoob Mojthem warned that the more Hmong soldiers and families came out of the jungle, the weaker the force of Hmong resistance in Laos, and thus, the weaker the Hmong people's claim for separatism. "If they kept fleeing from place to place, we saw that they would not be prepared to find a permanent solution to Hmong statelessness," Yuepheng Xiong added. "There would not be anyone left in the homeland to continue the work for a Hmong homeland. Hmoob Mojthem was created to encourage the Hmong to stay in their homeland and not flee the country. It was to say that they should prepare their life inside Laos and to ask the Hmong everywhere, in America and elsewhere, to promote secession as the only solution to the conflict in Laos. Those people in Laos deserved their own sovereign state."[1115]

Like the WHC and the CWHP, the Hmong Mojthem Foundation stirred up mixed emotions and stimulated various debates in the community. Segments of the Hmong diasporic population vehemently opposed Hmoob Mojthem's objectives and activities. They feared that the Hmoob Mojthem radio program would expose the Hmong in Laos to more harm than good. As Hmong scholar Yang Dao criticized,

> The message that you broadcast through the radio will not bring prosperity to the Hmong. Instead, it will bring more harm to our Hmong still in China, Laos, and Thailand. The suffering of our people back in Laos was not totally the fault of the Red Lao. Hmong Americans bear part of the responsibility for the Communist persecution of our Hmong in Laos. I, therefore, urge you to stop using your emotion and anger to do politics but use your brain and reason to find a way for our Hmong.[1116]

[1115] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[1116] Yang Dao, email correspondence to Yuepheng Xiong and others, 30 January 2009. The email was circulated to people in the community. Author was on the listserve. Yang Dao also made several criticisms during an interview with author, 2 February 2009.

Other Hmong, however, privately supported the mission of Hmoob Mojthem Foundation. According to Yuepheng Xiong, the foundation had gained a popular support from the Hmong both in the homeland and in the diaspora. Hmoob Mojthem leaders operated the radio solely with the funds that they secured from the public. The Hmong sometimes sent their donations directly to Hmoob Mojthem through their website on the internet. Hmoob Mojthem sometimes collected donations from the Hmong at special events, such as the New Year festival and July Fourth Soccer Tournament, and at locations such as the Hmong Como International Flea Market in St. Paul, Minnesota. Beside monetary support, Hmoob Mojthem also received widespread moral encouragement from the homeland and diasporic communities. According to Yuepheng Xiong, only a minority of the Hmong population worldwide had expressed any objection or opposition to Hmoob Mojthem's radio program. "Most people agree with Hmoob Mojthem and very much appreciate Hmoob Mojthem's message of Hmong unity," Yuepheng Xiong said. "Some say that Hmoob Mojthem is like a dose of medicine for the ailing Hmong. Others say that Hmoob Mojthem is like the air that they breathe. It is their life (*txoj sia*)."[1117] Since 2006, Hmoob Mojthem had raised Hmong national consciousness or ethnic nationalism to new heights all over the world. The Hmong, Xiong claimed, had deepened their love and appreciation for one another because of Hmoob Mojthem Radio. The heart of their program was to promote the messages that the Hmong must love Hmong (*Hmoob hlub Hmoob*), the Hmong must help Hmong, (*Hmoob pab Hmoob*), and the Hmong must stop persecuting Hmong (*Hmoob txhob tua Hmoob*). The phrase "Hmoob Mojthem" itself means Hmong unity.[1118]

In the early 2000s, General Vang Pao also emerged from abeyance to reformulate his strategy and approach toward Laos. In early November 2003, Vang Pao secretly met with a Vietnamese official at a small hotel on the outskirts of Amsterdam, where Vang Pao talked of throwing his support to normalizing U.S. trade relations with Laos in exchange for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's help in pressuring the Lao government to negotiate peace and reconciliation with Vang Pao and to end the conflict in the jungle

[1117] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 7 December 2008.
[1118] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 28 January 2009; Yuepheng Xiong, email correspondence to Yang Dao, Yenviset Xiong, and others, 31 January 2009.

of Laos.[1119] On November 26, 2003, Vang Pao unveiled his new initiative for democracy in Laos to more than 700 Hmong and Lao at Prom Center in Oakdale, Minnesota.[1120] "It is time to let the past stay in the history books, and let a new era of peace, prosperity and reconciliation return to the country of Laos," Vang Pao declared. "The era of killing must stop… and allow a new era of peace, prosperity and happiness to come to the millions of people living in Laos. We as the leaders, regardless of political affiliation or philosophy, need to put our individual [and] personal differences aside. We need to slowly begin new dialogues that will strengthen the nation and the people."[1121] No longer adamant about a military takeover as the only viable solution to the conflict in Laos, Vang Pao wrote to Khamtay Siphandone, President of the Lao PDR, on January 2, 2004, to "seek peace, prosperity, and happiness for all the people in Laos." In the letter, Vang Pao wrote:

> Today, I call upon all people of good will to work for the "independence, freedom, and good fortune" of the peoples of Laos. I am prepared to extend my hand and heart in friendship to stop the fighting and bring about peace, prosperity, and happiness in my homeland. I am prepared to meet with anyone to discuss how we can together to bring about a better future for the people of Laos. I ask that you and I meet, at your earliest opportunity, to discuss a "step-by-step" plan to end all fighting in Laos and prepare a transition to a more compassionate and inclusive political system.[1122]

Lao President Khamtay Siphandone never responded.

On July 17, 2004, General Vang Pao and Dr. Khamphay Abhay, an exiled Lao politician, formed the United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction (ULCPF). The ULCPF called on "all Laotians in the free world to advocate for the freedom fighters and help promote peace, justice, freedom and affect democratic changes

---

[1119] Lucy Y. Her, "Hmong Leader Presents Plans for Peace with Laos," *Star Tribune*, 27 November 2003, 9A; Tony Kennedy and Paul McEnroe, "Ex-Guerrilla's Gamble for Peace Backfires," *Star Tribune*, 5 July 2005.
[1120] Dai Thao, "Gen. Vang Pao Reveals Initiative For Democracy in Laos," *Hmong Times*, 1 December 2009, 1 & 7.
[1121] General Vang Pao, "Doctrines on Laos: Putting the People First," 26 November 2003, People Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN, V13.2004.10.
[1122] Vang Pao, letter to H.E. Mr. Khamtay Siphandone, 2 Janauary 2004, People Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

to the Laotian people." The ULCPF was formed "as a result of the ongoing conflict in Laos regarding [lack of] freedom, human rights violations, humanitarian crisis and government corruption against innocent Laotian civilians, Lao ethnic minorities, in particularly the Lao-Hmong and Lao-Khmu." It had branch offices in Canada, Europe, Australia and Asia.[1123] In December 2004, at their first public meeting, Vang Pao declared that the goal of the exiled Lao and Hmong leaders in the ULCPF was to "resolve the Lao conflict by peaceful means."[1124]

For a long time, people engaged in transnational politics were largely Hmong male leaders of the first or elder generation like Vang Pao and Pa Kao. Many of them engaged in transnational politics to liberate their Hmong fellows from communist retaliation and persecution in Laos, seek safe haven for Hmong refugees in Thailand, and find ways to return to a new and more politically stable Laos or a completely new nation-state of their own. Meanwhile, the younger generations were pushed and pushing for integration into American society, and they were criticizing the engagement of the older generation in transnational politics as backward-looking, backward-thinking, and separatist. They concentrated on achieving the "American Dream" in the United States. However, after the dawn of the new millennium, 1.5-generation and second generation Hmong community leaders and activists found it increasingly difficult to separate their political engagement in the United States from the politics back in the homeland. Undoubtedly, many of the younger generations, especially the second generation, had no desire to return to Laos. Yet, they recognized that their destiny in the United States was inextricably bound to the destiny of the Hmong people in Laos. Political events in Laos directly affected their lives and the lives of their parents and communities in the United States. Many of their parents still had siblings and relatives in Laos, and many of their parents were still deeply involved in the politics back home. More importantly, they recognized that the Hmong people back in Laos and the Hmong people in the diaspora were of the same nation. As Amee Xiong, the leader of Voices of Sorrow and an organizer for the Long Walk for Freedom, declared in June 2004 to kick off the walk, "I

[1123] United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction, *The Lao Conflict: Background, Basic Strategies and Intelligence*, (Fresno, CA, 2004), 10.
[1124] Hlee Lee, "First Meeting of the United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction," *Hmong Times*, 1 December 2004, 10; ULCPFR, "Letter of Appointment," 20 December 2004, Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.

am very disappointed and sad at the lack of awareness in the U.S. Congress of the issue of the suffering Hmong people in the jungles of Laos….I have become very passionate about this issue because *these Hmong people are OUR PEOPLE*."[1125] Despite their geographical separation, they realized that they belonged to the same community of nation. They were members of the same "imagined community."[1126] They understood that the Hmong American community was not just a U.S.-geographically bounded community; it was a global community. They saw no problem with having their feet and hands in multiple societies and no contradiction in their simultaneous participation in ethnic politics and transnational politics. Most of all, they saw that ethnic or domestic politics and transnational politics were different forms of political participation in the United States, and both were necessary for the liberation of the Hmong worldwide.

Refugee Crisis in Thailand and Unresolved Fighting in Laos

Why did these new organizations emerge? To start, these new organizations emerged in the new millennium because the job of resolving the "complications in Hmong society" that Soua Her, the Chao Fa liason in southern California, alluded to at Pa Kao's funeral service in Fresno was not yet completed. The issues that had plagued the Hmong both in the diaspora and in the homeland since the Vietnam War were still not resolved. In the early 2000s, several thousand Hmong people continued to suffer from communist persecution in the Lao jungle, and thousands more remained displaced in Thailand. The Lao, Thai, and United States governments, the international community, and the Hmong in the diaspora had not put an end to these ugly legacies of the United States Secret War in Laos. In 2002, when Pa Kao was assassinated, the refugee mess in Thailand and the fighting in the Lao jungle were still as much a part of the lives of the Hmong in the diaspora as they were in the 1970s when they were first displaced from Laos or the 1980s when Pa Kao and Vang Pao began their transnational struggles against the Lao PDR government.

[1125] Amee Xiong, prepared statement, speech delivered at state capitol, St. Paul, MN, 15 June 2004, in Organizational Files, Hmong Archives, St. Paul, MN.
[1126] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983).

In the early 1990s, when Thailand, Laos, the UNHCR, assisted by the United States, moved to shut down all the refugee camps, thousands of Hmong rejected the only two options they were given at the time, which were either resettlement in the United States or repatriation to Laos. In 1992, for example, Thailand and the United States resettled 7,500 Hmong refugees in America and repatriated 1,700 Hmong to Laos. Yet, 10,000 Hmong refugees rejected resettlement and repatriation and sought sanctuary in Wat Tham Krabok while as many as 8,000 others took to the mountains to secretly live among the Hmong Thai in Hmong villages in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Tak, Phetchabounn, and Phitsanoulok provinces.[1127] Wat Tham Krabok was a Buddhist monastery known for its opium rehabilitation program and located some ninety miles northeast of Bangkok in Sababuri Province, Thailand. Boua Hue Her was one of those Hmong refugees in Ban Vinai who rejected resettlement and repatriation and sought sanctuary at Wat Tham Krabok. Recalling his escape from Ban Vinai to Wat Tham Krabok, he said:

> In February, I think, of 1992, they were telling us: 'go, everyone, go choose your own destiny. The camp is going to be shut. Go choose your own destiny.' When they said this, they set up two booths. One booth is for those who want to go to America to go register. Those who do not want to go to America go register at the other booth to go to Napho refugee camp. Those who are going to Napho will eventually return to Laos. That's how they divided the refugees. It's a very difficult decision. I don't want to go to America at all, but I also cannot go back to Laos either. On the 5th, I was supposed to go register with the authorities. On the night of the 4th, I decided to follow the prophet. I don't want to go to America, and even if I go back to Laos, they won't treat us well. So we packed that night and ran away to Wat Tham Krabok.[1128]

In 2003, when Thailand threatened to close the Hmong camp at Wat Tham Krabok and relocate the inhabitants to holding centers or military camps inside Thailand or across the

---

[1127] Hiram A. Ruiz, "Tough Times for Refugees in Thailand," *News From the U.S. Committee for Refugees*, 1 July 1993; Marc Kaufman, "Allies Abandoned," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 February 1994, 22.

[1128] Boua Hue Her, interview with the author, 18 April 2007. Boua Hue did not mention the name of the prophet, but there was a widespread belief among Hmong refugees that the abbot at Wat Tham Krabok was destined to become the protector of the Hmong people. Seeking sanctuary at the Wat (the Thai word for temple) is the fulfillment of a prophecy long prophesied by the founder of the Wat before Hmong even knew the temple existed.

border in Laos because the camp, according to the Thai government, had become a center for illegal drug activities, the United States, with mounting pressures from Hmong Americans, agreed to accept 15,000 Hmong from the monastery. Yet, by then, the Hmong population at the camp was close to 20,000.[1129] The discrepancy in U.S. resettlement program and the actual number of Hmong refugees at the Wat had to do with the threatening nature of Thailand's action and the baffling nature of the United States resettlement program.

Before the United States announced it would accept Hmong refugees from Thailand in August 2003, Thai soldiers had already quarantined the camp with razor wires. Before this, many Hmong families who feared that the Thai government would deport them to Laos when Thailand first started to make plans to shut down the camp in 2002 had already packed their belongings and left. According to Boua Hue Her, a rumor circulated among Hmong refugees that a Thai policeman guarding the temple had told a Hmong man that Hmong refugees in the 1990s took a 24-hour flight to America but those at the monastery would only take a 2-hour flight to America. For Hmong refugees, this could only mean one thing: they were not destined for the United States; they were going to Phonsavan, Laos. For them, the rumor confirmed what they had previously heard from Hmong visitors from Laos, which was that the Lao PDR government had recently constructed many new houses in Phonsavan and that all the houses remained empty long after the construction was complete. For the Hmong, Thailand was sending them to Phonsavan to live in those empty houses.[1130] Consequently, when Thai soldiers quarantined the camp in 2003, many Hmong refugees were living outside of the camp. When they realized that the United States would accept 15,000 Hmong refugees from Thailand in January 2004, those who left the camp wanted to re-enter the camp but they could not. The U.S. resettlement program was restricted solely to those residing in the camp at the time that Thai soldiers quarantined the camp, that is, those who registered with Thai authorities for resettlement in the United States by August 2003. As the U.S. Embassy declared, "Any Lao/Hmong who was registered by the Royal Thai Government

---

[1129] Tunya Sukpanich, "Home At Last?" *Bankok Post*, 11 January 2004; Thomas Lum, "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RL 34320, 7 January 2008; Bill McEwen, "Destined For Fresno," *Fresno Bee*, 9 May 2004.
[1130] Boua Hue Her, interview with the author, 18 April 2007.

authorities as of August 2003 and recognized as living at the Wat will be eligible to apply for the U.S. resettlement program. Lao/Hmong living outside the Wat will not be eligible for the program."[1131] Many people living inside the camp were also excluded because Thai authorities believed they were Thai citizens and did not register them by the August deadline. As a result, not all of the Hmong refugees in Thailand were resettled.[1132] Thus, the mess of Hmong refugees in Thailand continued.

In March 2004, while the Hmong refugees were processed for resettlement in the United States, 4,000-5,000 Hmong came out of the Lao jungle to seek shelter near Khet Noi in Petchabun Province, Thailand, in a place called Ban Huay Nam Khao (White Water in English).[1133] Khet Noi was the largest Hmong village in Thailand. The Hmong who lived there carried Thai citizenship and had been in Thailand way before the Vietnam War. These Hmong, in other words, were not Hmong refugees from Laos. The several thousand Hmong who came out of the Lao jungle in 2004 went to Huay Nam Khao because they wanted to have access to the Hmong in Khet Noi. In October 2005, Rebecca Sommer, an independent documentary filmmaker and a lobbyist for the Society for Threatened Peoples International at the United Nations, recorded that 204 families, totaling 1033 individuals came out from the Lao jungle to take refuge in White Water. From Phou Bia, 42 families (203 individuals) came out; from Phou Ban, 3 families (14 individuals); from Phat Let-Phan Dai, 32 families, 161 individuals; from Phalai, 103 families (539 individuals); from Phou Khongkhao, 3 families (20 individuals); and from Bolihamxay, 21 families (96 individuals).[1134] Because they were the same people, some

---

[1131] Embassy of the U.S.A., "The U.S. to Open A Refugee Resettlement Program for Lao/Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok," 18 December 2003, http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/news/press/2003/nrot050.htm (accessed 26 October 2006).

[1132] Maisee Yang, "Special Report From Wat Thamkrabok, Thailand: A Firsthand Perspective From Inside, (Part 1)" *Hmong Today*, 26 February 2004; "Special Report From Wat Thamkrabok, (Part 2)," *Hmong Today*, 11 March 2004; "Special Report From Wat Thamkrabok, (Part 3)," *Hmong Today*, 25 March 2003; and Piyanart Sivalo and Supalak Ganjanakhundee, "Hmong Miss Out on Move to US," *The Nation*, 22 July 2003.

[1133] Medicins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), "Hidden Behind Barbed Wire: Plight of Hmong Refugees Held in Detention Camp in Northern Thailand," 20 May 2009, 3.

[1134] Rebecca Sommer, "Report on the Situation in the Xaysomboun Special Zone and 110 Hmong-Lao Refugees Who Escaped to Petchabun, Thailand 2004-2005," (May 2006), http://www.rebeccasommer.org/documentaries/Hmong/news.html, (accessed April 21, 2007). Oral testimonies are also transcribed and translated in this report. To view oral testimonies in images, see "Hunted Like Animals," produced by Rebecca Sommer. Author has a copy which he purchased at Hmong New Year in St. Paul, MN, in November 2006. For an article on the film, see HNN staff, "World Premier

Hmong families in Khet Noi gave food and shelter to the refugees. Soon, the refugees were joined by some of the Hmong who were left out of the resettlement program at Wat Tham Krabok. Later, other Hmong, including some legitimate Hmong citizens of Laos and Thailand, also took shelter in Huay Nam Khao.

By late 2006, a mixture of legitimate and non-legitimate refugees had gathered in Huay Nam Khao. In August 2006, when I visited Huay Nam Khao, for example, a Xiong family told me that they abandoned their house in 52 KM, near Vientiane, the capital of Laos, where they lived since 1992 when they were repatriated from Ban Vinai refugee camp, to come to Huay Nam Khao because the communists had accused the father for supporting the Chao Fa resistance. Fearing for their safety, they fled to Thailand after the father's older brother was assassinated. In October 2005, Rugrawee Pinyorat also reported a similar story of a Hmong woman named Chongmi Saelee (a citizen of Laos with a Lao name). In 2003, after her husband returned from a visit to the United States with the money that his relatives had given him, he mysteriously disappeared. When Saelee went to the police to ask for help and inquire on the whereabouts of her husband, they threatened to kill her. "They told me that they would also kill me if I continued to search for him," she said. Fearful for her life, she fled to Huay Nam Khao.[1135]

After returning from my study in Thailand and my visit to Huay Nam Khao in the summer of 2006, I also learned that one of my maternal aunt's daughters had run away with a group of people from Laos to Huay Nam Khao. She, a legitimate Lao citizen, returned home only after she ran out of money and realized that the United States had no plan to resettle the Hmong from Huay Nam Khao. In 2006, when I visited Huay Nam Khao, I stayed at a hotel, owned by a Hmong American in Chico, California. One evening, a Hmong man came into the office as I was about to have dinner with the young man employed to manage the hotel and a cousin of mine in Thailand. The man told me that he had a house, a large farm, and two cars in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. A refugee from the Vietnam War, he had since the early 1990s acquired Thai citizenship. Yet, he abandoned everything and came to Huay Nam Khao because his father, who was

---

for 'Hunted Like Animals,' Set for Friday, St. Paul, MN," *Huntington News*, (November 23, 2006), at http://www.huntingtonnews.net/national/061123-staff-hla.html, (accessed April 21, 2007).

[1135] Rungrawee C. Pinyorat, "6,000 Hmong evicted from town face uncertain future," *The Associated Press*, 1 October 2005.

already resettled in the United States, forced him to come to Huay Nam Khao, saying that the United States would resettle the refugees, and that this was the only way for them to reunite and live together again. When he objected, his father threatened to disown him. By the time I met him, he was already in Huay Nam Khao for two years, and he had exhausted his saving. He deeply regretted his decision, but he stayed because, for him, he could not turn back. He had lost everything. At its peak, in April 2008, the population at of the makeshift camp in Huay Nam Khao was 7,850.[1136]

Beginning in late 2005, Thailand began arresting and deporting the Hmong in Huay Nam Khao back to communist Laos. On December 5, 2005, for example, Thai authorities rounded up a group of 27 Hmong (5 male and 22 female), 22 of them children, and transported them from Ban Pak Khat in Nong Khai province across the Mekong River in two small boats, making two journeys each, to the Lao village of Ban Phabat. After they completed the deportation, Thai authorities joined Lao officials for a celebratory drink on the Thai side of the river. After spending the night in Vientiane, Laos, the girls were sent to a prison attached to an army base outside of Paksen, 200 km east of Vientiane, Laos. Meanwhile, the two boys and three adult men were first held in Vientiane but transferred in May 2006 to a detention center in Phongsaly in the far north.[1137] On February 24, 2006, 150 Hmong community members gathered at the steps of the capital in St. Paul to ask U.S. lawmakers to take action to locate the missing children and reunite them with their families. Young Hmong girls, dressed in Hmong traditional dresses, were seen carrying signs, reading: "Free 26 Hmong Children Now!" and "Thai Gov. Return Our Children to US."[1138] In March 2007, Lao authorities revealed that they had found twenty one girls in Laos, but there was no sign of the other six. Twelve of the girls were later reunited with their parents in Huay Nam Khao, but the other nine girls that they found were still in Laos. Meanwhile, the whereabouts and fates of the unaccounted five boys and one girl remained unknown.[1139]

[1136] Medicins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), "Fearing A Forced Return: The Situation of the Lao Hmong Refugees in Petchabun, Thailand," 20 May 2009, 4.
[1137] Amnesty International, "Lao People's Democratic Republic: Hiding in the Jungle—Hmong Under Threat," 23 March 2007, 18-19.
[1138] Myka Moua, "Rally Demands Answers," *Hmong Today*, 3 March 2006.
[1139] Medicins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), "Fearing A Forced Return: The Situation of the Lao Hmong Refugees in Petchabun, Thailand," 20 May 2009, 4.

While the international community was still inquiring about the missing children, Thailand continued to secretly deport Hmong refugees across the river to the other side of the border. On August 18, 2008, thirty-one Hmong refugees were secretly deported to Laos. The whereabouts and fates of these refugees were unknown.[1140] On November 17, 2006, Thai authorities again arrested a group of 152 Hmong refugees and asylum seekers, including 77 children and eight infants, from Huay Nam Khao and transferred them to the Immigration Detention Center (IDC) in Bangkok. On December 7, the group was transferred from the IDC in Bangkok to a detention facility in Nong Khai province near the Lao border.[1141] At least 104 of the Hmong in this group were recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. Consequently, when Thai authorities tried to deport this group to Laos, it backfired. Thailand became the target of mounting criticisms by the international community. Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch, for example, wrote:

> Thailand should not forcibly return Hmong who may face persecution when they go back to Laos. Rather than breaching its international obligations, the Thai government should ensure that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is able to identify and protect those who have a well-founded fear of persecution in Laos…. Prime Minster Surayud has stated clearly that his foreign policy will be based on human rights. He should not contradict himself by abandoning Thailand's commitment to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring countries.[1142]

The criticisms of the international community ultimately forced Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont to call off the deportation this group of 152 individuals.[1143] Yet, Thailand continued to confine them in the detention center in Nong Khai and to deny them political asylum in a third country.[1144] As soon as the criticisms abated, Thailand resumed its practice of deporting the Hmong back to Laos. On January 26, 2007, Thai

---

[1140] "31 Hmong refugees secretly repatriated to Laos," *The Nation*, 18 August 2006.
[1141] "Vientiane seeks details of Hmong," *The Nation*, 31 November 31, 2006; "Bangkok agrees to give details of Hmong to Laos," *The Nation*, 9 December 9, 2006.
[1142] Human Rights Watch, "Thailand: Stop Deportation of Hmong Refugees to Laos," 1-2. http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/12/thaila14822.htm (accessed April 24, 2007)
[1143] "Government tries to deport Hmong refugees," *Bangkok Post* (December 8, 2006); "Hmong Deportation Plan Backfires: Surayud Unnerved by Fierce Resistance," *Bangkok Post*, (January 31, 2007).
[1144] "UN wants end to sending Hmong to Laos," *Bangkok Post* (December 12, 2006); "Thailand won't return 152 detained in Nong Khai," *Bangkok Post*, (December 13, 2006).

authorities again secretly rounded up a group of 16 Hmong refugees from Huay Nam Khao and deported them to Laos.[1145] Little by little, Thai authorities secretly deported Hmong refugees to Laos. By late 2009, only 4,000 people were left in Huay Nam Khao and 158 people at the detention center in Nong Khai. In December 2009, Thai authorities rounded up and deported all the Hmong people in Huay Nam Khao and Nong Khai to Laos. The whereabouts and fates of the repatriates remain unknown.[1146]

Compounding this refugee mess in Thailand was the Thai desecration of Hmong graves at Wat Tham Krabok. While 14,000 of the Hmong refugees at the monastery had left, some 720 were still in the camp when the head abbot at the monastery, Luangphaw Charoen Parnchard, authorized the Bhoti Pavana Chinese Foundation to dig up Hmong graves at the camp in October and November 2005.[1147] Luangphaw Charoen and others at the monastery explained that they authorized the digging because the graves were contaminating the streams and water sources in the area. The bodies, they said, were treated with respect and cremated according to Thai Buddhist tradition. To the horror of the Hmong, however, there was not a shred of respect given to the dead. In videos shot by Hmong refugees still in the camp and sent to the Hmong in the United States, who later posted the videos on the internet, Hmong corpses were exhumed and boiled in hot water and their bodies were dismembered. The diggers were seen also laughing and posing for pictures by the pile of bones and flesh they had just separated, especially by the two Hmong females whose bodies had turned into stones. Make-ups were put on the fresh corpses, and they were placed on display for the diggers' enjoyment and laughter—a complete dehumanization of the corpses and a violation of the fundamental human rights of the Hmong people.[1148]

Xong Khang, an International Organization for Migration (IOM) counselor in the camp for the refugees, was still in the camp when the digging occurred. Khang described

---

[1145] Amnesty Interntional, "Lao People's Democratic Republic: Hiding in the Jungle," 17.
[1146] Seth Mydans, "Thailand Begins Repatriation of Hmong to Laos," *New York Times*, 28 December 2009; Seth Mydans, "Thailand Evicts 4,000 Hmong to Laos," *New York Times*, 29 December 2009; Rachel Harvey, "Repatriated Hmong Arrive in Laos," *BBC News*, 26 February 2010.
[1147] Wameng Moua, "Hmong Graves at the Wat Being Exhumed," *Hmong Today*, 1 December 2005, 11.
[1148] Several videos capturing the desecration of Hmong graves circulated in the Hmong community; they were sold at discounted rate at local Hmong flea markets and grocery stores. Author has a copy of one of the videos: *Suav & Thaib Tshem Hmoob Txwv Feej Zos Qhov Tsua* (Chinese and Thai Destroying Hmong's Sacred Ground at Wat Tham Krabok), 2005-2006, video.

the desecration of Hmong graves as "truly horrifying." "They chop the head off and throw it in the boiling water," Khang said. "And as for the internal organs, they simply dig that from the corpse and leave it wherever it is convenient, often right on the ground where it is sometimes picked up by a dog and brought back to the camp."[1149] Already an unhealthy environment, the camp was now filled with smells of rotting flesh and less healthy to live, which completely contradicted the explanation of the authorities of the monastery and the foundation that the digging of the graves was for the purpose of promoting public health. Before mounting pressures from Hmong Americans and the international community to end the desecration, 900 Hmong graves had been desecrated.[1150] For Wameng Moua, the editor of *Hmong Today*, a local newspaper in St. Paul, "the grave digging…is yet another act of oppression being carried out by a landlord who is eager to kick them out."[1151] Had the authorities of the monastery and the foundation waited a little longer, the Hmong might not have even known until it was too late. Fortunately, they were not that patient and started digging while some Hmong refugees were still in the camp. The impatience, thus, backfired, transforming the monks and authorities of the monastery from compassionate beings into cruel and inhumane "landlords" who wanted to erase all memories of Hmong refugees from the place.

In the meantime, across the border, the fighting in the Lao jungle continued for the Hmong freedom fighters and their families. In 2000, the fighting in Laos received international attention after a series of bombings took place in the capital, Vientiene, and other cities, killing several people. Gary Yia Lee chronicled the series of bombings in early 2000 as follow:

> On the evening of 31 March 2000, the relative calm of Vientiane, the small dusty capital of Laos, was shattered by a bomb in a crowded Korean restaurant with the quaint name of "Khob Chai Deu" (Thank You Yes) in the central part of the city. It was a grenade reportedly thrown by two men on a motor cycle, injuring two local Lao diners and eight foreign tourists (mostly British and German), two of them seriously. A second bomb went off five days later next to a government-run

[1149] Wameng Moua, "Hmong Graves at the Wat Being Exhumed," *Hmong Today*, 1 December 2005, 11.
[1150] Wameng Moua, "Minnesota Pushes For Human Rights Justice," *Hmong Today*, 28 April 2006, 1 & 11; State Senator Mee Moua, "United Nations Special Rapporteur to Hear Testimony on Grave Desecrations in Thailand," *Hmong Times*, 3 December 2008.
[1151] Wameng Moua, "Hmong Graves at the Wat Being Exhumed," *Hmong Today*, 1 December 2005, 11.

> hotel, a few hundred meters from the scene of the first explosion, followed by a third bomb a few days later. Then, a fourth bomb exploded in the busy Morning Market on May 28, injuring 15 Lao civilians… A fifth bomb went off on 7 June 2000, and other bombs were reported to have been found at the airport and near the Vietnamese Embassy.[1152]

The Lao PDR government acknowledged that the first explosion was the result of personal business rivalry but offered little explanation for the other bombings. After the fifth explosion occurred, the Lao government charged that the explosions were the work of Hmong insurgents in Laos and their supporters in exile who had returned to carry out campaigns against the government and people of Laos. The Lao ambassador in Thailand, in particular, blamed General Vang Pao for the attacks. According to Lee,

> Diplomats in Vientiane, however, had a different explanation and saw the bomb explosions as the result of internal disputes between PL (Pathet Lao) leaders vying for control of power and business opportunities. The incidents were designed to create instability in the government, which has been beset by lack of political reforms and economic problems. Those in power are said to be split into two groups. President Khamtay Siphandone and other elderly hard-liners reportedly want to align Laos with the Vietnamese communist government in Hanoi while a second group prefers more economic opening to the outside world.[1153]

Between February and August 2003, seven ambushes of highway buses, taxis and other vehicles traveling to and from Vientiane, Laung Prabang and Xieng Khoung were reported, in which over 40 people were killed, including two Swiss tourists. For its part, the Lao PDR government again blamed the Hmong insurgents for the ambushes.[1154] At the same time, the Lao PDR government was careful to hide the suppression of the Hmong in the Lao jungle from the outside world by dismissing the ambushes as the work of "bandits" and "highway robbers." In doing so, as Lee has argued, the Lao PDR government "made it easy for real Lao bandits to kill and loot whilst blaming the 'Chao

---

[1152] Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4, (2000): 6.
[1153] Ibid., 6-7.
[1154] Thomas Lum, "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RS20931, 22 November 2004.

Fa' Hmong for their deeds."[1155] According to Thomas Lum, a specialist in Asian Affairs in the Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, two Lao anti-communist resistance groups, namely the Free Democratic People's Government of Laos and the Committee for Independence and Democracy in Laos, had claimed responsibility for the explosions.[1156] The Chao Fa resistance groups were not responsible for the bombings, shootings, and lootings. In the summer of 2007, while I was in Laos, a number of Hmong residents in Vientiane and KM 52 also told me that the ambushes of army convoys, highway buses and taxis along the road from Vientiane to Luang Prabang and Xieng Khoung were not the work of the Chao Fa resistance fighters. They were the work of a few Lao and Khmu thieves and bandits who ambushed those vehicles for the prized possessions that tourists carried with them. After Lao authorities arrested and killed those thieves and bandits, it was safe again to travel along that road. There had been no ambush reported ever since those arrests.

In a real sense, the new organizations that emerged in the new millennium, such as the World Hmong People's Congress, the Congress of World Hmong People, the Mojthem Foundation, Voices of Sorrow or Hmoob Hlub Hmoob, the Hmong Human Rights, and the United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction, among others, did so in part as means to redress the unresolved refugee crisis in Thailand and the fighting in the Lao jungle.

Globalization and Media Technologies

At the same time, globalization and media technologies, including the internet, also helped to facilitate the rise of these new Hmong transnational political organizations in the new millennium. Take, for instance, the story of how founders of the World Hmong People's Congress came together to form the group and later the organization. According to Cheng (Tousouayeng) Yang, one of its founders, what sparked the group to come together that year was an incident that occurred on May 25, 1998. On that day, Yang told me, fourteen Vietnamese officials, including a high-ranking Vietnamese

[1155] Gary Yia Lee, "Rebels or Bandits?" 11.
[1156] Thomas Lum, "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RS20931, 22 November 2004.

military officer, Lt. General Dao Troung Lich, and twelve Lao officials flew a helicopter over the Padong area to locate Hmong Chao Fa villages to attack with chemical poisons. Chao Fa fighters in the area, however, shot down the helicopter, killing all of the officials, including some Lao and Vietnamese biological and chemical toxin experts. The Chao Fa had suffered zero casualties. Nonetheless, for Yang and his colleagues, the Pathet Lao recruitment of Vietnamese troops to attack the Hmong inside Laos was a fundamental violation of international law, particularly the International Convention against Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. They felt it was wrong for the LPDR government to bring foreign troops into Laos to attack the Hmong inside the Lao territory. "We felt we had to do something to protect the rights and sovereignty of the Hmong. We, therefore, created the organization," Yang said.

Similarly, the students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison were deeply affected by the moving images that they saw in videos and newspapers on the Hmong in the Lao jungle. They were particularly moved for action by the massacre of Hmong children in the Lao jungle on May 19, 2004.[1157] On that fateful morning, five starving children, who had not eaten for several days, decided to wander into the woods to forage for edible roots, plants, wild yams, and mushrooms in the jungles of Laos. Driven by hunger, they risked their lives to go beyond their only safe haven, knowing nothing of what awaited them on the outskirt of their refuge. Rather than finding edible roots, plants, or mushrooms to fill their groaning wrinkled stomachs, their bodies were fed with bullets, sharp bamboo and wooden sticks. The bodies were left by thirty to forty soldiers of the Lao People's Army in the woods for wild animals to devour after they had been raped and brutally mutilated. Found hours later by their parents and friends, the bodies were not only bruised and drenched in their own blood but also saturated with their killers' semen and urine. Chia Her, 15, Chao Lee, 16, Mao Lee, 14, Pang Lor 14, and Tou Lor, 13, lay dead in the Xaysomboune Special Military Zone in Xieng Khouang Province, northern Laos, known officially as the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR). Mao Lee was shot in both breasts, and the other bodies were mutilated. One of the girls was disemboweled. The three adults who accompanied these children managed to escape after they were severely injured with gunshot wounds. Nou Chue Thao was shot in his

[1157] James Chang, interview with author, 8 May 2009.

arms and left foot; Mee Vang on her back and right foot; and Mrs. Va Xeng on her knees.[1158] Students at UW-Madison were also moved by the images of the displaced men, women, and children in Thailand. They, thus, formed the Hmong Human Rights to:

> 1. Educate people about the forced repatriation and treatment of the Hmong refugees in Thailand as the result of their involvement with the U.S. during the Vietnam War (The Secret War); 2. Pressure the Thai government to grant the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access into the Huay Nam Khao refugee camp to screen the Hmong for refugee status before they are repatriated back to Laos in June 2009; 3. Pressure the Thai government to allow the Hmong who have already been granted refugee status by the UNHCR at the Nong Khai Immigration Detention Center to resettle in third party countries who are willing to accept them; 4. Contact state representatives and senators to support our cause; and 5. Start a letter writing campaign to representatives and senators in our communities across the nation.[1159]

Likewise, the moving images in Hmong newspapers and the internet drove founders of Hmoob Mojthem Foundation to form the organization to respond to the mass displacement of Hmong families in Thailand. Hmoob Mojthem leaders were deeply concerned about the plight of the Hmong who left their villages in Laos and especially those in the Lao jungle to come to Huay Nam Khao with the false hope of resettlement in the United States. The initial goal of the group was, therefore, to find a way to stop the burgeoning problem of Hmong displacement in Huay Nam Khao inThailand. It was to inform the people the truth about the prospect of further Hmong resettlement in the United States. Hmoob Mojthem leaders wanted to tell the people that the United States had made no more plans to accept Hmong refugees from Thailand and to urge the displaced Hmong population to return to wherever they came from. The group created the Hmoob Mojthem Radio in 2006 explicitly to stop the Hmong people from coming to

---

[1158] For reports on this killing, see, for example, "Lao Soldiers Torture, Rape, and Murder Four Hmong Girls. Boys Body Mutilated." *Hmong Today*, (September 23, 2004); Wameng Moua, "Journalists show film of Hmong trapped in the jungles of Laos: Audience moved to tears after viewing the desperate situation." *Hmong Today*, (June 17, 2004), p. 1&9; Thua Vang, "In Search of the Truth," *Hmong Today*, (July 29, 2004), 10-11; "Tibneeg Hmoob Nyob Lostsuas," *Hmong Today*, (July 1, 2004): 1 & 18-19; Dai Thao, "Community Came to See Photos of Suffering Hmong in Laos," *Hmong Times*, (November 1, 2003), p. 1& 8.

[1159] Ger Yang, Email Letter Writing Campaign, 10 April 2009.

leaving their homes and villages. "We created Hmoob Mojthem Radio in 2006 because we saw that Hmong continued to flee from place to place like nomads," Yuepheng Xiong said. "They had no permanent and stable home. We were afraid that Hmong would become nomads forever if they continued this unhealthy pattern of migration."[1160] The messages of Hmong nationalism and unity were later added to the radio program to foster Hmong national consciousness in Laos.

Even Hmong ethnic politicians, like Rep. Cy Thao and Senator Mee Moua, could not remain bystanders to Hmong transnational politics when they saw the images of the egregious desecration of Hmong graves in Hmong newspapers and videos. After Hmong graves were desecrated in 2005, Sen. Mee Moua and Rep. Cy Thao became leading spokespersons against the desecration. They fought for Hmong cultural and religious rights and used their positions to garner congressional and international supports to halt the desecration of Hmong graves and bring charges against the authorities of Wat Tham Krabok and the foundation. On March 2, 2006, Moua and her husband, Yee Chang, and Professor Barbara Frey, director of the University of Minnesota Human Rights Program, organized a town hall meeting and letter writing campaign at the Lao Family Community in St. Paul. Nearly 400 concerned Hmong community members attended the meeting to express their personal grievances. Many brought with them land titles, indicating when and for how much they had purchased the land on which they had buried their loved ones, to show that they had the right to bury their loved ones on the land.[1161] A month later, more than 200 Hmong, at the urging of Mee Moua, crammed into the rotunda at the state capitol to hear the resolution that Moua had asked the Minnesota legislator to pass earlier to end the desecration of Hmong graves at Wat Tham Krabok and get justice for the Hmong.[1162] In September 2007, Sen. Mee Moua, St. Paul Mayor's Policy Associate Va-Megn Thao, Mee Moua's husband and community activist, Yee Chang, Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller, and others led an official fact finding delegation to Thailand, where they met with Thai government officials and leaders of the two religious

[1160] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.
[1161] Wameng Moua, "Hundreds Gather to Protest Grave Diggings," *Hmong Today*, 17 March 2006. Author was also present at the hall meeting and helped to collect statements from Hmong families.
[1162] Wameng Moua, "Minnesota Pushes For Human Rights Justice," *Hmong Today*, 28 April 2006.

organizations responsible for the desecration of Hmong graves at the monastery.[1163] On December 3, 2008, writing about the grave desecration in *Hmong Times*, another local newspaper in St. Paul, Moua explained,

> In October and November 2005, more than 900 Hmong graves were disinterred at Wat Tham Krabok, a Buddhist monastery in Thailand that served for more than a decade as home to thousands of Hmong families fleeing persecution after the communist takeover of Laos in 1975. While most of the graves were on monastery grounds, many were located on plots of land purchased by the refugees and the exhumations were carried out without the notice, consent or involvement of the relatives of the deceased.[1164]

Finally, on December 10, Mee Moua and Cy Thao joined Professor Barbara Frey and the Human Rights Program at the University of Minnesota in hosting a hearing at the university on the desecration of Hmong graves. Professor James Anaya, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, was at the hearing to take Hmong testimonies. In her moving speech at the hearing, Moua said:

> As a people, the Hmong believe that the burial sites of our loved ones are sacred temples, a place not only for their bodies but a home for their souls. A violation of this sacred ground is tantamount to the destruction of our place of worship and the displacement of our ancestors' souls. For the victim families who have been affected by this violation, the consequences have varied from physical ailments to emotional distress to spiritual disturbances. Many of these families will have to wrestle with how to repair this violation for generations to come.

Speaking directly to Professor Anaya, Moua added, "Today, we are here… to ask that you, as the representative of an international body, charged with the opportunity to make the case, help us to recognize the wrong that has been perpetrated, bear witness to the adverse consequences dealt to the victim families, and protect all future grave sites from

---

[1163] "Timeline of Events—Hmong Grave Desecrations," compiled by the Human Rights Program, University of Minnesota, (author's collection).
[1164] State Senator Mee Moua, "United Nations Special Rapporteur to Hear Testimony on Grave Desecrations in Thailand," *Hmong Times*, 3 December 2008.

future desecrations. Let this be the last time any people should ever have to witness their loved ones violated in this manner."[1165]

Three Key Events

In the new millennium, three major events also helped catapult the second secret war or ongoing fighting in the Lao jungle to international spotlight. The first was the publication of journalist Andrew Perrin's report, "Welcome to the Jungle," and its accompanying heart-wrenching photo essay in *Time Asia* magazine in May 2003. Until then, the Lao PDR government was able to hide the fighting between Hmong resistance fighters and government forces in the Lao jungle from the world and the plight of the Hmong in Laos was largely known only to the Hmong. The publication of this article, however, brought unprecedented international attention to the Hmong in the jungle of Laos. The article, based on Perrin's four-day hike into the Lao jungle, described the Hmong as a defenseless people constantly in fear and on the run from communist persecution and a people dwindling in number and trapped in the jungle crying for help. Describing the plight of the Hmong in heart-wrenching details, Perrin wrote:

> There were hundreds of them, perhaps a thousand. They wept and knelt before me on the ground, crying, "Please help us, the communists are coming." The Hmong rebels prostrating before me were convinced they would all soon die… In all my years as a journalist I had never seen anything like this: a ragtag army wailing families in tow, beseeching me to take news of their plight to the outside world. I walked among starving children, their tiny frames scarred by mortar shrapnel. Young men, toting rifles and with dull-eyed infants strapped to their backs, ripped open their shirts to show me their wounds. An old man grabbed my hand and guided it over the contours of shrapnel buried in his gut. A teenage girl, no more than 15, whimpered at my feet, pawed at my legs and cried, "They've killed my husband. They've killed my mother, my father, my brother…" But

[1165] State Senator Mee Moua, Welcome Remarks at the UN Hearing on Desecration of Hmong Graves in Thailand, on the Occasion of the Visit of Special Rapporteur James Anaya, 10 December 2008.

> before she could finish, others were pushing her aside to sob out their own litanies of loss. In this heart of darkness, nobody has a monopoly on grief.[1166]

The second event happened just a month after the report in *Time Asia* magazine came out. The plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle again received international attention when two European journalists, based in Bangkok, Belgian Thierry Falise and Frenchman Vincent Reynaud, and their translator, Naw Karl Mua, a Hmong-American pastor of the Light of Life Lutheran Church in St. Paul, were arrested on June 4, 2003 while trying to document human rights abuses and religious persecution in Laos.[1167] Comparing his clandestine hike to the jungle to that of Falise, Reynaud, and Mua, Perrin wrote:

> We were lucky. Photographer Philip Blenkisop and I emerged from the jungle earlier this year scratched and shaken, but we carried with us a unique story about a little-known people, the Hmong, desperately fighting for survival… Belgian Theirry Falise, 46, and Frenchman Vincent Reynaud, 38, weren't so fortunate. The two Bangkok-based journalists, along with their translator, Naw Karl Mua, 44, a Hmong-American pastor from St. Paul, Minnesota, had followed in our footsteps, looking to report the story for themselves before time runs out for the Hmong. On June 4 these three foreigners were walking out of the jungle near the northeaster Laotian province of Xieng Khouang when their party, which included heavily armed Hmong rebels acting as escorts, came under fire from government troops. During the firefight, someone was killed—it's not clear who, or on which side—and shortly afterward the two journalists and their translator were captured, along with three Hmong.[1168]

On June 24, the Lao Veterans of America organized a rally at the state capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota to bring more attention to the plight of the Hmong in Laos and call for the release of the two journalists and the St. Paul pastor. "Since many of us left Laos in 1975, the communist government has been hunting our people, and continues to hunt them today," Rep. Cy Thao told the crowd of more than 200 Hmong at the rally. "Today we

---

[1166] Andrew Perrin, "Welcome to the Jungle," *Time Asia Magazine*, 5 May 2003.
[1167] Todd Nelson, "St. Paul Pastor Arrested in Laos," *Pioneer Press*, 12 June 2003; Martha Sawyer Allen, "St. Paul Pastor, 2 Journalists Detained in Laos," *Star Tribune*, 12 June 2003; Roben Corben, "Lao Arrests European Journalists, American in Battle with Rebels," *Bangkok Post*, 11 June 2003; Seth Mydans, "2 Journalists and U.S. Clergyman Are Reported Held in Laos," *New York Times*, 16 June 2003.
[1168] Andrew Perrin, "Licensed to Kill," *Time Asia Magazine*, 30 June 2003.

need to send a clear message to the U.S. government and to the government of Laos—there will be no more trade talks until the Lao government frees Naw Karl Mua. There will be no more trade talks until the Lao government brings human rights to everyone person in Laos."[1169] On June 30, after a trial that lasted for about two and a half hours, a Lao court sentenced Falise, Reynaud, and Mua to 15 years in prison for killing a village security officer, obstructing the work of the police, and illegal possession of a gun and an explosive device.[1170] After receiving mounting pressures from members of Congress, including U.S. Senator Norm Coleman and U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum from Minnesota, the Lao government released and deported the two journalists and the Hmong pastor from Laos on July 9. On July 10, Naw Karl Mua was back in St. Paul.[1171]

The ordeal that Falise, Reynaud, and Mua had with the communist Lao government was over when they were released and deported to Thailand. However, the ordeal for Thao Moua, Pa Fue Khang, and Char Yang—the three Hmong who were arrested with them on June 4—continued. After they were arrested with Falise, Reynaud, and Mua, Char Yang managed to escape detention and eventually fled to Thailand where he sought asylum and was later resettled in the United States. Thao Moua and Pa Fue Khang, however, were less fortunate. They were convicted along with Falise, Reynaud, and Mua. Moua and Khang are still serving their prison sentences of 12 and 15 years respectively. Meanwhile, Char Yang was tried and convicted *in absentia*.[1172] Likewise, the ordeal of the Hmong in the Lao jungle continued, and so did the conflict. When Perrin visited the Hmong in the Lao jungle, the leader of the group, Moua Toua Ther, told him that the group under his command now had only 800 persons left from an initial 7,000 people in 1975.[1173] Naw Karl Mua later added that, by the time he and the two European journalists visited the group in June 2003, the group had only 750 people left,

---

[1169] Todd Nelson, "St. Paul: Pastor's Arrest Fuels Anti-Laos Rally," *Pioneer Press*, 25 June 2003.
[1170] Vijay Joshi, "St. Paul Pastor, 2 Others Sentenced to 15 Years in Laotian Jail," *Associated Press*, 30 June 2003; "The Hmong: Forgotten People of Laos," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003; and "Laos Court Finds Foreigners Guilty," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003.
[1171] Tom Webb, "Washington, D.C.: Ambassador Urges Resolution For Pastor," *Pioneer Press*, 26 June 2003; Tom Webb and Todd Nelson, "Scenario Outlined to Free Pastor," *Pioneer Press*, 28 June 2004; Tom LaVenture, "Welcome Home: Rev. Mua Relieved But Grieves for Hmong Laos," *Asian American Press*, 18 July 2003, 1&9; "Minnesota Minister Freed From Laos Prison Said He Did Not Admit Guilt," *Associated Press*, 12 July 2003.
[1172] Amnesty International, "Thao Moua and Pa Fue Khang: Hmong Imprisoned After Unfair Trial," June 2004; Andrew Perrin, "A Blackbird's Song," *Time Asia*, 20 September 2004.
[1173] Andrew Perrin, "Welcome to the Jungle," *Time Asia Magazine*, 5 May 2003.

and they were mostly women and children. Explaining how the group was reduced from 7,000 to 750, Mua said:

> The rest [those not included in the 750] fell into one of four categories: the first group (about 10%) died because of starvation. The second group (about 15%) died because of sickness without medication. The third group (about 50%) died because they were killed by the communist Lao government with bombs and poisons from the air and troops on the ground. And the fourth group (about 25%) had surrendered; but nobody knows where they are. And I believe their number is tremendously reduced because the LPDR continues to suppress: killing, poisoning, cutting off their food and medical supplies.[1174]

In 2003, the Fact-Finding Commission on Laos, a non-profit lobby group based in Oroville, California, reported that twenty groups of Hmong veterans of the U.S. secret war, totaling about 15,000 people, were still in the jungle resisting and defending themselves against the communist Lao PDR government. The number dropped from 17,177 in 2001 when the groups had 3,334 soldiers, many of whom were women and children.[1175] The latest estimate of the Hmong still in the jungle numbered only between several hundred to a few thousand (2,000-3,000) persons.[1176]

Since the arrest of Falise, Reynaud, and Mua, the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle had received more coverage in the international press. The arrest of the journalists and the Lutheran pastor and the plight of the Hmong received coverage in the BBC, followed by a French television program.[1177] In March 2008, the story of Hmong persecution in the Lao jungle even got picked up by the Islamic television station, "Aljazeera," in the Middle East. It did a two-part report on the Hmong in the Lao jungle

---

[1174] Rev. Naw Karl Mua, "For Such A Time AS This," *Hmong Today*, 31 December 2003, 16.
[1175] Fact Finding Commission, "A Report of the Current Conditions in Laos for the Veterans of the U.S. Secret War to President George Bush," 2 June 2003.
[1176] Thomas Lum, "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RL 34320, 7 January 2008.
[1177] "The Hmong: Forgotten People of Laos," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003; and "Laos Court Finds Foreigners Guilty," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003; "Small-Scale Fighting Taking Place in Laos," *Agence France-Presse*, 14 July 2003. For a report on the Hmong in France protesting in Paris to bring attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle, see Leej Nkaub Lis Foom, "French Hmong Protest in Paris," *Hmong Today*, 6 October 2005. Author also possesses a copy of the report on the Hmong in the Lao jungle on French TV news. Copy is given to author by Vajtsua Shouayang from France.

and published a number of articles on them online.[1178] For many Hmong, especially second-generation Hmong Americans, they also became aware of the plight of the Hmong only after the arrest of Falise, Reynaud, and Mua in 2003 by reading about them in Hmong newspapers. The story of the persecution and "extermination" of the Hmong in Laos was the front page story of the first volume and first edition of *Hmong Today*, the local newspaper in St. Paul that Wameng Moua, owner and editor, started in late 2003.[1179] Since that first edition, Moua had dedicated many volumes and editions of *Hmong Today* to the plight of the Hmong in Laos. Whenever the newspaper ran a story on the Hmong in Laos, it almost always came with moving and heart-wrenching pictures of Hmong men, women, and children in rags, crying for help and begging to be saved.[1180]

Along with newspapers, videos had also become powerful tools for the Hmong and the international community to disseminate information about the suffering of the Hmong in Laos, especially the videos that show the excruciating pain and suffering of the Hmong in the Lao jungle such as the series of videos that the Fact Finding Commission produced and released in the early 2000s and the documentary entitled "Hunted Like Animals" on the plight of Hmong refugees at Huay Nam Khao (White Water) in Petchabun, Thailand, that Rebecca Sommer, an independent documentary filmmaker and U.N. lobbyist, released in 2006.[1181] In these videos, the Hmong in the Lao jungle were shown, as Gary Yia Lee put it, "living in rags and under the cover of tree foliage, young men maimed and scarred by years of fighting against the Lao government and Vietnamese troops, children suffering from malnutrition and alleged chemical poisoning from bombs, old soldiers crying and begging to be saved from the atrocities of the ruling authorities and young girls allegedly gang-raped and stabbed to death by Lao soldiers."[1182] The moving images of women and girls being raped and butchered to death

---

[1178] Aljazeera, "Laos Denies Hmong Persecution," 16 March 2008; "Out of the Jungle," 13 March 2008; "Laos 'Lost Tribe' in Plea For Help," 14 March 2008.
[1179] Wameng Moua, "Betrayal, Lost Hope, And the Forgotten Tribe," *Hmong Today*, 31 December 2003.
[1180] See, for example, Wameng Moua, "Journalists Show Film of Hmong Trapped in the Jungles of Laos," *Hmong Today*, 17 June 2004; Wameng Moua, "Hmong Urges United Nations: 'Save Our People From Extinction!" Hmong Today, 24 March 2005; and "The Last Resistance," *Hmong Today*, 17 November 2006.
[1181] The videos produced by Fact Finding Commissions included "Pleas of Freedom Fighters in Laos," released in 2000; "Hope Lost," released in 2002; "Voices of Sorrow," in 2005; and "Starvation or Surrender," in 2005. Rebecca Sommer, "Hunted Like Animals," 2006.
[1182] Gary Yia Lee, "Dreaming Across the Oceans: Globalization and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2007): 11.

and men crying their heart out for help from the Lao jungle drove their Hmong audiences to tears and sent many indignant Hmong viewers scurrying for actions. At the "Hmong Human Rights Speaker Forum" that the Hmong Human Rights, an organization founded by students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, organized in December 2009, for example, audiences in the room were in tears when Vaughn Vang, Executive Director of Hmong Lao Human Rights Council, one of the invited speakers, showed clips of the plight of Hmong refugees in Thailand from Rebecca Sommer's "Hunted Like Animals" as part of his presentation. At the end of the conference, student organizers vowed to take more radical actions to bring human rights protection to the Hmong in the Lao jungle and to denounce the Lao PDR government for its egregious record of human rights violation.[1183]

Finally, the last significant event that brought international attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle was the arrest of General Vang Pao in the summer of 2007. On June 4, 2007, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents arrested Vang Pao, age 77, at his home in Westminster, California and charged him, seven Hmong supporters—Lo Chao Thao, Lo Thao, Youa True Vang, Hue Vang, Chong Yang Thao, and Seng Vue, Chue Lo—and a retired U.S. army officer named Harrison Ulrich Jack for allegedly plotting a violent overthrow of the communist Lao PDR government. The criminal complaint against Vang Pao and his co-conspirators and the arrests are the culmination of a six-month undercover investigation, dubbed "Operation Tarnish Eagle," in which an undercover FBI agent allegedly met with Harrison Jack and the alleged Hmong conspirators, including Vang Pao, on separate occasions to discuss plans to purchase and transfer military weapons worth several millions of dollars to Thailand and Laos to be used by Hmong resistance fighters against the Lao government.[1184]

Their alleged plot constituted a violation of the United States Neutrality Act, which prohibits private citizens from engaging in military expeditions against nations with which the United States is at peace. In a press release issued by the Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,

---

[1183] Hmong Human Rights, "Hmong Human Rights Speaker Forum, December 5, 2009." Author attended the forum the entire day.
[1184] United States v. Harrison Ulrich Jack, Case No. 207-MJ-0178 (E.D. Cal. Filed June 4, 2007), at http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/press_release/docs/2007/06-04-07JackComplaint.pdf.

Firearms and Explosives (ATF), U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott, for instance, explained, "The United States cannot provide a safe harbor to those plotting to overthrow a government with whom we are at peace. These defendants flagrantly violated numerous federal laws, including the Neutrality Act, in planning to topple the government of Laos." In the same press release, ATF acting director Michael J. Sullivan added, "We cannot tolerate our country being used as a staging ground for foreign coup attempts. These defendants had developed an audacious plan to overthrow the Government of Laos, and were seeking to arm themselves with automatic rifles, rockets and surface-to-air missiles."[1185] If convicted, he would spend the rest of his life in prison.[1186]

Like the arrest of the two European journalists and Rev. Naw Karl Mua, the arrest of Vang Pao brought more publicity to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. The arrest of Falise, Reynaud, and Mua in June 2003 received coverage mostly in Minnesota, but Vang Pao's arrest attracted international attention. The Hmong all over the world heard about the arrest on radios, saw it on TV and the internet, or read it in newspapers. When Vang Pao was arrested, I was in Laos. I did not know Vang Pao had been arrested in the United States until some of the Hmong people in 52KM informed me. Some had heard it on the radio. Others saw it on the local TV news channel. Only after I was informed did I read about it in the newspapers in the library of the University of Dongdok, Vientiane, Laos.[1187]

Vang Pao's arrest happened in the context of the United States war on terrorism. He was charged, as Tim Weiner of the *New York Times* put it, as a "Laotian bin-ladin" who plotted to "murder thousands and thousands of people just like Islamic fundamentalists did to the United States on September 11, 2001."[1188] The arrest came after the Hmong, largely because of their continued involvement in the fighting in Laos, had been classified as "terrorists" under the U.S. Patriot Act of 2001 and Real ID Act of

---

[1185] Interagency Press Release, "Operation Tarnished Eagle," Thwarts Plot to Overthrow the Government of Laos (June 4, 2007), at http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/press_release/docs/2007/06-04-07/JackPressRls.pdf.

[1186] Nick Schou, "The General's Last Stand," *Orange County Weekly*, 6 July-12 July 2007; Curt Brown, "Tuesday: Vang Pao charged in Lao plot," *Star Tribune*, 5 June 2007.

[1187] See, for example, "Laos Plot: Extensive $28m Invasion Plot Drawn Up," *The Nation*, 18 June 2007; "Hmong Man Held Over 'Plot'," *The Nation*, 20 June 2007; and "Hundreds Rally for Gen Vang Pao," *The Nation*, 21 June 2007.

[1188] Tim Weiner, "General Vang Pao's Last War," 48.

2005.[1189] Under these provisions, the Hmong, including the refugees in Thailand, were ineligible for resettlement in the United States because they were terrorists, or persons providing "material support" to terrorists.[1190] Xo Chia Vue, a 64 year-old man in a detention center in Bangkok, Thailand, for example, spent 14 years fighting for the United States during the Secret War. After years of separation from his two brothers and a son in Fresno, California, he hoped to reunite with them. Like hundreds of other Hmong asylum seekers and refugees still in Thailand, however, he was barred from resettlement in the United States because he was considered a part of the collectivity of Hmong "terrorists." Xo Chia's granddaughter was also barred from seeking asylum in the United States because she cooked for him in the jungle. That is, she had provided "material support" to a "terrorist."[1191]

In the United States, Vang Pao's arrest sent thousands of his Hmong supporters scurrying for action. To start, for many Vang Pao supporters, Vang Pao's arrest was another betrayal, perhaps the greatest betrayal, which the United States government had committed against Vang Pao.[1192] He had devoted fifteen years of his life to fighting communism in Laos for the United States during the Secret War. After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, he called his people to unite with the United States government to protect America from future attack.[1193] He, with the urging of Republican Senator Norm Coleman from Minnesota, had mobilized many of the Hmong elders, the veterans of the Secret War for Laos, all over the United States, not just in Minnesota, to vote twice for President Bush. Casting their votes for the Republican Party, Hmong veterans hoped that the Republican president would support their effort to fight the

---

[1189] Amanda Perez, "Patriot Act Classifies Hmong as Terrorists," KFSN-TV, 18 February 2007, Retrieved 23 March 2007, http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=local&id=5043637&ft=print; Anna Husarska, "Old Allies, Tagged 'Terrorist'," *Washington Post*, 16 December 2006, A19; "Anti-Terror Laws Exclude Vietnam Allies," *Associate Press*, 20 February 2007; Ann Schottman Knol, "People Without A Country: Increasingly Horrific Plight in Hmong Homeland Made Worse By the U.S. Patriot Act," *City Pages*, 17-24 May 2007, 8-11.

[1190] Jennie Pasquarella, "Blaming Terror's Victims," *Legal Times*, 29 May 2006; Refugee Council USA, "Material Support Problem: Punishing Refugee Victims of Terror," 8 March 2007, www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/ms-backgrd-info3-8-07.pdf, (accessed October 10, 2007).

[1191] Anna Husarska, "Old Allies, Tagged Terrorists," *Washington Post* (December 16, 2006).

[1192] Stephen Magagnini, "Hmong Sense New Betrayal," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 June 2007; Cathy Thao, "Free Our Leader!!!" *Hmong Times* 16 June 2007; Chong Jones, "Vang Pao and the U.S. Government, Marriage and Betrayal," *Hmong Today*, 1 July 2007.

[1193] "Hmong Leader Says that Terrorist Attacks Helped Unify Hmong and Other Americans," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 8 April 2002.

communist government in Laos and protect Hmong refugees in Thailand from harm.[1194] Yet, the Hmong were classified as terrorists and individuals providing "material support" to terrorists, and Vang Pao was arrested as a terrorist and by the authorities of the same president he had twice rallied his supporters to elect as their leader. For Vang Pao supporters, therefore, the United States government, Vang Pao's onetime ally, had once again betrayed him with his arrest.[1195] As the young activist, Pamela Xiong, said in a moving speech to the crowd of Vang Pao supporters at the rally in St. Paul in May 2009:

> We found ourselves in disbelief that a man who's spent his lifetime finding peace, preaching love and promoting unity, would be indicted by the very government which he built his career and legend of heroism and sacrifice being loyal to. We felt *betrayed* because when our glorious leader was hauled off into a cell in chains, the ENTIRE community felt as though we were all stuck in a cell. We no longer noticed the comfort of our own freedom and everyday we felt prison walls closing in on the sacrifice our people had made for this country.[1196]

It was, perhaps, this feeling of betrayal that sent thousands of Hmong across the country to the streets in cities in California, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to demand the United States government to drop all the charges against Vang Pao and let their leader go.

One effect of Vang Pao's arrest was the coming together of different generations of Hmong Americans for Vang Pao. At every rally in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California, thousands of first, 1.5, and second generation Hmong Americans stood side by side in solidarity with Vang Pao. In fact, many of the main organizers and spokespersons for Vang Pao at the rallies were young college-educated 1.5 and second generations who generally were less sympathetic and interested in Vang Pao in the past. "Give Justice and Rights for the Hmong," and "Vang Pao is Innocent" were some of the signs that young supporters, dressed in white to symbolize peace and unity, carried as they marched to the courthouse in Sacramento, California to demand Vang Pao's immediate release. The generation gap that long divided many Hmong families was

---

[1194] Steven Doherty, "Political Behavior and Candidate Emergence in Hmong-American Community," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8, (2007): 1-35; Yang Lor, "Hmong Political Involvement in St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California," *Hmong Studies Journal* 10, (2009): 1-53.
[1195] Nick Schou, "The General's Last Stand," *OC Weekly* (July 6-July12, 2007).
[1196] Pamela Xiong, "Free Our Leader?" Speech printed in *Hmong Today*, 16 June-1 July 2009, 16 & 18.

bridged as they came together to ask for Vang Pao's release.[1197] As Mai Der Vang, a young activist, said in the wake of Vang Pao's arrest, "Most of the elders believe Vang Pao had a legitimate motive, that Laos was once our country too, and that the ongoing genocidal acts against the Hmong in Laos must cease. If you ask me, the generations are not as far apart as they appear to be. If young Hmong had more knowledge of Hmong history, they might be better able to empathize with the concerns and views of the older generation."[1198] For Xang Vang, one of Vang Pao's closest associates, the presence of different generations of Hmong at the rallies for Vang Pao showed that, despite their difference, the Hmong were also capable of uniting for a common cause. "It is a sad time for the Hmong people," he said, "but it is also time to show the world that we can unite and stand up for what we believe."[1199]

The arrest also brought new found respect for Vang Pao by some young people in the United States. Take, for example, the editorial of Wameng Moua, editor of *Hmong Today*, in which he called Vang Pao his hero and the Hmong hero:

> Gen. Vang Pao…is a man who, above and beyond everything we may know about him, is so devoted to his people that he has sacrificed his own happiness all this time to remain true to those who need him the most—those Hmong who have been suffering in Laos all these years. It's no secret. Every Hmong New Year for the last 30 plus years, this guy gets on stage and huffs and puffs about how he will lead us back to Laos. Those of us too young to care about Laos really never gave it much thought, dismissing the speech as yet another empty promise among the list of other disappointments we've seen from Hmong leadership. And yet our parents still honored the man as though he just opened the sky and handed civilization to the Hmong people. To them, the General represented everything a George Washington or a Martin Luther King was to their respective constituents: Through bravery and innovation, he delivered a higher standard of living and a taste of the promised land. To us, the General was this old guy in an ill-fitting suit who was at the end of his tenure as leader of the Hmong people. We learned

[1197] Cathy Thao, "Free Our Leader!!" *Hmong Times*, 16 June 2007, 1 & 8; May Chan, "Sacramento: Thousands Turn Out in Support of Vang Pao," *Hmong Times*, 1 July 2007, 1 & 6.
[1198] Mai Der Vang, "Vang Pao Case Bridges Hmong Generational Divide," *New America Media*, 18 June 2007.
[1199] "General In Trouble: Hmong Unite Like Never Before," *Hmong Today*, 15 June 2007, 12-13 & 15.

> to despise his pandering, his pleas for support. We called him a liar and a cheat and cheered when the attorney general dismantled the foundation named after him. But *all along, we were blinded by our youth*. We took our cake lives in America for granted, never appreciating the blood that was spilled so that we could enjoy life in the greatest, most free nation in the world. All along, this mountain of man was still fighting against the enemies of the Hmong. He was still loyal, especially to those who were hidden away in the jungles of Laos too weak to fight. Even now after heart bypass surgery and a number of other health ailments, General Vang Pao remains the hero of the Hmong. It saddens me so much to realize that I hadn't seen this man's love until now…. When others would have enjoyed an endless life of retirement and tranquility that a man in his position could have taken advantage of, General Vang Pao never quit. He never let go of the dream, the promise. He is truly a man of integrity and fortitude. *He is my hero. He is the Hmong hero*. His legacy is forever intact.[1200]

Most of all, the arrest exposed young people to the second war in Laos or the ongoing fighting in the Lao jungle, encouraged them to sympathize with their parents and their perspectives. As Mai Der Vang added:

> I believe much of our past is linked to our present state, which cannot be ignored in the case of those Hmong in Laos who continue to endure genocidal acts and extreme human rights abuses at the hands of the Lao military. From the elders' perspective, our past evokes memories of a lost motherland and the continued search for a place to call home. I recently asked my mother what she would do if the opportunity to return to Laos was presented. If political conditions improved, she responded, she would choose to return. The terrain of the United States, she explained, could never compare to the natural beauty of the Lao highlands.[1201]

After Vang Pao's arrest, following the example of young activists in the Twin Cities, Fresno, and Sacramento, the Hmong Student Association of Colorado (HSAC) organized what they called a "Big Bang" for April 30, 2008. The HSAC is an umbrella organization that represents students from various colleges and universities in Colorado,

---

[1200] Wa Meng Moua, "Letter from the Editor," *Hmong Today*, 16 June 2007, 5.
[1201] Mai Der Vang, "Vang Pao Case Bridges Hmong Generational Divide," *New America Media*, 18 June 2007.

including University of Colorado at Denver, University of Colorado at Boulder, Front Range Community College, Colorado State University, and Colorado School of Mines. On that day, Hmong college students planned to come out to protest the "genocide" of the Hmong in Laos simultaneously in their respective colleges and universities in Colorado. By engaging in rallies at multiple sites, they hoped to express their solidarity with Hmong victims in Laos and bring more attention to the persecution in Laos. "It's time we combine our organizations, our efforts, and our lives together to raise this cause to a global level, in which all of the world will hear our one voice," said its organizers. "This event, the Big Bang on April 30th, 2008, is to create an ALL COLLEGE CAMPUS RALLY about Hmong genocide. Just as the name implies, the Big Bang is supposed to be BIG in starting a transformation. In this particular case a transformation of humanity in which it will start a chain of greater events that will lead to the end of the Hmong genocide." Framing their struggle as a struggle for justice, Big Bang organizers added, "We must be heard from everywhere. We can no longer be passive. We have to be assertive and fight for justice. We can do anything as long as we are united with this common goal: to put an end to the Hmong Genocide."[1202] The Hmong students in Colorado never actually carried out the Big Bang. However, news of Hmong political affairs in Laos and Thailand continue to saturate the main website of the Hmong Student Association Colorado, demonstrating a heightened consciousness of the interrelatedness of the Hmong in the diaspora and an increased interest in politics in the homeland.[1203]

Vang Pao's Release

On September 18, 2009, after more than two years of community outcry and rally, the United States government finally dropped all the charges against Vang Pao. Federal prosecutors offered no explanation for their decision to drop the charges against Vang Pao other than that, after two years of sifting through evidences, they did not have

[1202] Hmong Student Association of Colorado, Email Announcement of the Big Bang on April 30, 29 April 2009.
[1203] See their website at http://hmongstudent.org.

enough evidences to prosecute him.[1204] For documentary filmmaker Roger Warner, the case against Vang Pao was based on bogus or false information. The evidences were exaggerated and largely based on a memo, called Operation Popcorn, which a David Vang had written.[1205] Vang, who had no military experience and was unemployed and months behind on his mortgage payments, was reportedly promised $5,000 to write this action plan for the so-called coup, but he never got the five grand he was promised. The memo, for Warner, "reads like the outline for a bad movie script. It's delusional fantasy, with no logistics to speak of, no plans for getting those black-market weapons and mercenaries to Asia, no way to get from A to B." Moreover, Warner argued, the case against Vang Pao was weak because "the feds' undercover operative, who works for the ATF (the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms), was the co-creator of the so-called plot." He was the person who offered to sell weapons to the retired Army colonel Harrison Jack who, in turn, pitched the deal to the Hmong. The Hmong Americans who were arrested "didn't hatch the idea for this plot, or at least anything this ambitious."[1206]

Immediately after he was released, Vang Pao went back to work on finding a solution to the conflict in the jungle of Laos. His arrest had not stopped Vang Pao from continuing to engage in transnational politics. On December 22, 2009, three months after U.S. federal authorities dropped the charges against him, Vang Pao announced in Fresno, California, that he wanted to return to Laos after thirty-five years in exile to negotiate for peace in Laos. On January 11, 2010, the general said, he would meet with Lao officials at the Friendship Bridge between Nong Khai, Thailand, and Vientiane, Laos, to discuss peace and reconciliation between the Hmong in the diaspora and the Lao government and bring an end to the conflict in Laos. "We have to make a change right now," Vang Pao said to a crowd of Hmong supporters. "The government of Laos has tried to open the

---

[1204] Stephen Magagnini, "Hmong Express Relief Over End of Case for Vang," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009; Denny Walsh, "Feds Drop Charges Against Hmong Leader Vang Pao," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009; Eric Bailey and My-Thuan Tran, "Charges Against Californian Hmong Leader Accused of Plotting to Overthrow Lao Government Are Dropped," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 2009; Jesse McKinley, "U.S. Drops Case Against Exiled Hmong Leader," *New York Times*, 19 September 2009; Eric Bailey and My-Thuan Tran, "Federal Charges Dropped Against Hmong Leader Vang Pao," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 2009.

[1205] David Vang, "Operation POPCORN: A Comprehensive Plan of Action, Coup Operation," no date. Classified as Government Exhibit 1. [Accessible through the UW-Madison Library]

[1206] Roger Warner, "On Exaggeration, Context and the Wages of A Covert War," *Pioneer Press*, 20 June 2007. See also, Roger Warner, "The Weirdest Terrorism Court Case in America," *Huffington Post*, 11 March 2009.

door. We should put something on the table and sit down in peace."[1207] Three days later, the Lao PDR government responded to Vang Pao's plan to return to Laos to negotiate peace and reconciliation, saying that they would welcome anybody else but not Vang Pao. "If he comes to Laos soon, he must submit to the death sentence that was handed down against him in absentia by the Lao People's Court after the present regime took power in 1975," Lao Foreign Ministry spokesman Khenthong Nuanthasing said. Vang Pao, the Lao spokesman continued, had nothing to offer to the Lao PDR, and the government in Vientiane "has nothing to deal with him." "Without Vang Pao," Khentong explained, "we can develop Laos and we don't need him."[1208] Vang Pao's attempt at reconciliation ended in failure.

Future of Hmong Transnational Politics:
Reconciliation or Separation

At the time of this writing, Thailand and Laos had ended the refugee mess in Thailand by deporting all Hmong refugees in Huay Nam Khao and the detention center in Nong Khai back to Laos. On December 28, three days after the Lao PDR government responded to Vang Pao's plan, 5,000 Thai troops and security officers rounded up the 158 Hmong refugees in a prison compound in Nong Khai and the last 4,000 Hmong in Huay Nam Kham and sent them across the Friendship Bridge to Laos.[1209] Hmong transnational politics, however, persisted because the Hmong in the diaspora still do not know fates and whereabouts of the Hmong repatriates. In 2006, after the UNHCR demanded access to the 7,000 Hmong in Ban Huay Nam Khao and the 152 Hmong refugees in detention in Nong Khai, Thailand flatly rejected their request. Meanwhile, the Lao government fired

---

[1207] Stephen Magagnini, "Vang Pao Says He's Return to Laos: Ex-General Is Aiming for Reconciliation," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 December 2009; Kim Briggeman, "General Who Brought Hmong to Bitterroot, Missoula Vows Liberation of Those Left in Laos," *The Missoulian*, 26 December 2009; Roger Warner, "No Thanks to the State Department, the Last Remnant of the Vietnam War May Be About to End," *The Huntington Post*, 23 December 2009.
[1208] Supalak Ganjanakhundee, "Laos Shuns Vang Pao's Plans," *The Nation*, 26 December 2009; Supalak Ganjanakhundee, "Laos Says No to Gen Vang Pao's Plea," *The Nation*, 25 December 2009.
[1209] Rachel Harvey, "Repatriated Hmong Arrive in Laos," *BBC News*, 26 February 2010; Ron Corben, "Thailand Begins Repatriation to Laos of Hmong Migrants," *Bangkok Post*, 28 December 2009; Seth Mydans, "Thailand Begins Repatriation of Hmong to Laos," *New York Times*, 28 December 2009.

back, blasting the UNHCR for interfering in state's domestic affairs.[1210] Back then, the Pathet Lao government also insisted that Vang Pao was the main culprit for the continuing refugee problem in Thailand. It was he, the Lao government charged, who insisted on having a base in Thailand from which to continue his resistance against the Pathet Lao government. It was also he who continued to discourage Hmong refugees from accepting neither resettlement nor repatriation.[1211] To this day, the Lao PDR government still denies access for international aid agencies, human rights organizations, and other third parties to go and check on the status of the repatriates.

At the same time, the fighting between the Lao PDR government and the Hmong in the Lao jungle has not ended, and the secret war rages on.[1212] The Hmong and the Lao PDR government still fight a secret war in the Lao jungle. The lives and destinies of the Hmong people and the Lao PDR government are still affected by this legacy of the United States Secret War of the 1960s. Even after the whereabouts of the repatriates are revealed and the safety of the repatriates secured, Hmong transnational politics will continue because the fighting in the Lao jungle has not been resolved. It was unfortunate that the Lao PDR government had rejected Vang Pao's proposal to sit down and discuss a plan to end the fighting. As long as the fighting in the Lao jungle has not ended, Hmong transnational politics will continue in spite of the potential charge of the Hmong in the diaspora as perpetual foreigners or terrorists for their role in the conflict in Laos. As long as the people in the Lao jungle are also not fully accepted as legitimate Lao residents and citizens and reintegrated into Lao society, the Hmong in the diaspora will continue to fight for their safety and try to find a safe place or a home for the Hmong living in the jungle.

[1210] "Lao Blasts UN on Hmong," *Bangkok Post*, 15 December 2006; "No Third Party Involved in the Repatriation of Hmong Laos," *Yahoo News*, 26 December 2006; and "UN Right Chief Cautions Thailand on Returning Hmong to Laos," *International Herald Tribune*, 26 December 2007.

[1211] "Refugee Problem: Hmong Chief Vang Pao Blamed, Vientiane say the refugee problem in Thailand is work of the pro-U.S. leader," *The Nation*, 14 July 2006; "Ethnic minorities blame Laos for exodus: Vang Pao," *The Nation* 16 July 2006.

[1212] Roger Arnold, "Still A Secret War," *Digital Journalist*, October 2006, at http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0610/dis_arnold.html, accessed 26 June 2009; Roger Arnold, "Update: Still A Secret War, Part II," *The Digital Journalist*, August 2007, http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0708/still-a-secret-war-part-ii.html, accessed 26 June 2009; Thomas Fuller, "Old U.S. Allies, Still Hiding in Laos," *New York Times*, 17 December 2007; Thomas Fuller, "CIA-Backed Soldiers Still on Run," *New York Times*, 24 December 2007; Amnesty International, "Lao People's Democratic Republic, Hiding in the Jungle: Hmong Under Threat," 23 March 2007.

Today, the United States, the Lao government, and the Hmong must find a way to end this conflict. The fighting in the past thirty-five years has cost millions of dollars and thousands of lives on both sides of the conflict. If the conflict continues, it would become increasingly difficult for the Hmong in the diaspora and the people in the Lao jungle to compromise for anything less than complete self-determination or an autonomous Hmong state. More violence and more death will engender more hostility and more desire for vengeance. As Yang Long, a radio operator and communication expert during the Secret War and a community elder and activist in St. Paul, told me, "There is something working in the world. If you don't love a people, there will always be a conflict for a long, long time. One person dies, but one person is also born. There is still that conflict. It will go on until the government of that land says, 'If we don't love these people, then that conflict will never die.' So even all the grandparents are killed, the grandchildren will still be fighting."[1213] The cycle of violence and warfare will repeat itself if the parties involved do not make a concerted effort to put an end to the conflict.

In fact, segments of the Hmong population in the diaspora appear to increasingly refuse to negotiate, compromise, or bargain for anything short of complete ethnic separation. Increasingly, these people insist on seeing the creation of a true Hmong nation or homeland in northern Laos. As the conflict drags on and the pain of displacement, marginalization, and minoritization both in the homeland and in the diaspora rages on, some Hmong in the diaspora hold the territorially defined homeland more important. For these Hmong in the diaspora, who attach their identities with a territorially defined homeland, ethnic separation seems more and more as the only and most reasonable solution to the conflict in Laos. Vang Pao and his supporters seem to have shifted away from their traditional approach of military confrontation for peaceful reconciliation with the Lao PDR government. However, most of the 1.5-generation college educated Hmong Americans who led organizations such as the World Hmong Congress, the Congress of World Hmong People, the Hmoob Mojthem Foundation, and many others are less willing to negotiate. They increasingly mobilize the Hmong in the diaspora for ethnic separation. More and more, they are not optimistic about any possibility of peaceful coexistence with the Lao people and the Lao PDR government.

[1213] Yang Long, interview with author, 12 March 2007.

For them, at the root of the conflict is not just ideological; it is racial. Ideology can change, they said, but one's race cannot be changed. When the conflict is ideology, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence are possible. However, when the conflict is race, as the conflict in Laos, the only and best solution is ethnic separation—that is, the separation of the Hmong from the Lao society altogether. This, for them, is the only way to lasting peace. As Yuepheng Xiong, co-founder and spokesperson for the Hmoob Mojthem Foundation, explained,

> We can see from history that Hmong are a people who value independence and freedom. They like to live on their own. They always want to have something they can call their own. Even if you push for integration or reintegration into Lao society now, Hmong will not be satisfied in the future. They will change their mind, and they will want to fight for their own state in the future."[1214]

The failure of the Lao PDR government to reintegrate the men, women, and children who surrendered in the past into Lao society and the continued fighting between government troops and the Hmong in the jungle thirty-five years after the Secret War in Laos are undeniable proofs that peaceful coexistence within the same nation-state is not possible for the Hmong living in the Lao jungle and the Lao PDR government.[1215] The refusal to engage in constructive dialogues with Vang Pao further confirmed their suspicion that Laos was not interested in reconciliation.

In the new millennium, even other less well-known groups, such as A Message From God, the Poj Koob Yawm Ntxwv (Gods and Ancestors), and the Northern Lao Development Project (popularly known as 411), were also focused on Hmong ethnic separation. The former aimed to promote the message of global peace and unity, which they claimed was the message from God and a message which God had chosen to promote through a Hmong prophet from the Xiong clan in the Hmong community. Central to their activities was their effort to invite all the leaders of the world to come to Thailand in 2010 to hear God's message of global peace and unity from the Hmong

---

[1214] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 28 January 2009.

[1215] For more on the allegedly failed reintegration of several waves of Hmong who surrendered and came out from the jungle in early 2000s, see Amnesty International, *Lao PDR, Hiding in the Jungle: Hmong Under Threat*, 23 March 2007; United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction, *The Lao Conflict: Background, Basic Strategies and Intelligence*, (Fresno, California, 2007); Rebecca Sommer, *Report on the Situation in the Xaysomboun Speacial Zone and 110 Hmong-Lao Refugees Who Escaped to Petchabun, Thailand 2004-2005*, May 2006.

prophet. Embedded in his message, two of the prophet's messengers told me back in 2006, was peace and unity in Laos through the provision for the Hmong their own sovereign state.[1216] Like A Message From God, the second group, the Gods and the Ancestors wanted to promote Hmong unity and nationalism through the development of a pure Hmong national religion—an initiative also inspired by God and delivered in a dream to a Hmong prophet in Appleton, Wisconsin.[1217] The last group, formed on April 11, 2009, claimed to have set up multiple offices in Asia, including one in Hong Kong, one in Vietnam, and one in the Golden Triangle. It also claimed to have the support and permission of the United Nations to take over the development projects in nine provinces in northern Laos. Hmong self-determination and an independent Hmong state in northern Laos, they said, would soon be a reality.[1218]

Second generation Hmong Americans, doubtless, did not explicitly advocate ethnic separatism or an independent Hmong state in Laos. Nevertheless, they also increasingly engaged in activities that helped to sustain and nurture the flow of Hmong separatist politics in the homeland. In 2005, for example, a group of second-generation Hmong Americans chose the name "Team Chow Fa (Cob Fab)" for their group when they entered the 48 Hour Film Project contest. The group's six-minute film called "Into the Dark," which they made within 48 hours, was premiered at the Riverview Theater in Minneapolis on June 21. When asked why they chose to name their team "Chow Fa," Kang Vang, the film director/editor, made explicit connection to the Chao Fa resistance in the Lao jungle. In his words, Vang said, "I called our team Chow Fa (Cob Fab) because what we're doing is guerilla style filmmaking and the Chow Fa are resistance groups in the jungle. It's a way to raise more awareness about what's going on in Laos and represent what we're doing here."[1219] In 2007, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talents (CHAT) in St. Paul, Minnesota, chose "Hmongland" as its theme for its seventh

---

[1216] Two representatives from the group presented their message to author and Dr. Gary Yia Lee at the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University in the spring of 2008.
[1217] Dr. Prasit Leeprecha and author interviewed the priest and other leaders of the group in St. Paul, Minnesota, in the fall of 2009.
[1218] Author met and talked with the representative of the Minnesota office in Minneapolis in summer of 2009. A copy of the alleged UN document giving the group control over development projects in northern Laos was given to author.
[1219] Samy Yang, "Team Chow Fa Competes in 48 Hour Film Contest," *Hmong Today*, 16 June 2005.

annual Hmong Arts and Music Festival. Describing the importance of its theme, CHAT Executive Director, Kathy Mouacheupao, wrote:

> "Where do the Hmong come from?" "Do the Hmong have a country of their own?" These are questions that are commonly asked of Hmong people. And, although the curiosity in these questions have a legitimate innocence to them, this notion of whether or not there is a Hmongland raises questions regarding how Hmong people are perceived both by Hmong and non-Hmong people. How does a population without a recognized country identify itself? How do residents of a displaced community respond to definition inside and outside of the community? These questions force an inward exploration of identity and worth for many Hmong and a world of wonderment for non-Hmong. CHAT asks artists to consider these questions and to share how they imagine what HMONGLAND would be like.[1220]

Again, in March 2008, CHAT engaged the idea of a Hmong homeland by writing and performing a play called "Hmongland" at the Bedlam Theatre in Minneapolis. The play "combines spoken word, documentary theater, storytelling and mythology….to investigate how…a population without a recognized country identify itself."[1221] While these young artists did not express any desire to return to Laos and did not advocate a separate Hmong homeland in Laos, their engagement with the idea of a Hmongland itself helped to sustain and nurture the link of the Hmong in the United States to the homeland in conflict.

Apart from these initiatives, there were the Jao Fa Grocery Store in Maplewood and the Hmongland Publishing Company in St. Paul, Minnesota. By naming a store after the Chao Fa or a publishing company as Hmongland, they inevitably brought attention to the plight of the Hmong people in the Lao jungle and encouraged the people to think about the future and possibility of an independent Hmong state, respectively. When asked why he named his store "Jao Fa (or Chao Fa)," Houa Xiong of Maplewood, responded:

[1220] Kathy Mouacheupao, Email Announcement of the 7th Annual Hmong Arts and Music Festival on August 16, 7 August 2008.
[1221] "Hmoob-land (Hmong-land)," written and directed by Robert Karimi, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent and Kaotic Good Productions, March 2009.

> I name the store "Jao Fa" because many of our people who are my generation [1.5 generation] were former Jao Fa. Now that we are in the United States and eating and sleeping well, we often forget about the Jao Fa who are still trapped in the jungle. I name the store "Jao Fa" to raise people's awareness about the Jao Fa in the jungle. I want the Hmong people to remember that we still have some Jao Fa in the jungle. I also name the store "Jao Fa" to keep the name "Jao Fa" alive, to prevent it from being erased from people's memory.[1222]

For the Hmongland Publishing Company, Yuepheng Xiong, its owner and the owner of Hmong ABC [Arts, Books, and Crafts] store on University Ave in St. Paul, explained that he "purposefully chose that name to inspire the Hmong toward the goal of a Hmong land." "Legally and officially," he explained, "it is a business. It is a publishing company. But behind that, it is a way to raise people's nationalist consciousness. It is a way to promote Hmongland [the country] without promoting. It is to make people conscious of Hmong nationalism without causing too much trouble."[1223]

There are also the widely distributed and viewed Hmong-made dramas on the Chao Fa resistance in the Lao jungle. The dramas, "Jao Fa [Caub Fab]," and "Jao Fa [Caub Fab 2]: Hmong Hero," released in 2009 and 2010, respectively, were laced with strong sentiments of patriotism and ethnic nationalism. Both show the torture of Hmong prisoners in Lao communist prison camps, the discrimination of the Lao against the Hmong, the rape of Hmong women and girls by communist soldiers, the helplessness of unarmed Hmong men to do anything as Lao communist soldiers harassed their wives, the random arrest and massacres of Hmong villagers, the alienation in the refugee camp, and the helplessness of life without a country. The same themes and story lines of war and displacement and the righteousness of the Chao Fa struggle in Laos also appear in the drama, "Vaj Tuam Thawj: The Legend of Chao Fa," which is not yet released but was premiered at the Third Hmong International Studies Conference at Concordia University in April 2010. In Hmong-made dramas such as these and other videos and music, as Hmong anthropologist Gary Yia Lee has observed,

---

[1222] Houa Xiong, interview with author, 10 November 2008.
[1223] Yuepheng Xiong, interview with author, 22 October 2008.

> Apart from the imposition of subjective cultural translation by video producers, there appears to be a strong streak patriotism and enforced nostalgia ingrained in many Hmong videos—whether in documentaries, music DVDs or the movie features. Many of the taped images, the Hmong traditional music used (whether singing or instrumental), the narratives in the documentaries, the dialogues and story lines of the movie (war, separation and homeland and nostalgia, inability to fit into a new country due to language and cultural differences)—appear to be imbued with the desire of the producers to remind the captive views of the homeland, to harp back on who and what the viewers are, and above all to appeal for those living 'comfortably' in exile not to forget 'the plight' of those they have left behind in Laos, China, Vietnam or Thailand. Many of the modern songs, for example, urge Hmong listeners to unite, to work hard, to progress in life and to love each other as a community.[1224]

These Hmong-made dramas and other documentaries, such as the documentary, "Hunted Like Animals," that Rebecca Sommer, an independent documentary filmmaker and U.N. lobbyist, produced, showing the Hmong in the Lao jungle living in rags, men and young men aimed and scarred by years of fighting, children suffering from malnutrition and "yellow rain," old soldiers and their women and children on their knees crying and begging for help and rescue, and young girls allegedly gang-raped and massacred by Lao soldiers, will continue to not only send the Hmong in the diaspora scurrying for political actions but also promote Hmong ethnic separatist nationalism. The torture, suffering, and discrimination of the Hmong under the Lao regime portrayed in these videos will continue to move Hmong viewers to tears and make them feel indignant toward the Lao government and the Lao people. They will continue encourage the Hmong in the diaspora to think that peaceful coexistence with the Lao people and government is not possible, and that only when they are governed by their own people and government can the Hmong truly drink from the well of freedom.

Most of all, globalization and the rise of the internet have also helped not only to expose more Hmong in the diaspora to the conflict in Laos but also enable Hmong long-

---

[1224] Gary Yia Lee, "Dreaming Across the Oceans: Globalization and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2007): 28.

distance nationalists in the diaspora to mobilize support among likeminded members around the world for their cause in the homeland. In the process of soliciting support and sympathy from their co-ethnics around the world and the international community, Hmong long-distance nationalists have devoted numerous websites to the plight of the Hmong in Laos and the conflict in the homeland.[1225] There are also hundreds of clips on Youtube on the plight of the Hmong and the conflict in Laos. Many of these clips call for the international community and the Hmong in the diaspora to intervene to save the people in the jungle.[1226] The Hmong in the diaspora also have a wide range of organizations and newspapers, maintain dozens of websites and e-mail lists, and broadcast a number of daily and weekly radios and television programs.[1227] Many of the diasporic websites created by the different groups engaged in the homeland conflict are replete with images of Hmong suffering, and many of these sites and images are designed to solicit sympathy and support for the groups' efforts in the homeland.[1228]

Today, the destinies of the Hmong in the Lao jungle, the Hmong in the villages and the cities inside Laos, the Hmong in the diaspora, and their relation with Lao PDR

[1225] See, for example, http://www.factfinding.org/media.html; http://www.hmongihrw.org/; and http://www.laohumanrightscouncil.org/.

[1226] See, for example, "Save the Hmong People;" "Save the Forgotten Hmong People;" "For My People;" "Hunted Like Animals;" "Still A Secret War;" "The Lost Tribes, Part 1, 2 &3;" "CIA Secret War: Abandoned Ally, Forgotten People;" "Hmong Genocide;" "East 101-Hmong Tribes, Part 1-2."

[1227] For newspapers, see, for example, *Hmong Tribune* at http://www.thehmongtribune.com/; *Hmong Today* at http://www.hmongtoday.com/; and *Hmong Times* at http://www.hmongtimes.com/. For radios, see, for example, Suab Hmoob Radio in Sacramento, California (at http://www.shrdo.com/); Hmong American Broadcasting Radio in the Central Valley of California (at http://www.thehmongradio.com/); Tsev Neeg Sib Koom TV/Radio (at http://www.hmongradio.tv/); Hmong American News Radio (at http://www.gohmong.com/); Hmong Minnesota Radio (at http://www.hmnradio.com/); Hmong Wisconsin Radio (at http://www.hmongwisconsinradio.com/); Hmong-Lao Radio (at http://www.h-lr.com/); Mojthem Radio (at http://www.mojthem.com/); Haiv Hmoob Radio (at http://www.haivhmoobradio.com/). For TV programs, see, Hmong TV Broadcasting (at http://www.hmongtv.com/); Hmong TV Network (at http://www.hmongtvnetwork.com/htv_home.php); and Hmong News at CrossingsTV (at http://www.crossingstv.com).

[1228] For studies on the Hmong media and the effect of Hmong media on Hmong transnational identity and community, see Louisa Schien, "Hmong/Miao Transnationality: Identity Beyond Culture," in *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, edited by Nicholas Tapp, Jean Michaud, Christian Culas, and G.Y. Lee, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004), 273-280; Lousia Schein, "Mapping Hmong Media in Diasporic Space," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 229-244; Gary Yia Lee, "Dreaming Across the Oceans: Globalization and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2007): 1-33; and Prasit Leeprecha, "Role of Media Technology in Reproducing Hmong Ethnic Identity," in *Living in a Globalized World: Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*, ed. Don McCaskill, P. Leeprecha, and He Shaoying, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mekong Press, 2008), 89-113; Jo Ann Koltyk, "Telling Narratives Through Home Videos: Hmong Refugees and Self-Documentation of Life in the Old and New Country," *Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 422, (Autumn, 1993): 435-449.

are in the hands of the Hmong in the diaspora and the Lao PDR government. Many Hmong in the diaspora continue to provide financial resources to the people in the jungle, and they continue to have a strong influence on the strategies and tactics of the Hmong fighters back in Laos. They continue to play critical roles in setting the terms of the debate around the issues of memory, identity, and conflict in the homeland. Many of them continue to romanticize the "old country," glorify the past, and keep the grievances alive in the different ubiquitous media technologies, including videos, cassettes, radios and the internet. Through these media, they continue to remind the Hmong in the homeland of the centuries of historical oppression that the Hmong had suffered as victims of foreign domination and to enforce their message of ethnic separation. The message of separation resonates powerfully among the Hmong both in the diaspora and in the homeland who have experienced racial discrimination and brutalities at the hands of the dominant non-Hmong races and nations. People with grievances resulting from their experience living under someone else's control will not hesitate to support the ideology of ethnic separation and the dream of a true Hmong homeland.

In short, the Hmong diaspora and the Lao PDR government must now choose between peace/reconciliation and ethnic separation. These, it seems, are the only two options that Hmong long-distance nationalists have presented for the Lao PDR government to consider. If the communist government and Hmong long-distance nationalists choose peace and reconciliation, they must immediately engage in constructive dialogues with each other and encourage the cessation of fire. The Lao PDR government must provide transparency and ensure the safety of the repatriates and those who come out from the jungle. The government must give full amnesty to the people and allow them to live healthy and productive lives, and they must punish any government official or soldier who exploits, seeks vengeance, and assassinates those who throw down their arms, surrender, and come out from the jungle, no matter what rank the government official or military officer occupy. To achieve peaceful reconciliation, the government must stop making statements and engaging in activities to provoke fear and distrust among the Hmong in the jungle and those in the diaspora, such as the statement that a government official reportedly made in early 2008 promising to promote government troops who kill a Hmong fighter one rank up, along with a reward of six million kip (U.S.

$600) per head.[1229] For sustainable peace in Laos, the government must also develop the economy, eliminate racial discrimination against minority ethnic nations, and end the corruptions within the government.[1230] On the other side, the Hmong, especially those separatist nationalists, must be willing and open to negotiate a peace treaty and accept the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the Lao. They must let go of their separatist aspiration and prioritize on saving the lives of the people in the jungle. Their unwillingness to compromise and negotiate for peace and reconciliation can prolong, rather than end or resolve, the conflict.[1231]

At the same time, if the Lao PDR government does not take the initiative to resolve the conflict, the Hmong in the diaspora is likely to continue to press for ethnic separation in the homeland. Until they can feel safe and have equal opportunity in the Lao government and society, Hmong long-distance nationalists, especially those of the separatist stream, will not stop fighting for a place where they can govern themselves and practice their own religion, culture and language. Unless they can feel at home in Laos, they will continue to find themselves a new home, a Hmong state. The fact that maps, flags, and other symbols of the nation-state are omnipresent in diasporic websites and publications is an indication that some Hmong long-distance nationalists are now more determined and more serious than ever before about fighting for their own Hmong homeland or state. They are certainly making the territorial conception of their identity more paramount, and they are less willing and less likely to support a compromise or a bargain that falls short of an independent Hmong state for some other instrumental end. Anyone or any group who accepts any compromised solution is likely to be condemned by separatist Hmong nationalists as appeasement or treason against the Hmong race or nation. Therefore, the government must the lead in negotiation and cease its attack on the

---

[1229] Sarah Jackson-Han, "Lao Troops Told 'Shoot to Kill' Hmong Rebels," *Radio Free Asia*, 8 February 2008; Michael Benge, "The Two Faces of Communist Laos," *Front Page Magazine*, 28 February 2008.
[1230] For analysis of corruption, discrimination, and other problems endemic to the Lao state and government, see, for example, Martin Stuart-Fox, "Political Culture of Corruption in the Lao PDR," *Asian Studies Review* 30, (March 2006): 59-75; Martin Stuart-Fox, "Laos: Politics in A Single-Party State," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2007): 160-180; Geoffrey Gunn, "Laos in 2007: Regional Integration and International Fallout," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1, (2008): 62-68; Gary Yia Lee, "Bandits or Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs* 4, (2000): 6-15.
[1231] Terrence Lyons, "Diasporas and Homeland Conflict," in *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, edited by Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111-129.

people. If not, the government might as well be prepared to give autonomy to the Hmong living in the Lao jungle and allow them to live on their own. Until the conflict in Laos is resolved, either through peaceful reconciliation or ethnic separation, the river of Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora will continue to flow, and many more people, on both sides of the conflict, will die as a result. Until the fighting ends, the Hmong in the diaspora will also continue to be bound to the Hmong in Laos and reinforce their link to the homeland through the conflict in Laos.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished Materials

Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University
- Hmong Oral History Project

Hmong Archives, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Bee Moua Photos and Papers
- Persons Files
- Organizations Files
  - Chao Fa Democratic Party of Laos
  - United Lao National Liberation Front
- Audiocassettes Collection
- Videos Collection

Immigration History Research Center (IHRC), University of Minnesota
- International Institute of Minnesota Records
  - Series 6: Refugee Case Files—Hmong (1975-2002)
  - Series 18: Casework Files—Caseworkers' Files (to 1993)
  - Series 19: General Case Files—"Not Made Cases" and "Open Cases" (1970-1980)
- Refugee Studies Collections
  - Series 6: Resource Files—Hmong Subseries
  - Series 7: Articles
  - Series 8: Newspaper Clippings
  - Series 9: Projects—Hmong Resettlement Studies
  - Series 10: Manuscripts

Minnesota Historical Society
- Hmong Oral History Project

Southeast Asian Archive, University of California-Irvine
- Brigitte Marshal Collections, 1981-1995
- Gayle Morrison Collections, 1969-2001

Thailand Information Center, Chulalongkorn University
- Institute of Asian Studies Reports and Manuscripts

Vietnam Archive, the Vietnam War Project, Texas Tech University
- Allen Cates Papers
- CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) Papers
- Douglas Pike Papers
- George Veith Papers
- Odgen William Papers
- Tom Matthew Papers
- William Colby Papers
- Oral History Project

Author Interviews

Interview with James Chang, May 8, 2009
Interview with Sue Her, November 10, 2009
Interview with Boua Hue Her, April 18, 2007
Interview with Heuky Chu-Yang Heu, May 27, 2007
Interview with Chai Lee, January 21, 2009
Interview with Anthony Lor Lee, March 26, 2009
Interview with Neng Ma Lee, February 2, 2009
Interview with Tougeu Leepaolo, April 23, 2007
Interview with Gymbay Moua, March 9, 2009
Interview with Yang Thao, January 13, 2009 and August 31, 2009
Interview with Yuesoua Thao, June 01, 2007
Interview with Blong Vang, September 25, 2008
Interview with Chia Koua Vang, March 19, 2009
Interview with Jim Vang, May 28, 2007
Interview with Kham Vang, December 4, 2007
Interview with Shong Kai Vang, December 8, 2006
Interview with Wa Her Vang, September 25, 2008
Interview with Xang Vang, April 20, 2007 and October 20, 2008
Interview with Amee Xiong, January 8, 2010
Interview with Houa Xiong, November 10, 2008
Interview with Yuepheng Xiong, October 22, 2008 and January 28, 2009
Interview with Cheng (Tousouyeng) Yang, March 6, 2009
Interview with Dao Yang, February 2, 2009
Interview with Long Yang, March 12, 2007
Interview with Sai Soua Yang, July 7, 2010
Interview with Vajtsua Yang, November 5, 2008
Interview with Xai Yang, February 15, 2009
Interview with Zhong Khang Yang, February 5, 2009 and March 1, 2009

Videos, DVDs, and Cassettes

_____. "Suav & Thaib Tshem Hmoob Txwv Feej Zos Qhov Tsuas (Chinese and Thai Destroying Hmong's Sacred Ground at Wat Tham Krabok), 2005-2006, film.

Ceeb Xeem Tsom. "Kwvtxhiaj Xov Tooj Cua Hmoob Chiang Mai," volume 1-4, recorded in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Fact Finding Commission (FFC). "Pleas of Freedom Fighters in Laos," Oroville, CA, 2000, film.

Fact Finding Commission (FFC). "Hope Lost," Oroville, CA, 2002, film.

Fact Finding Commission (FFC). "Voices of Sorrow," Oroville, CA, 2005, film.

Fact Finding Commission (FFC). "Starvation or Surrender," Oroville, CA, 2005, film.

Lauj, Soob Yeeb. "kwv txhiaj," recorded in Laos, 1975. Special collection of audiocassettes, Hmong Archive, St. Paul, MN. Item #: LA/KT/L56555/1975.

Lee, Txongpao and Mark E. Pfiefer, "Building Bridges: Teaching About the Hmong in Our Communities," Powerpoint Presentation by the Hmong Cultural Center, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Leepaolo, Tougeu. "Hmong Narrative of the Beginning of the World," audiocassette, (n.d), in author's possession.

Levine, Ken and Ivory Levine, *Becoming Americans: The Odyssey of A Refugee Family.* New York: Iris Films, 1983. Film.

Litting, Kay. *Being Hmong Means Being Free.* Green Bay: Northeastern Wisconsin In-School Telecommunications, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, 2000. Film.

Muas, Zeb. "Nco Txog Looj Ceeb," CD. Originally produced in 1983 but reproduced by DM Video Production, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2003.

Muas, Zeb. "8 Xyoo Peb Hmoob Tawg Rog," CD. Originally produced in 1983 but reproduced by DM Video Production, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2003.

Moua, Zeb. "Txog Thaum Twg Hmoob Mam Sib Sau," [When Will the Hmong Reunite], CD. Originally produced in 1983 but reproduced by DM Video Production, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2003.

Sommer, Rebecca. "Hunted Like Animals," 2006, film.

Thao, Kou and Dao Xiong. *Jao Fa, Caub Fab 2, Hmong Hero*. Milwaukee, WI: Hmong Media Production, 2010. Film.

Xyooj, Nruas Pov. "Hmoob Poob Tebchaws," and "Thaum Tsis Muaj Tus Coj," CD. Originally produced in the Ban Vinai in the early 1980s but reproduced by Bangkok Market in Minneapolis, MN.

Xiong, Yuepheng. *Phong Savan Rov Lawm Tov* (Phonsavan and Beyond). St. Paul: Hmong ABC, 2002, videocassette.

Xiong, Yuepheng. *Taug Txoj Lw Ntshav: Keeb Kwm Hmoob Nyob Suav Teb,* vol. 1. St. Paul, MN: Hmong ABC, n.d., 85 min., DVD.

Xiong, Yuepheng. *Taug Txoj Lw Ntshav: Txoj Kev Mus Cuag Huab Tais Hmoob,* vol. 2. St. Paul, MN: Hmong ABC, n.d., 90 min., DVD.

Vas Paj Ntxawg Yaj, "Hmoob Poob Teb Poob Chaw," [Hmong Lost Their Country or Hmong Becoming Refugees], audiocassette, no date,

Dissertations, Theses, and Papers

Cooney, Bridget M. "The International Policies, Refugee Spatialities, and the Hmong of Southeast Asia." MA thesis, California State University-Long Beach, 2005.

Duffy, John. "Writing From These Roots: Literacy, Rhetoric, and History in A Hmong-American Community." Ph.D dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison 2000.

Goldstein, Beth L. "Schooling for Cultural Transitions: Hmong Girls and Boys in American High Schools." Ph.D dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1985.

Katz, Rebecca L. "Yellow Rain Revisited: Lessons Learned for the Investigation of Chemical and Biological Weapons Allegations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Russia)." Ph.D dissertation, Princeton University, 2005.

Lee, Mai Na. "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration and Legitimacy Under French Colonialism." Ph. D dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005.

Leeprecha, Prasit. *Kinship and Identity among Hmong in Thailand*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2001.

Lor, Yia S. "Power Struggle between the Lor and Ly Clans, 1900-2000." BA thesis, California State University-Chico, 2001.

Moua, Tou Yer. "Hmong Values and Political Leadership as Perceived by the U.S. Hmongs." Ph.D dissertation, United States International University, 1994.

Scott, George C. "Migrants Without Mountains: The Politics of Socio-cultural Adjustment among the Lao Hmong Refugees in San Diego." Ph.D dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 1986.

Vang, Chia Youyee. "Reconstructing Community in Diaspora: Narratives of Hmong American/Refugee Resistance and Human Agency." Ph.D dissertation, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 2006.

Vang, Pobzeb, "Sino-Lao Relations in World Politics Since 1954: The Theory and Practice of Peaceful Coexistence." Ph.D dissertation, University of Denver, 1996.

Verrone, Richard Burks. "Behind the Wall of Geneva: Lao Politics, American Counterinsurgency, and Why the United States Lost in Laos, 1961-1965." Ph.D dissertation, Texas Tech University, 2001.

Yang, Shoua. “Hmong Social and Political Capital: The Formation and Maintenance of Hmong-American Organizations.” Ph.D dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 2006.

Newspapers and Periodicals

“31 Hmong refugees secretly repatriated to Laos,” *The Nation,* 18 August 2006.

“A Response from the Hmong.” *Twin Cities Readers*, 3-9 October 1990.

“Allies We Abandoned in Laos Are Still Fighting and Dying,” *The Washington Post,* 17 September 1978

“Anti-Terror Laws Exclude Vietnam Allies,” *Associate Press*, 20 February 2007

“Bangkok agrees to give details of Hmong to Laos,” *The Nation,* 9 December 2006.

“China Lost in Vietnam, Izvestia Says,” *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 April 1979.

“Chinese ‘Subversion’ Against Laos,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcast*, 5 March 1979.

“Crop of Resentment Growing,” *The Dispatch,* 20 October 1980

“Deportations Link to Pa Denied,” *Orange County Register*, 10 June 2007.

“Don’t Force Them Back,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 8 June 1993, 6A.

“Ethnic minorities blame Laos for exodus: Vang Pao,” *The Nation,* 16 July 2006.

“A Fledging Alliance,” *Time Magazine*, 17 June 1985.

“General Dreams of Returning to Laos,” *The Dispatch*, 20 October 1980,

“General In Trouble: Hmong Unite Like Never Before,” *Hmong Today,* 15 June 2007.

“Government Issues Government on PRC-SRV Border Conflict,” *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 22 February 1979, 1.

“Government tries to deport Hmong refugees,” *Bangkok Post,* 8 December 2006.

“Governor Urges Thailand to Further Move Against Rebel Generals,” *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts,* 10 March 1994

“Hmong Deportation Plan Backfires: Surayud Unnerved by Fierce Resistance,” *Bangkok Post,* 31 January 2007.

"The Hmong: Forgotten People of Laos," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003.

"Hmong Leader Says that Terrorist Attacks Helped Unify Hmong and Other Americans," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 8 April 2002.

"Hmong Man Held Over 'Plot'," *The Nation*, 20 June 2007.

"Hmong Protest Against Repatriation," *Washington Inquirer*, 18 December 1992.

"Hmong Rally in Support of Hunger Strike," *UNPO News*; available at http://www.unpo.org/content/view/8266/236; accessed on 18 March 2009.

"Hmong Refugee Fear Forced Repatriation," *Bangkok Post*, 4 December 1994, 24.

"Hundreds Rally for Gen Vang Pao," *The Nation*, 21 June 2007.

"Indictment Hurt Hmong Worldwide, Advocate Says," *Orange County Register*, 18 July 2007.

"Joint Communique Issued on Souphanouvong Delegation's Visit," *FBIS Daily Report*, 26 March 1979, H1-H18.

"Lao Blasts UN on Hmong," *Bangkok Post*, 15 December 2006.

"Lao Soldiers Torture, Rape, and Murder Four Hmong Girls. Boys Body Mutilated." *Hmong Today*, 23 September 2004.

"Lao Paper Calls on Mong to Foster Unity," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 November 1981.

"Laos Court Finds Foreigners Guilty," *BBC News*, 30 June 2003.

"Laos: Deeper into the Other War," *Time*, 9 March 1970.

"Laos Denies Hmong Persecution," *Aljazeera News*, 16 March 2008.

"Laos 'Lost Tribe' in Plea For Help," *Aljazeera News*, 14 March 2008.

"Laos Plot: Extensive $28m Invasion Plot Drawn Up," *The Nation*, 18 June 2007.

"Laotian Needlework From Rhode Island," *New York Times*, 26 March 1981.

"Laotian Officer Welcomes Thai Action Against Former Generals," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 7 March 1994.

"Legislation Is Introduced in U.S. Senate To Assist Hmong Veterans," *Asian American Press*, 30 April 1999, 1.

"Little Help from Friends," *Newsweek*, 23 December 1985, 27.

"Minnesota Minister Freed From Laos Prison Said He Did Not Admit Guilt," *Associated Press*, 12 July 2003.

"Military Wants Action Against Vang Pao's Men," *Bangkok Post*, 24 February 1994.

"National Construction Front Criticizes PRC Invasion of SRV, February 21, 1979," *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 22 February 1979, 12.

"Nhan Dan: Thailand Peking's Mercenary Base," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 22 November 1979.

"No Independent Observers, Lao Says," *The Nation*, 5 September 2007.

"No Third Party Involved in the Repatriation of Hmong Laos," *Yahoo News*, December 26, 2006.

"Our Forgotten Allies in Laos are Being Massacred," *Chicago Tribune*, 27 May 1979.

"Our Forgotten Allies are Being Massacred," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1979.

"Out of the Jungle," *Aljazeera News*, 13 March 2008.

"Poison Gas is Being Used against the Meo," *Agence France Presse Dispatch*, 26 September 1978.

"Poison Gas Used by Vietnam in Laos," *The Times* (London), 27 September 1978.

"Poison Attacks on Laos Tribes," *The Guardian*, 8 January 1978.

Poisonous Gases Reported Used on Laos Tribes," *The International Herald Tribune*, 23 October 1978.

"Police and Military Announce Action Against Lao Resistance in Sara Buri," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 28 February 1994.

"PRC Must Stop Threats, Interference in Laos," *FBIS Daily Report Asia/Pacific*, 8 March 1979, I1-12.

"Raids Staged From Thailand," *South China Morning Post (Hong Kong)*, 30 October 1993.

"Reactionaries' Schemes Against Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 8 October 1980.

"Refugee Problem: Hmong Chief Vang Pao Blamed, Vientiane say the refugee problem in Thailand is work of the pro-U.S. leader," *The Nation*, 14 July 2006.

"Refugees are usually victims of Crime," *The Dispatch*, 20 October 1980.

"Report Says Reagan Aid Sent POW Funds to Rebels," *Washington Post*, 14 January 1993.

"Response from the Yang." *Twin Cities Reader*, 10 October 1990.

"Road From Laos to Nicaragua." *The Economist*, 7 March 1987.

"Small-Scale Fighting Taking Place in Laos," *Agence France-Presse*, 14 July 2003.

"SRV Paper Says China Trains Refugees to Subvert Indochina," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 20 November 1979.

"Statement by President Clinton on the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 May 2000.

"Text of China's Statement on Withdrawal of Troops," *The New York Times*, 6 March 1979, 10A.

"Thai Army Unit Expels 320 Anti-Lao Rebels," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 30 September 1993.

"Thai Army Official Says Aid to Lao Resistance Now Cut Off," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 22 July 1992.

"Thai Military Said Exerting Pressure on Hmong Refugees to Return to Laos," *BBC News*, 10 September 2007.

"Thai Military Goes to Court to Rein In Lao Rebels," *The Straits Times*, 26 February 1994, 21.

"Thailand won't return 152 detained in Nong Khai," *Bangkok Post*, 13 December 2006.

"Thais Reportedly Force Exiles Back to Laos," *New York Times*, 17 March 1987, A5.

"Tibneeg Hmoob Nyob Lostsuas," *Hmong Today*, 1 July 2004, 1 & 18-19.

"Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation between the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the People's Republic of Kampuchea, February 18, 1979," *FBIS Daily Report*, 22 February 1979.

"UN wants end to sending Hmong to Laos," *Bangkok Post*, 12 December 2006.

"UN Right Chief Cautions Thailand on Returning Hmong to Laos," *International Herald Tribune* 26 December 2007.

"U.S. House Approves Vet Status for Hmong," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 30 April 1997, 4D.

"Vice Premier Teng at Bangkok Press Conference, Vietnam-Soviet Treaty Threatens World Peace and Security," *Beijing Review*, 17 November 1978.

"Vientiane seeks details of Hmong," *The Nation*, 31 November 2006.

"Vietnam Tells China Not to Touch Laos," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 14 March 1979.

"Wimol Says Vang Pao Faces Arrest in Thailand," *Bangkok Post*, 25 February 1994.

Allen, Martha Sawyer. "St. Paul Pastor, 2 Journalists Detained in Laos." *Star Tribune*, 12 June 2003.

Arnold, Roger. "Still A Secret War," *Digital Journalist*, October 2006.

Arnold, Roger. "Update: Still A Secret War, Part II," *Digital Journalist*, August 2007.

Bailey, Eric and My-Thuan Tran. "Charges Against Californian Hmong Leader Accused of Plotting to Overthrow Lao Government Are Dropped," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 2009.

Bailey, Eric and My-Thuan Tran, "Federal Charges Dropped Against Hmong Leader Vang Pao," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 2009.

Barry, Ann. "Laotian Needlework Comes to America," *New York Times*, 12 August 1985.

Barber, Ben. "We Share A Lot of Pain in Our Heart," *The Washington Times*, 3 December 1997.

Barber, Ben. "U.S. Honors Hmong Soldiers: Gift of Citizenship Promised to Veterans From Laos," *The Washington Times*, 15 May 1997.

Beck, Roy. "The Ordeal of Immigration in Wausau." *Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 4

(1994): 84-97.

Benge, Michael. “The Two Faces of Communist Laos,” *Front Page Magazine*, 28 February 2008.

Bixler, Mark. “Wavering Welcome: Foreign Policy Weighs Heavily on Refugees’ Entry to U.S.,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9 April 2003.

Bonner, Brian and Yee Chang, “The General’s Last Stand,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 28 July 1996, 1A.

Bonner, Brian and Yee Chang. “Leaders’ Differences Split Hmong Community.” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 1-7 June 1988.

Bonner, Brian and Yee Chang. “No Hiding from Fear.” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 2 April 1995.

Boffey, Phillip M. “Yellow Rain: New Support for Honeybee Theory,” *The New York Times*, 12 August 1985.

Briggeman, “General Who Brought Hmong to Bitterroot, Missoula Vows Liberation of Those Left in Laos,” *The Missoulian*, 26 December 2009.

Brown, Kurt. “Tuesday: Vang Pao charged in Lao plot,” *Star Tribune*, 5 June 2007.

Butterfield, Fox. “Teng Again Says Chinese May Move Against Vietnam.” *New York Times*, 1 February 1979.

Calkins, Royal and Denice Rios. “The General and the Hmong: A Tale of Betrayal,” *Fresno Bee* (Special Report), 23-24 July 1989.

Calkins, R. and D. Rios, “War Still Not Over for U.S. Hmong: Refugees Give Cash to General’s Resistance Campaign that may be a Fraud.” *Sacramento Bee*, 23 July 1989.

Chan, May. “Sacramento: Thousands Turn Out in Support of Vang Pao.” *Hmong Times*, 1 July 2007, 1 & 6.

Chanda, Nayan. “Cambodian: Fifteen Days that Shook Asia,” *FEER*, 19 January 1979.

Chardy, Alfonso. “Groups Won’t Cut Contra Aid,” *Dallas Morning News*, 16 June 1985

Corben, Ron. “Lao Arrests European Journalists, American in Battle with Rebels,” *Bangkok Post*, 11 June 2003.

Corben, Ron. “Thailand Begins Repatriation to Laos of Hmong Migrants,” *Bangkok Post*, 28 December 2009.

Coleman, Donald E. “A Hero’s Rites in Fresno,” *Fresno Bee*, 19 December 2002.

Congress of World Hmong People, “Call for the Creation of a Hmong State—Partition Laos,” *International Communication*, No. 615/99, 15 January 2008, 1-4.

Cowell, Alan. “Four Rebels Units Sign Anti-Soviet Pact,” *New York Times*, 6 June 1985.

Crossette, Barbara. “Laotian Migration Worries Thailand,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1984, A11.

Crossette, Barbara. “Laotians Still Pour Into Thailand Despite Efforts to Stem the Flow,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1985, A4.

Crossette, Barbara. “Laotian Refugees Crowd Thai Camp,” *New York Times*, 23 June 1985, 7.

Davies, Hugh. “Vietnam Troops ‘Using Death Gas on Tribesmen’,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 1979.

Dewhurst, Caroline. “Life at Ban Vinai,” *The Nation*, January 1985.

Doder, Dusko. “Moscow Cautions Beijing on Vietnam Intervention.” *Washington Post*, 9 February 1979.

Duchschere, Kevin. “St. Paul Hmong Fear for Refugees Facing Ouster from Camps,” *Star Tribune*, 24 April 1992, 1B.

Elmore, Mick. “Yearning to be Hmong,” *Irrawaddy*, May 2004.

Embassy of the United States of America, “The U.S. to Open A Refugee Resettlement Program for Lao/Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok,” *Press Release*, 18 December 2003.

Enwall, J. “Miao or Hmong?” *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter* 17, (1992).

Estrada, Heron. “Laotians Hope to Halt Repatriation,” *Star Tribune*, 28 May 1995, 1A.

Fadiman, Ann. “Heroes’ Welcome,” *Civilization*, August/September 1997, 52-61.

Falbo, Jean. “Laos Human Rights Conference Sponsored by Yale, Southern,” *Southern News*, 13 December 1990.

Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), 8 December 1979.

Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) *1976 Yearbook*, 202-203.

FBIS Daily Report Asia, 25 May 1993, 47-48.

FBIS Daily Report—People's Republic of China, 9 May 1979, C2.

FBIS, *Daily Report—People's Republic of China*, 16 February 1979, A6-A7.

FBIS Daily Report, 29 March 1979, K7-K9.

Ferguson, Ellyn. "Hmong Want Obama's Support Fighting Thailand's Forced Deportations,"
Post-Crescent Washing Bureau, 7 February 2009.

Fors, Heather. "Minnesota Hmong, Lao Veterans Rally in D.C. for Citizenship Bill," *Star Tribune*, 14 May 1999, A14.

Frommer, Frederic J. "Ventura Expedites Hmong Citizenship Bill," *Asian American Press*, 3 March 2000, 1.

Frommer, F. "House Committee Passes Bill to Ease Citizenship Rules for Hmong," *Asian American Press*, 7 April 2001.

Fuller, Thomas. "Old U.S. Allies, Still Hiding in Laos," *New York Times*, 17 December 2007.

Fuller, Thomas. "CIA-Backed Soldiers Still on Run," *New York Times*, 24 December 2007

Ganjanakhundee, Supalak. "Laos Shuns Vang Pao's Plans," *The Nation*, 26 December 2009.
Ganjanakhundee, Supalak. "Laos Says No to Gen Vang Pao's Plea," *The Nation*, 25 December 2009.

Garcia, Dominica. "In Thailand: Refugees' Horror and Misery," *New York Times*, 14 November 1978, A27.

Galvan, Louis. "Hmong Rally in Fresno for U.S. Intervention," *Fresno Bee*, 27 April 1994, A18.

Garrett, W.E. "No Place to Run: The Hmong of Laos," *National Geographic*, (1974): 78-93.

Gordon, Greg. "House Panel Acts to Help Hmong Vets Who Fought for CIA Gain Citizenship," *Star Tribune*, 12 June 1998, A16.

Greenberger, Robert. "Right-Wing Groups Join in Capitol Hill Crusade to Help Savimbi's Anti-Communists in Angola," *Wall Street Journal*, 25, November 1985.

Hamburger, Tom and Erick Black, "Hmong: Lost in the Promised Land," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, 21 April 1985.

Hamilton-Merritt, Jane. "Poison Gas War in Laos," *Reader's Digest*, October 1980, 1-8.

Hamilton-Merritt, Jane. "Tragic Legacy from Laos," *Readers Digest*, August 1981.

Hammond, Ruth. "Rumors of War," *Twin Cities Reader*, 25-31 October 1989.

Hammond, Ruth. "Rumors of War: Family Secrets, Part 2," *Twin Cities Readers*, 8-14 November 1980, 8-10 and 12-14.

Hammond, Ruth. "The Laos Connection," *Twin Cities Reader*, 14 November 1990, 12-13.

Hammond, Ruth. "Strangers in a Strange Land," *Twin Cities Reader*, 1-7 June 1989, 6-10.

Hammond, Ruth. "The Great Refugee Shakedown: The Hmong Are Paying to Free Laos—But What's Happening to the Money?" *The Washington Post*, 16 April, 1989.

Hammond, Ruth. "Sad Suspicions of a Refugee Ripoff." *Washington Post*, 16 April 1989.

Hammond, Ruth. "Family Secrets." *Twin Cities Readers*, 14 November 1989.

Hanners, David. "Hmong Put Pressure on Grams," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 9 May 2000, 1B & 2B.

Harvey, Rachel. "Repatriated Hmong Arrive in Laos," *BBC News*, 26 February 2010.

Her, Lucy. "Hmong Leader Presents Plans for Peace with Laos," *Star Tribune*, 27 November 2003, 9A.
Hmong World Congress. "WHC Officially Recognized Hmong Pahawh Written Language." *Media Newswire Press Release*, 4 March 2009.

HNN staff, "World Premier for 'Hunted Like Animals,' Set for Friday, St. Paul, MN," *Huntington News*, (November 23, 2006), at http://www.huntingtonnews.net/national/061123-staff-hla.html, (accessed April 21, 2007).

Hoge, Patrick. "State Probes Lao Refugee Aid Group," *Sacramento Bee*, 17 October 1990.

Hoge, Patrick. "Laotian Aid Unit Facing Funds Cutoff," *Sacramento Bee*, 26 June 1991.

Hopfensperger, Jean. "Bill Would Help Hmong Vets Get Citizenship," *Star Tribune*, 5 April 1990, 1B & 7B.

Hotakainen, Rob and Sean Madigan, "Showdown Set Over Hmong Citizenship Rules," *Star Tribune*, 11 May 2000.

Hotakainen, Rob and S. Madigan, "Grams Gets Hatch's Backing on Hmong Citizenship Bill," *Star Tribune*, 12 May 2000, A6.

Husarska, Anna. "Old Allies, Tagged 'Terrorist'," *Washington Post*, 16 December 2006, A19.

Interagency Press Release, "Operation Tarnished Eagle," Thwarts Plot to Overthrow the Government of Laos (June 4, 2007), at http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/press_release/docs/2007/06-04-07/JackPressRls.pdf.

Jackson-Han, Sarah. "Lao Troops Told 'Shoot to Kill' Hmong Rebels." *Radio Free Asia*, 8 February 2008.

Jadaan, Lee S. "UWP Students Take Action in Washington, D.C. for Displaced Hmong Population," *Daily Pioneer News*, 17 March 2009.

Jones, Chong. "Vang Pao and the U.S. Government, Marriage and Betrayal." *Hmong Today*, 1 July 2007.

Johns, Michael. "Acts of Betrayal—Persecution of Hmong." *National Review*, 23 October 1995.

Johns, Michael. "Let's Not Forget Laos." The World & I, September 1995, 74-79.

Johnson, Scott. "Hundreds Demonstrate Outside Vietnamese Embassy Demanding Freedom," *World Press* (April 27, 2007). http://cih07.wordpress.com/2007/04/27/hundreds-demonstrate-outside-vietnamese-embassy-demanding-freedom/ (accessed on August 29, 2007).

Johnson, Steven. "Extortion Probe Botched, Refugees' Complaints Were Ignored, State Says," *San Jose Mercury News*, 4 November 1990.

Joshi, Vijay. "St. Paul Pastor, 2 Others Sentenced to 15 Years in Laotian Jail," *Associated Press*, 30 June 2003.

Karnow, Stanley. "Free No More: The Allies Americans Forgot," *GEO* 2 (1980), 9-10, 14, 17-26.

Karnow, Stanley. "U.S. Giving Little Attention to Meos, Once Allies, Now Genocide Target," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1979.

Keller, Bill. "Of Heart and Home and the Right to Work," *New York Times*, 11 November 1984.

Kamiol, Robert. “Laotian Resistance Emerges from Mist,” *International Defense Review* 3, (1990): 270.

Kaufman, Marc. “Hmong Leader’s Vanishing in Laos Reverberates in U.S.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 May 1994.

Kaufman, Marc. “Allies Abandoned: The United States Enlisted the Hmong to Help Fight the Cold War. Now It is Shunning them during the Peace,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 27 February 1994.

Kaufman, Marc. “U.S. Lawmakers Turn Up the Heat for Hmong Fighting Repatriation,” *Philadelphia Inquirer,* 3 October 1994.

Kaufman, Marc. “At Long Last, U.S. Honor the Hmong: Bittersweet Ceremony Salutes Ethnic Group’s Aid in Vietnam War,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 15 May 1997, A03.

Kelly, Neil. “Meos Lose Home in the Mountains,” *The Bangkok Post*, 12 October 1978.

Kennedy, Tony and Paul McEnroe. “Ex-Guerrilla’s Gamble for Peace Backfires,” *Star Tribune,* 5 July 2005.

Knol, Ann Schottman. “People Without A Country: Increasingly Horrific Plight in Hmong Homeland Made Worse By the U.S. Patriot Act,” *City Pages*, 17-24 May 2007, 8-11.

Khongsawatkiat, Somtawin. “Plight of Indochinese Refugees in U.S.,” *The Nation*, 21 June 1981.

King, Wayne. “New Life’s Culture Demons Torture Laotian Refugees,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1981.

Kreiger, John. “Forgotten U.S. Allies Still Waging the Vietnam War,” *U.S. News & World Report,* 14 September 1992, 49.

Krauthammer, Charles. “Essay: The Reagan Doctrine.” *Time*, 1 April 1985, 54-55.

Krauthammer, Charles. “Support the Contras,” *Washington Post*, 11 January 1985.

Kucewicz, William. “Bee-Feces Theory Still Has No Sting,” *Wall Street Journal*, 17 September 1987.

LaVenture, Tom. “Welcome Home: Rev. Mua Relieved But Grieves for Hmong Laos,” *Asian American Press*, 18 July 2003, 1&9.

LaVenture, Tom. “Trek To Help Save Hmong Allies,” *Asian American Press*, 18 June 2004.

Lescaze, Lee. "Laotians Waiting in Thai Camps for Chance to Fight Again." *Washington Post* 26 March 1979, A19.

Lee, Hlee. "First Meeting of the United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction," *Hmong Times*, 1 December 2004, 10.

Lewis, Michael. "Homeland Lost to U.S. Promises." *Modesto Bee*, 30 April 1995.

Lindsay, Jeff. "Why Are the Hmong in America?" *Future Hmong Magazine*, June 2002, 14-15.

Lindsay, Roger. "How Mao the Meo?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 January-1 February 1969, 182.

Lis Foom, Leej Nkaub. "French Hmong Protest in Paris," *Hmong Today*, 6 October 2005.

Lo, Ching. "Amee Xiong—Study, Work, Volunteer." *Hmong Today*, 10 March 2005, 11.

Madigan, Sean. "Hmong Citizenship Bill Clears House Committee," *Star Tribune*, 31 March 2000, A21.

Madigan, Sean. "House Eases Citizenship Rules for Hmong Vets," *Star Tribune*, 3 May 2000, A1 & A12

Madigan, Sean, T. Hamburger and R. Hatakainen. "Deal Reached on Hmong Vets Bill," *Star Tribune*, 19 May 2000.

Madigan, Sean. "Clinton Sings Citizenship Bill for Hmong Veterans." *Star Tribune*, 27 May 2000, A4.

Magagnini, Stephen. "Vang Pao Says He's Returning to Laos: Ex-General Aiming for Reconciliation," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 December 2009.

Magagnini, Stephen. "Hmong Express Relief Over End of Case for Vang," *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009.

Magagnini, Stephen. "Vang Pao Says He's Returning to Laos: Ex-General is Aiming for Reconcilation," *Sacramento Bee*, 23 December 2009.

Magagnini, Stephen. "Hmong Sense New Betrayal," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 June 2007.

Marin, Frank W. "A CIA-Backed Guerilla Who Waged a Secret War in Laos Puts Down Roots in Montana," *People*, 29 August 1977.

Marc, Diana. "Hmong Chief Laid to Rest in Fresno." *Fresno Bee*, 24 December 2002.

Marks, Tom. "Chao Fa: SOF Joins H'mong." *Soldier of Fortune*, January 1992.

Martins, Susana. "Conference A Mixture of Truth, Lies," *Southern News,* 31 December 1990.

Matichon (Bangkok), 29 August 1980 (FBIS, 29 August 1980).

McEwen, Bill. "Destined for Fresno." *Fresno Bee*, 9 May 2004.

McKinley, Jess. "U.S. Drops Case Against Exiled Hmong Leader," *New York Times*, 19 September 2009.

Morin, Stephen P. "Many Hmong, Puzzled by Life in U.S., Yearn for Old Days in Laos," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 1983.

Moua, Mee. "Mee Moua: MN State Senator, First Hmong American Elected to A State Legislature, A Closer Look," *Hmong Is You* 3, (Summer 2007): 8

Moua, Mee. "United Nations Special Rapporteur to Hear Testimony on Grave Desecrations in Thailand," *Hmong Times*, 3 December 2008.

Moua, Mee. Welcome Remarks at the UN Hearing on Desecration of Hmong Graves in Thailand, on the Occasion of the Visit of Special Rapporteur James Anaya, 10 December 2008.

Moua, Myka. "Rally Demands Answers," *Hmong Today*, 3 March 2006.

Moua, Wameng. "Arrived! The Long Walk for Freedom Reaches Washington, D.C." *Hmong Times,* 26 April 2004, 1 & 10.

Moua, Wameng. "Dr. Pobzeb Vang: A Life of Service," *Hmong Today*, 25 August 2005.

Moua, Wameng. "Hmong Graves at the Wat Being Exhumed," *Hmong Today*, 1 December 2005, 11.

Moua, Wameng. "Betrayal, Lost Hope, And the Forgotten Tribe," *Hmong Today*, 31 December 2003.

Moua, Wameng. "Long Walk For Freedom Takes The First Steps to Washington, D.C.," *Hmong Today*, 17 June 2004.

Moua, Wameng. "Minnesota Pushes For Human Rights Justice," *Hmong Today*, 28 April 2006, 1 & 11

Moua, Wameng. "500 Demonstrators Rally Against NTR In Front of Rep. Betty McCollum's Office," *Hmong Today*, 22 April 2004.

Moua, Wameng. “Journalists Show Film of Hmong Trapped in the Jungles of Laos,” *Hmong Today*, 17 June 2004.

Moua, Wameng. “Hmong Urges United Nations: ‘Save Our People From Extinction!” *Hmong Today*, 24 March 2005.

Moua, Wameng. “The Last Resistance,” *Hmong Today*, 17 November 2006.

Moua, Wameng. “Letter from the Editor,” *Hmong Today*, 16 June 2007, 5.

Moua, Wameng. “Wat Tham Krabok Team Declares the Twin Cities Are Ready For the New Comers,” *Hmong Today*, 6 May 2004.

Moua, Wameng. “Hundreds Gather to Protest Grave Diggings,” *Hmong Today*, 17 March 2006.

Moua, Wameng. “Journalists show film of Hmong trapped in the jungles of Laos: Audience moved to tears after viewing the desperate situation.” *Hmong Today*, 17 June 2004, 1&9

Mua, Naw Karl. “For Such A Time AS This,” *Hmong Today*, 31 December 2003, 16.

Muntarbhorn, Vitit. “Differentiating Refugees from Illegal Immigrants,” *The Nation*, 2 April 1987.

Mydans, Seth. “California Says Laos Refugee Group Has Been Extorted by Its Leadership,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1990.

Mydans, Seth. “California Says Laos Refugee Group Is A Victim of Leadership’s Extortion,” *New York Times*, 7 November 1990, A20.

Mydans, Seth. “Thailand Begins Repatriation of Hmong to Laos,” *New York Times*, 28 December 2009.

Mydans, Seth. “2 Journalists and U.S. Clergyman Are Reported Held in Laos,” *New York Times*, 16 June 2003.

Mydans, Seth. “Thailand Evicts 4,000 Hmong to Laos,” *New York Times*, 29 December 2009.

Nelson, Todd. “St. Paul Pastor Arrested in Laos,” *Pioneer Press*, 12 June 2003.

Nelson, Todd. “St. Paul: Pastor’s Arrest Fuels Anti-Laos Rally,” *Pioneer Press*, 25 June 2003.

Oberdorfer, Don. “Carter, Teng Ready Working Relations.” *Washington Post*, 31 January 1979.

Parks, Michael. "Laos Mired in Fight with Hill Tribesmen," *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 October 1978.

Pasquarella, Jennie. "Blaming Terror's Victims," *Legal Times*, 29 May 2006.

Pear, Robert and James Brooke. "Rightists in U.S. Aid Mozambique Rebels," *New York Times*, 22 May 1988.

Perez, Amanda. "Patriot Act Classifies Hmong as Terrorists," KFSN-TV, 18 February 2007. Retrieved 23 March 2007, http://abclocal.go.com/kfsn/story?section=local&id=5043637&ft=print

Perrin, Andrew. "Welcome to the Jungle." *Time Asia Magazine*, 5 May 2003.

Perrin, Andrew. "Licensed to Kill." *Time Asia Magazine*, 16 June 2003.

Perrin, Andrew. "A Blackbird's Song," *Time Asia*, 20 September 2004.

Peters, Ann. "No Land of Smiles for Hmong Detainees Held Captive in Thailand," *The Nation*, 5 October 2007.

Peterson, Tom. "Lords of the Sky," *Soldier of Fortune*, August 1990.

Peterson, Tom. "Mekong River Mayhem: Chao Fah Ambushes Pathet Lao." *Soldier of Fortune*, April 1991, 58-63.

Pfeifer, Mark E. "Hmong American Socioeconomic Profile," *Asian American Press*, 26 January 2007.

Pheifer, Pat. "Hmong Nonprofit Charges Fraud," *Star Tribune*, 5 March 2008.

Pinyorat, Rungrawee C. "6,000 Hmong evicted from town face uncertain future," *The Associated Press*, 1 October 2005.

Poopat, Thana. "Laos Urged to Relocate 60,000 Refugees." *The Nation*, 28 June 1991.

Pramot, Khukrit and Souphasai Souphanouvong, "The Plan for the Liquidation of the Hmong Who Oppose the Liberation in the Northeast in the Country," *Bangkok Siam Rat*, 7 May 1993.

Pulaski, Alex. "Revered Hmong Leader Vang Pao Stands Tall in Two Worlds," *Fresno Bee*, 1 January 1995, A15.

Pulaski, Alex. "Hmong Asked to Help Lao Cause." *Fresno Bee*, 23 February 1992.

Pulaski, Alex and Michael Doyle. "Hmong Leader's Disappearance Worries Family." *Fresno Bee*, 22 May 1994, B1.

Radio Bangkok, 2 August 1980 (FBIS, 4 August 1980).

Radio Vientiane, 26 July 1980 (FBIS, 5 August 1980).

Ranard, Donald. "The Last Bus," *The Atlantic*, October 1987.

Refugee Council USA, "Material Support Problem: Punishing Refugee Victims of Terror," 8 March 2007, www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/ms-backgrd-info3-8-07.pdf, (accessed October 10, 2007).

Richburg, Keith B. "Insurgency in Laos Seeking to Emerge from Anonymity: Recent Uprising in Jungle Fighting Reported." *Washington Post*, 11 February 1990, A27.

Robbins, William. "Violence Forces Hmong to Leave Philadelphia," *New York Times*, 17 September 1984.

Rosenlind, Steven. "Fresno Man Thinks Hmong Subject to Violence in Laos; Tou Ger Vang Worries the U.S. Hass Forgotten His People." *Fresno Bee*, 9 June 1995, A12.

Ross, Michael. "Probe Links 'Reagan Doctrine' to Covert Aid to Lao Rebels," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 January 1993.

Rosett, Claudia. "Yellow Rain in Laos: New Reports." *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June, 1990.

Rosett, Claudia. "A Lonely Fight For Freedom." *Wall Street Journal*, 13 June 1990.

Ruiz, Hiram A. "Tough Times for Refugees in Thailand." *News from the U.S. Committee for Refugees*, 1 July 1993.

Salisbury, Bill. "U.S. Closer to Recognizing Hmong Vets," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 24 April 1997, 3D

Salisbury, Bill. "Committee Approves Break for Hmong Vets," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 18 June 1998, 2B.

Salisbury, Bill. "We Waited For This Day for 10 Years," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 21 June 1998, 3B.

Salisbury, Bill. "Silent Sacrifice, Hmong and Lao Veterans Are Finally Honored for Fighting in the CIA-Run Secret War in Laos," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 15 May 1997, 1-4.

Salisbury, Greg. "Hmong Veterans Rally in D.C.," *Asian American Press*, 21 May 1999, 1.

Schou, Nick. "The General's Last Stand," *OC Weekly* (July 6-July12, 2007)

Shapiro, Walter and Peter Younghusband. "Lehrman's Contra Conclave," *Newsweek*, 17 January 1986.

Shefchik, Rich. "Vets May Finally Be Citizens," *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 10 April 2000, 1A & 5A.

Sherman, Spencer. "Waking Up On the Moon: The Hmong in America," *APF Reporter* 8, no. 3 (1985): 1-6. http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF0803/Sherman/Sherman.html . Retrieved 1 August 2007.

Shulins, Nancy. "Transplanted Hmong Struggle to Adjust in U.S.," *State Journal*, 15 July 1984.

Sivalo, Pynanart and Supalak Ganjanakhundee, "Hmong Miss Out on Move to US," *The Nation*, 22 July 2003.

Straits Times (Singapore), 20 June 1980.

Sukpanich, Tunya. "Home At Last?" *Bangkok Post*, 11 January 2004.

Sullivan, Michael. "Rebels Opposing Marxist Regimes in 4 Nations Unite," *Washington Post*, 6 June 1985.

Suzukamo, Les. "Hmong Fight Plan to Send Refugee Kin Back to Laos," *Pioneer Press*, 8 June 1991.

Tai, Wendy. "Returning to Laos Frightens Hmong: Refugees' Pleas Reach Twin Cities," *Star Tribune*, 24 June 1991, 1B.

Tai, Wendy. "Hmong Fear Refugees Might Be Forced Back to Laos," *Star Tribune* 18 May 1992, 4A.

Tai, Wendy S. "Returning to Laos Frightens Hmong: Refugees' Please Reach Twin Cities," *Star Tribune*, 24 June 1991, 1B.

Tai, Wendy S. "Feeling More at Home in America: As Hmong Ties to Laos Fade, Support for Resistance Ebbs," *Star Tribune*, 20 October 1991, B1.

Thaikla, Thong-U. "Meo: The Courageous Hill Tribe." *Yut Takot Journal*, August 1968-January 1969.

Thao, Dai. "Gen. Vang Pao Reveals Initiative For Democracy in Laos," *Hmong Times,* 1 December 2009, 1 & 7.

Thao, Dai. "Community Came to See Photos of Suffering Hmong in Laos," *Hmong Times*, (November 1, 2003), 1& 8.

Thao, Cathy. “Free Our Leader!!” *Hmong Times,* 16 June 2007, 1 & 8.

Tomsho, Robert. “Part-Time Revolutionaries.” Dallas Life Magazine, 9 February 1986.

Toronto Globe and Mail, 1 September 1979.

U.S. News and World Report, 2 June 1980.

Vang, Her. “Another Step toward Freedom for Hmong People: Demonstration in Washington, D.C.,” *Hmong Times,* 1 July 2005.

Vang, Hlee. “Wife of Slain CIA Fighter Fears Retribution,” *Gannett Wisconsin Media*, 4 September 2009.

Vang, Mai Der. “Vang Pao Case Bridges Hmong Generational Divide,” *New America Media,* 18 June 2007.

Vang, Thua. “In Search of the Truth,” *Hmong Today*, 29 July 2004, 10-11.

Viviano, Frank. “Strangers in the Promised Land,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 31 August 1986.

Vreeland, Susan. “Through the Looking Glass with Hmong of Laos,” *Christian Science Monitor* 30 March 1981.

Warner, Roger. “No Thanks to the State Department, the Last Remnant of the Vietnam War May Be About to End,” *The Huntington Post,* 23 December 2009.

Warner, Roger. “On Exaggeration, Context and the Wages of A Covert War,” *Pioneer Press,* 20 June 2007.

Warner, Roger. “The Weirdest Terrorism Court Case in America,” *Huffington Post*, 11 March 2009.

Walsh, Denny. “Feds Drop Charges Against Hmong Leader Vang Pao,” *Sacramento Bee*, 18 September 2009.

Walsh, James. “Laotians, Hmong Protest Camp Closing,” *Star Tribune,* 26 January 1991, 3A.

Watson, Russell, Kim Willenson, and Ron Moreau, “The Friends of Tommy Posey,” *Newsweek*, 17 September 1984.

Webb, Tom. “Wellstone Aims to Pass Hmong Bill Quickly,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press,* 4 May 2000, 3B.

Webb, Tom. “Citizenship Bill Goes to President For Signature,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 24 May 2000, A1.

Webb, Tom. “Clinton Signs Hmong Citizenship Bill into Law,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 27 May 2000, 3B.

Webb, Tom. “Fate of Hmong Citizenship Bills Remains Up in the Air,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 8 May 2000, 1A.

Webb, Tom. “Washington, D.C.: Ambassador Urges Resolution For Pastor,” *Pioneer Press*, 26 June 2003.

Webb, Tom and Todd Nelson, “Scenario Outlined to Free Pastor,” *Pioneer Press*, 28 June 2004.

Weiner, Tim. “General Vang Pao’s Last War.” *New York Times Magazine*, 11 May 2008.

Wheeler, Jack. “Fighting the Soviet Imperialists: UNITA in Angola.” *Reason*, (April 1984): 25-28.

Williams, Odgen. “The Allies We Abandoned in Laos Are Still Fighting and Dying,” *The Washington Post*, 17 September 1978, B1ff.

Winter, Roger P. “Hmong Pushed Back at Laos-Thai Border,” *New York Times*, 8 July 1985, A16.

Xiong, Pamela. “Free Our Leader?” *Hmong Today*, 16 June-1 July 2009, 16 & 18.

Yang, Maisee. “Special Report From Wat Thamkrabok, Thailand: A Firsthand Perspective From Inside, (Part 1)” *Hmong Today*, 26 February 2004.

Yang, Maisee. “Special Report From Wat Thamkrabok, (Part 2),” *Hmong Today*, 11 March 2004.

Yang, Sammy. “Team Chow Fa Competes in 48 Hour Film Contest,” *Hmong Today*, 16 June 2005

Ziner, Karen Lee. “Death from the Sky: Who or What Kill Bee Thao’s Family,” *The Rhode Islander Magazine*, 12 February 1995, 8-15 & 23.

Published Materials

Ackland, Len E. “No Place for Neutralism: The Eisenhower Administration and Laos.” In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred W. McCoy, 139-154. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Adams, Nina S. and Alfred W. McCoy, eds. *Laos: War and Revolution*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Adler, Shelley R. "Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome Among Hmong Immigrants: Examining the Role of Nightmare." *Journal of American Folklore* 104, no. 411 (Winter, 1991): 54-71.

Ahern, Thomas L. *Undercover Armies: CIA and Surrogate Warfare in Laos.* Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2006.

Al-Ali, Nadje and Khalid Koser, eds. *New Approaches to Migration: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Amnesty International. *Lao People's Democratic Republic: Hiding in the Jungle, Hmong Under Threat.* 23 March 2007.

Amnesty International, "Thao Moua and Pa Fue Khang: Hmong Imprisoned After Unfair Trial," June 2004.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso, 1983.

Anderson, Benedict. *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London: Verso, 1998.

Anderson, Benedict. "Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics," The Werthem Lecture, Center for Asian Studies Amsterdam (CASA), University of Amsterdam, 1992.

Anderson, Wanni W. and Robert G. Lee, eds. *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Anthony, Victor B. and Richard S. Sexton. *The War in Northern Laos, 1954-1973*. Washington,
D.C.: Center for Air Force History, United States Air force, 1993.

ASEAN, *Joint Communiqué of the Twelfth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting*, Bali, Indonesia, 30 June 1979. Jakarta: Terbatas, ASEAN Sekretariat Nasional, 1979.

Auclair, Nicholas C. "National Security." In *Laos: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea M. Savada, 259-295. Washington, D.C.: Federal Reserve Division, Library of Congress, 1995.

Bacevich, Andrew. *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Bammer, Angelica. *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Barney, George Lindwood. "Meo of Xieng Khoung Province, Laos." In *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities and Nations*, edited by Peter Kundstadter, 271-294. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Bartl, Tim and Phillip Smith. *Report to the Congress of the United States: Fact Finding Mission to Thailand Regarding the Status of Hmong/Lao Refugees and Asylum Seekers, 28 December 1994 to 2 January 1995*. Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 1995.

Bartley, Robert L. and William Kucewicz. "Yellow Rain and the Future of Arms Agreements." *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1983): 805-826.

Basch, Linda, Nina G. Schiller, and C.S. Blanz. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. U.S.A.: Gordon and Breach, 1994.

Basch, Linda, Nina G. Schiller, and C.S. Blanz. "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration." *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1, (1995): 48-65.

Batson, Wendy. "After the Revolution: Ethnic Minorities and the New Lao State." In *Laos:*
Beyond the Revolution, edited by Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, 133-158. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Bessac, Susanne L. *Embroidered Hmong Story Cloths.* Missoula: University of Montana, 1988.

Bliatout, Bruce Thowpaow. *Hmong Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome: A Cultural Study*. Portland, Oregon: Sparkle Publishing, 1982.

Blum, William. *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II.* Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995.

Bock-Luna, Birgit. *The Past in Exile: Serbian Long-Distance Nationalism and Identity in the Wake of the Third Balkan War*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers University, 2007.

Bodenheimer, Thomas and Robert Gould. *Rollback! Right-Wing Power in U.S. Foreign Policy*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.

Borjas, George and Bernt Bratsberg. "Who Leaves? The Outmigration of the Foreign-Born," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 78, no. 1 (1996): 165-176.

Bouapao, Lilao. "Property Relations of the Hmong in Laos." Paper presented at a Conference on Politics of theCommons, held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, 11-14 July 2003. <http://dlcvm.dlib.indiana.edu/archive/00001135/00/Lilao_Bouapao.pdf > accessed 18 November 2009).

Bousequet, Gisèle L. *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Homeland Politics in the Parisian Vietnamese Community*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Bradley, Mark Phillip. *Imagining Vietnam & America*. Chapel Hill: University of NC Press, 2000.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora, Contesting Identities*. London: Routlege, 1996.

Branfman, Fred. *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life under An Air War*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972.

Branfman, Fred. "Presidential War in Laos." In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Alfred McCoy and Nina S. Adams, 213-280. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Breazeale, Kennon. "Laos Mapped by Treaty and Decree, 1985-1907." In *Breaking New Ground in Lao History: Essays on the Seventh to Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Mayoury
Ngaosrivathana and Kennon Breazeale, 297-335. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002.

Breuilly, John. *Nationalism and the State*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993.

Brown, MacAlister. "The Communist Seizure of Power in Laos." In *Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Society of the Lao People's Democratic Republic*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 17-38. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Brown, MacAlister and Joseph J. Zasloff, *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930-1985*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institutional Press, 1986.

Brown, MacAlister and Joseph J. Zasloff. "Laos 1977: The Realities of Independence," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 2, (February 1978): 164-174.

Brown, MacAlister and Joseph J. Zasloff. "Dependency in Laos." *Current History* 75, no. 442 (1978): 202-207, 228.

Brown, MacAlister and Joseph J. Zasloff. "Government and Politics." In *Laos: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea Matlas Savada, 203-258. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994.

Brubaker, Roger. "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 1, (January 2005): 1-19.

Bulk, Jac. "American Hmong on the Move: An Explanation of Very Distinctive Secondary Migration Patterns." *Hmong Forum* 1996: 3-28.

Burchett, Wilfred G. *Mekong Upstream.* Hanoi, Vietnam: Red River Publishing House, 1959.

Burchett, Wilfred G. "Dawn of the Laotian National Struggle." In *Conflict in Indochina: A Reader on the Widening War in Laos and Cambodia*, edited by Marvin Gettleman, Susan Gettlemen, Lawrence Kaplan, and Carol Kaplan, 28-38. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.

Busch, Andrew. *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Butler, Stuart, Michael Sanera, and W. Bruce Weinrod. *Mandate for Leadership II: Continuing the Conservative Revolution.* Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1984.

Carlin, Jean E. *Report of a Medical Consultant's Observations and Evaluations of and Recommendations for Indochinese (Southeast Asian) Refugees Camps.* University of California Irvine, August 29-September, 1979.

Carpenter, Ted Galen. "U.S. Aid to Anti-Communist Rebels: The 'Reagan Doctrine' and Its Pitfalls." *Policy Analysis* 74. Washington, D.C: Cato Institute, 1986.

Castle, Timothy. *At War in the Shadow of Vietnam: The United States' Military Aides to the Royal Lao Government*. *1955-1975*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Catlin, Amy R. *The Hmong: From Asia to Providence.* Providence, RI: Center for Hmong Lore, Roger Williams Park Museum, 1981.

Cerquone, Joseph. *Refugees from Laos in Harm's Ways.* Washington D.C.: American Council for Nationality Services, 1986.

Cerase, F.P. "Migration and Social Change: Expectations and Reality, A Study of Return Migration from the United States to Italy," *International Migration Review* 8, no. 2 (1974): 245-262.

Cha, Dia and Jacquelyn Chagnon, *Farmer, War-Wife, Refugee, Repatriate: A Needs Assessment of Women Repatriating to Laos.* Washington, D.C.: Asia Resource Center, 1993.

Chan, Sucheng. *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America*. Philadelphia: Temple

University Press, 1994.

Chan, Sucheng. *Asian American: An Interpretive History*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Chan, Sucheng. *Remapping Asian American History*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003.

Chan, Sucheng. "Scarred yet Undefeated: Hmong and Cambodian Women and Girls in the United States." In *Asian/Pafcific Islander American Women*, edited by Shirely Hune and Gail Nomorura, 253-267. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Chanda, Nayan. "Economic Changes in Laos, 1975-1980." In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, edited by Josheph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, 116-128. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Charkabongse, Prince Chula. *Lords of Life: A History of the Kings of Thailand.* London: Alvin Redman, 1960.

Charoenniyomphrai, Udom, et al.. *Indigenous Knowledge, Customary Use of Natural Resources and Sustainable Biodiversity Management: Case Study of Hmong and Karen Communities in Thailand.* Chiang Mai, Thailand: Inter Mountain Peoples Education, Education and Cultures in Thailand Association, 2006.

Chiengton, Jamaree. "The Politics of Ethnicity, Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Thailand, Vietnam and Lao PDR." In *Social Changes for the Mekong Region*, edited by Koasa-ard Mingsarn and John Dore, 147-172. Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University, 2003.

Churchill, Ward and Glenn T. Morris. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Left-Wing Revolution, Right-Wing Reaction, and the Destruction of Indigenous Peoples." In *Since Predator Came: Notes from the Struggle for American Indian Liberation*, 329-348. Littleton, Colorado: Aigis Publications, 1995.

Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, (1994): 302-338.

Cohen, Erik. "Hmong (Meo) Commercialized Refugee Art: From Ornament to Picture." In *Arts As A Mean of Communication in Pre-Literate Societies*, edited by D. Eban, E. Cohen, B. Damet, 51-95. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1990.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

Collet, Christian and Pei-te Lien, eds. *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.

Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*. Washington, D.C.:

World Bank, 2000.

Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), *CCSDPT Handbook: Refugee Services in Thailand*. Bangkok: CCSDPT Secretariat Office, 1986.

Conboy, Kenneth. *War in Laos, 1954-1975*. Carrollton, TX: Squandron/Signal Publications, 1994.

Conquergood, Dwight. "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp: Performance, Communication, and Culture." *The Drama Review* 32, no. 3 (1988):

Cooper, Nicola. *French in Indochina: Colonial Encounters*. New York: Berg, 2001.

Cooper, Robert. "The Hmong of Laos: Economic Factors in Refugee Exodus and Return." In *The Hmong in Transition*, Glenn L. Hendircks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, 23-40. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1986.

Culas, Christian and Jean Michaud. "A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History." In H*mong/Miao in Asia*, edited by Nicholas Tapp, Jean Michaud, Christian Culas, and Gary Y. Lee, 61-96. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004.

Culas, Christian. "Migrants, Runaways and Opium Growers: Origins of the Hmong in Laos and Siam in the Nineteenth and Early Twenties Centuries." In *Turbulent Times and Enduring People Mountain Minorities in the Southeast Asian Massif*, edited by Jean Michaud, 29-46. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000.

Curry, Robert. *Whispering Death*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004.

Davies, Sara E. *Legitimizing Rejection: International Refugee Law in Southeast Asia.* Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008.

Davis, Charles. *Across the Mekong.* Charlottesville, Virginia: Hildesigns Press, 1996.

D.C. Everest Area Schools, *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2000).

Deland, Claudio O. "Deforestation in Northern Thailand: The Result of Hmong Farming Practices or Thai Development Strategies." *Society and Resources* 15 (2002): 483-501

Dekun, Wu. "A Brief Introduction to the Hmong of China," *Hmong Forum* 2 (1991): 6.

Deloria, Vine. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. New York: Scribner, 1995.

Detzer, Daniel F. *Elder Voices: Southeast Asian Families in the United States*. New York: Altamira Press, 2004.

Devillers, Philippe. "Vietnam in Battle." *Current History* 77, no. 452, (December 1979).

Diamond, Nora. "Defining Miao: Ming, Qing, and Contemporary Views." In *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, edited by Steven Harrell, 92-116. Seattle University of Washington Press, 1995.

Doctors Without Borders. "Hidden Behind Barbed Wire: Plight of Hmong Refugees Held in Detention Camp in Northern Thailand," 20 May 2009.

Doctors Without Borders. "Fearing A Forced Return: The Situation of the Lao Hmong Refugees in Petchabun, Thailand," 20 May 2009.

Dodd, Thomas J. "Laos and the Southeast Asian Crisis." A Congressional Speech by Senator Thomas J. Dodd, May 21, 1962. In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred M. McCoy, 398-400. New York, Harper and Row, 1970

Doherty, Steven. "Political Behavior and Candidate Emergence in Hmong-American Community." *Hmong Studies Journal* 8, (2007): 1-35.

Dommen, Arthur J. *Conflict in Laos: the Politics of Neutralization*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.

Dommen, Arthur J. "Historical Setting." In *Laos: A Country Study*, edited by Andrea Matlas Savada, 1-75. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1994.

Dommen, Arthur J. "Laos: Vietnam's Satellite," *Current History*, (December 1979): 201-202 & 225.

Donnelly, Nancy. *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Doré, Amhay. "The Three Revolutions in Laos." In *Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Society of the Lao PDR*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 101-115. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Downing, Bruce T. and Douglas Olney, eds. *The Hmong in the West: Observations and Reports*. Minneapolis: Southeast Asian Refugee Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1982.

Downing, Bruce T. *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Forth Smith, Arkansas*, Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational

Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984):

Downing, Bruce T. *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Minneapolis-St. Paul,* Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-79.

Downing, Bruce T. *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Dallas-Forth Worth, Texas,* Submitted by Literacy and Language Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-56.

Downing, Bruce T. "Hmong Resettlement," *Center for Urban and Regional Affairs Reporter* 14, no. 3 (May 1984): 1-8.

Duffy, John. *Writing From These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Duffy, John. *The Hmong: An Introduction to their History and Culture*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004.

Duffy, John. "Recalling the Letter: The Uses of Oral Testimony in Historical Studies of Literacy." *Written Communication* 24, no. 1, (2007): 84-107.

Dugger, Ronnie. *On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983.

Dunnigan, Timothy. "Segmentary Kinship in an Urban Society." *Anthropological Quarterly* 55, no. 3, (1982): 126-136.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963.

Esterik, Peter Van. "Thailand's Response to the Refugee Crisis." In *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups & Ethnic Minorities: Prospects for the Eighties and Beyond,* Cultural Survival Report 22, Proceedings of a Conference Co-sponsored by Cultural Survival, Inc. and Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, 149-154. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1987.

Evans, Grant. *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in Southeast Asia?* Verso: The Thetford Press, 1983.

Evans, Grant. *A Short History of Laos: The Land In Between.* Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2002.

Evans, Grant. *Laos: Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*, A Writenet Report commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Protection Information Section (DIP), (May 2004).

Evans, Grant and Kelvin Rowley. *Red Brotherhood at War: Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos since 1975*. London: Verso, 1984.

Evera, Stephen Van. "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War." In *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, edited by Michael Brown, Owen R. Coté, Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, 26-60. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001.

Fall, Bernard. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Seige of Dien Bien Phu*. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Fall, Bernard. *Anatomy Of A Crisis*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967.

Faderman, Lillian. *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.

Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 1997.

Faruque, Cathleen Jo. *Migration of Hmong to the Midwestern United States.* Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002.

Fass, Simon. *The Hmong in Wisconsin: On the Road to Self-Sufficiency*. Milwaukee: Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, April 1991.

Fass, Simon. "Innovations in the Struggle for Self-Reliance: The Hmong Experience in the United States," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 2, (Summer 1986): 351-380.

Feagin, Joe R. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Feagin, Joe R. "Old Poison in New Bottles: The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism." In *Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States*, edited by J.F. Perea, 13-43. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

Fein, Helen. *Congregational Sponsors of Indochinese Refugees in the U.S., 1979-1981: Helping Beyond Borders.* Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1987.

Feingold, David. "Opium and Politics in Laos." In *Laos: War & Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred McCoy, 322-239. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Finck, John. "Secondary Migration to California's Central Valley." In *The Hmong in Transition*, edited by Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, 184-

187. Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York, 1986.

Freeman, Michael. *Human Rights.* Madlen, MA: Polity Press, 2002.

Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Fuglerud, Øivind. *Life on the Outside: The Tamil Diaspora and Long Distance Nationalism.* London: Pluto Press, 1999.

Geddes, Williams. *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Gettlemen, Marvin, J. Franklin, Marilyn Young, and H. Bruce Franklin, eds. *Vietnam and America*. New York: Grove Press, 1995.

Ghosh, Bimal. "Return Migration: Reshaping Policy Approaches." In *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* edited by Bimal Ghosh, 181-226. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations, 2000.

Gmeich, George. "West Indian Migrants and Their Rediscovery of Barbados." In *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*, edited by Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 206-223. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Goodwin, Jeff and James M. Jaspers, eds. *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning, and Emotion.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Goodwin, Jeff, James Jasper and Francesca Polleta, eds. *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Graham, D.C. "The Customs of the Ch'uan Miao." *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* 19, (1937): 18-20.

Grele, Ronald. "Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History." In *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. Chicago: Precedent Publishers, 1985.

Gunn, Geoffrey. *Rebellion in Laos: Peasants and Politics in a Colonial Backwater*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990.

Gunn, Geoffrey. "Shamans and Rebels: The BatChai (Meo) Rebellion of Northern Laos and North-West Vietnam," *Journal of Siam Society* 74, (1986): 110.

Gunn, Geoffrey. "Resistance Coalition in Laos," *Asian Survey* 23, no. 3, (March 1983): 316-340.

Gunn, Geoffrey. "Laos in 2007: Regional Integration and International Fallout," *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1, (2008): 62-68.

Haig, Alexander. "A Certain Idea of Man: The Democratic Revolution and Its Future," *Current Policy* No. 311, U.S. State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs, 13 September 1981

Hall, Sandra, "Hmong Kinship Roles: Insiders and Outsiders," *Hmong Forum* 1 (1990): 29-35.

Halliday, Fred. *The Making of the Second Cold War*. London: Verso, 1983.

Hamilton-Meritt, Jane. *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*. Bloomington/Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Hang, Maykao. "American Paj Ntaub: Wat Tham Krabok Assessment," www.mncn.org/doc/finalreport.pdf, (accessed 21 April 2007).

Hein, Jeremy. *From Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Hein, Jeremy. "Interpersonal Discrimination Against Hmong Americans: Parallels and Variation in Microlevel Racial Inequality," *The Sociological Quarterly* 41, no. 3, (Summer, 2000): 413-429.

Hein, Jeremy. "From Migrants to Minority: Hmong Refugees and the Social Construction of Identity in the United States." *Sociological Inquiry* 64, no. 3 (1994): 281-306.

Hein, Jeremy. "Leadership Continuity and Change in Hmong American Community." Asian and Pacific Migration Journal 6, no. 2, (1997): 213-228.

Helton, Arthur C. "The Refugee Act's Unfulfilled Asylum Promise." *World Refugee Survey*, (1985): 5-8.

Hendricks, Glenn, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard, eds. *The Hmong in Transition.* Minneapolis: Southeast Asian Refugee Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1986.

Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955.

Hillmer, Paul. *A People's History of the Hmong*. St. Paul: MN Historical Society Press,

2010.

Hmong National Development, *Hmong 2000 Census Publication: Data & Analysis.* Washington, D.C.: Hmong National Development, 2003.

Hmong National Development, *National Directory of Hmong Organizations,* (Washington, D.C.: HND, n.d).

Hostetler, Laura. *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Ho Tai, Hue-Tam. *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Hudspeth, William. *Stone-Gateway and the Flowery Miao*. London: Cargate Press, 1937.

Human Rights Watch, "Thailand: Stop Deportation of Hmong Refugees to Laos," http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/12/thaila14822.htm (accessed April 24, 2007)

Hung, Nguyen Manh. "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play among Communist Neighbors." *Asian Survey* 19, no. 1, (November 1979): 1037-1052.

Hutchison, Ray. *Acculturation in the Hmong Community.* Report Published by the Center for Public Affairs. (University of Wisconsin-Green Bay) and the Institute on Race and Ethnicity (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), 1992.

Hwang, Victor. "The Hmong Campaign for Justice: A Practitioner's Perspective," *Asian Law Journal* 9, no. 82, (2002): 83-115.

Indochina Refugee Action Center (IRAC), "Issue Paper: Synopsis of Current Refugee Situation," 8 August 1979.

Isaacs, Arnold R. *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacy*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Jacobs, Brian W. "No Win Situation: the Plight of the Hmong—America's Former Ally." *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 16 no. 139, (1996): 139-166.

Jackson, Karl. "Cambodian 1978: War, Pillage, and Purge in Democratic Kampuchea." *Asian Survey* 19, no. 1, (January 1979).

Jagodzinksi, Ann and James Kegel. *The Hmong and Their Stories: the Secret Wars, Escape to Laos, the Legends.* Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001.

Janzen, John. "Illusions of Home in the Story of a Rwandan Refugee's Return." In *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*, edited by Lynellyn

D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 19-33. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Jayavann, Wichitr. "Agreement between Gen. Bo Mya of KNU and Gen. Vang Pao of ULNLF at Chiang Mai on December 2, 1987."

Jenkins, Craig and Charles Perrow. "Insurgency of the Powerless: Farm Workers Movements (1946-1972)." *American Sociological Review* 42, (1977): 249-268.

Jenks, Robert. *Insurgency and the Social Disorder in Guizhou: The "Miao" Rebellion, 1854-1873.* Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press, 1994.

Joint Thai-U.S. Military Research and Development Center. *Meo Handbook*. Bangkok: Advanced Researched Projects Agency, 1969.

Johnson, Charles. *Myths, Legends, and Folk Tales from the Hmong of Laos*. St. Paul, MN: Linguistics Department, McAlester College, 1992.

Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatred: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Keeley, Charles B. "How Nation-States Create and respond to Refugee Flows." *International Migration review* 30, no. 4 (1996): 1044-1066.

Kennedy, John F. "Statement on Laos, March 23, 1961." In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred M. McCoy, 393-408. New York, Harper and Row, 1970.

Kesmanee, Chupinit. "Dubious Development Concepts in the Thai Highland: The Chao Kao in Transition," *Law & Society Review* 28, no. 3, (1994): 673-686

Kesmanee, Chupinit. "Hilltribe Relocation Policy in Thailand," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 12 (1988): 2-6

Keyes, Charles F. "Tribal Peoples and the Nation-State in Mainland Southeast Asia," In *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups and Ethnic Minorities*, A Cultural Survival Report, No. 22, 19-26. Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1987.
Khamkeo, Bounsang. *I Little Slave: A Prison Memoir from Communist Laos*. Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2006.

King, Martin Luther. *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington. San Francisco: Harper, 1986.

Klarich, Morgan, Viengneesee Thao, and Kao Feng Moua. *Hmong in the Modern World*. Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2005.

Koltyk, Jo Ann. *Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong life in Wisconsin.* Boston: Allyn and

Bacon, 1998.

Koltyk, Jo Ann. "Telling Narratives Through Home Videos: Hmong Refugees and Self-Documentation of Life in the Old and New Country." *Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 422, (Autumn, 1993): 435-449.

Kondo, Dorinne. "The Narrative Production of 'Home' Community, and Political Identity of Asian American Theatre." In *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geography of Identity*, edited by S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg, 97-118. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Koser, Khalid. "Return, Readmission and Reintegration: Changing Agendas, Policy Frameworks and Operational Programmes." In *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?* Edited by Bimal Ghosh, 57-99. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations, 2000.

Lagon, Mark P. "The International System and the Reagan Doctrine: Can Realism Explain Aid to 'Freedom Fighters'?" *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1, (1992): 39-70.

Laguerre, Michael. *Diaspora, Politics, and Globalization*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Lai, Him Mark. *Chinese American Transnational Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.

Lao National Liberation Army, *Proclamation*, 1989.

Lartéguy, Jean and Yang Dao. *La Fabuleuse Adventure of Peuple de L'opium*. Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1979.

Lee, Gary Yia. "Hmong Rebellion in Laos: Victims or Terrorists?" In *Handbook on Terrorism and Insurgency in Southeast Asia*, edited by A.T.H. Tan, 352-373. MA: Edward Elgar, 2007.

Lee, Gary Yia. "Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity," *Hmong Studies Journal* 8 (2007): 1-19.

Lee, Gary Yia. "Dreaming Across the Ocean: Media, Globalization, and Cultural Reinvention in the Hmong Diaspora," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2006): 1-31.

Lee, Gary Yia. "Bandits and Rebels? Hmong Resistance in the New Lao State," *Indigenous Affairs Journal* 4 (October-December 2000): 6-15.

Lee, Gary Yia. "Cultural Identity in a Post-Modern Society: Reflection in What is Hmong?" *Hmong Studies Journal* 1, no. 1, (1996): 1-14.

Lee, Gary Yia. “Ethnic Minorities and National Building in Laos: The Hmon in the Lao State,” *Peninsule* 11/12, (1985/1986): 215-232.

Lee, Gary Yia. “Minority Policies and the Hmong.” In *Contemporary Laos: Studies in the Politics and Society of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 199-219. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Lee, Stacey. *Up Against Whiteness: Race, School, and Immigrant Youth.* New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2002.

Leeprecha, Prasit. “Role of Media Technology in Reproducing Hmong Ethnic Identity.” In *Living in a Globalized World: Ethnic Minorities in the Greater Mekong Subregion*, edited by Don McCaskill, P. Leeprecha, and He Shaoying, 89-113. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Mekong Press, 2008.

Leeprecha, Prasit and Yangong Trakarnthamrong. “Concealment of Ethnic Identity: Impact of Ethnic Discrimination on Highland Ethnic Groups in Urban Chiang Mai.” Paper presented at the 4th National Conference of Anthropologists in Thailand. Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindorn Anthropology Center, 2005. [Report in Thai language]

Leighton, Marian Kirsch. “Perspectives on the Vietnam-Cambodian Border Conflict.” *Asian Survey* 18, no. 5, (1978): 448-457.

Lemoine, Jacques. “Les Hmong et les Yao.” In *Montagnards des Pays d’Indochine dans les collections du Musée de l’Hmme*, edited by C. Hemmet. Paris: Ed. Sépia/Ville de Boulogne-Billancourt, 1995.

Lemoine, Jacques. “To Tell the Truth,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 9, (2008): 1-29.

Lewallen, John. “The Reluctant Counterinsurgents: International Voluntary Services in Laos.” In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred McCoy, 357-371. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Loescher, Gil and John A. Scanlan. *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America’s Half Open Door, 1945 to the Present.* New York: The Free Press, 1986.

Lien, Pei-te, “Transnational Homeland Concerns and Participation in U.S. Politics: A Comparison among Immigrants from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.” *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 2, no. 1, (May 2006): 56-78.

Lo, Fungchatou T. *The Promised Land: Socioeconomic Reality of the Hmong People in Urban America (1976-2000).* Lima, OH: Wyndham Hall Press, 2001.

Long, Lynellyn D. *Ban Vinai: The Refugee Camp.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Long, Lynellyn D. and Ellen Oxfeld. *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Lor, Yang. "Hmong Political Involvement in St. Paul, Minnesota and Fresno, California." *Hmong Studies Journal* 10, (2009): 1-53.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Lum, Thomas. "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RL 34320, 7 January 2008.

Lum, Thomas. "Laos: Background and U.S. Relations," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RS20931, 22 November 2004.

Lummis, Trevor. *Listening to History: the Authenticity of Oral Evidence*. London: Hutchinson, 1988.

Lummis, Trevor. "Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence." *International Journal of Oral History* 2, (1983): 109-120.

Lyfoung, Touxa. *Touby Lyfoung: An Authentic Account of the Life of A Hmong Man in the Troubled Land of Laos*. USA, 1996.

Lyons, Terrence. "Diasporas and Homeland Conflict." In *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, edited by Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter, 111-129. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Marchetti, Victor and John D. Marks. *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974.

Marks, Thomas A. "The Meo Hill Tribe Problem in North Thailand," *Asian Survey* 13, no. 10 (October 1973): 929-944.

Mattison, Wendy, Laotou Lo and Thomas Scarseth. *Hmong Lives: From Laos to La Crosse.* La Crosse, WI: The Pump House, 1994.

McAdam, Dough. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

McAlister, John T. "Mountain Minorities and the Viet Minh: A Key to the Indochina War." In *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations*, vol. 2, edited by Peter Kunstadter, 771-844. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

McCoy, Alfred. *The Politics of Heroine in Southeast Asia*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

McCoy, Alfred. “French Colonialism in Laos: 1883-1945.” In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred M. McCoy, 67-99. New York, Harper and Row, 1970.

McFarland, Linda. *Cold War Strategist: Stuart Symington and the Search for National Security*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001.

McNamara, Dennis. “The Origins and Effects of ‘Humane Deterrence’ Policies in Southeast Asia.” In *Refugees and International Relations*, edited by Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan, 123-133. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

McSpadden Lucia Ann. “Contemplating Repatriation to Eritrea.” In *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind*, edited by Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld, 34-48. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Meselson, Matthew and Julian Robinson. “The Yellow Rain Affair: Lessons From A Discredited Allegation.” In *Terrorism, War or Disease? Unraveling the Use of Biological Weapons*, edited by Ann Clunan, Peter Lavoy, and Susan Martin, 72-96. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Mitchell, Roger. “The Will to Believe and Anti-Refugee Rumors,” *Midwestern Folklore* 13, no. 1 (1987): 5-15.

Miyares, Ines M. *The Hmong Refugee Experience in the United States: Crossing the River*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998.

Morrison, Gayle L. *Sky is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA’s Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999.

Mote, Sue Murphy. *Hmong and American: Stories of transition to a Strange Land*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland& Company, 2004.

Mottin, Jean. *The History of the Hmong (Meo)*. Bangkok, Thailand: Odeon Store LDT, 1980.

Moua, Mai Neng. *Bamboo Among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans*. St. Paul: MN Historical Society, 2002.

Moua, Houa Vue and Barbara J. Rolland. *Trails through the Mists*. Eau Claire, WI: Eagles Printing Co., 1994.

Munger, Ronald G. *Sleep Disturbances and Sudden Death of Hmong Refugees: A Report on Fieldwork Conducted in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp*, Proceedings of the Second Hmong Research Conference, University of Minnesota, 17-19 November 1983

Muntarbhorn, Vitit. “Displaced Persons in Thailand: Legal and National Policy Issues in Perspective,” *Chulalongkorn University Law Review* 1 (1982).

Nakabov, Peter. *Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Nakanish, Don T. *In Search of a New Paradigm: Minorities in the Context of International Politics.* Denver: Studies in Race and Nations, Center for International Race Relations, University of Colorado Press, 1975.

Nakanish, Don T. “Forward.” In *The Transnational Politics of Asian Americans*, edited by Christian Collet and Pei-te Lien. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.

Ng, Franklin. “From Laos to America: The Hmong Community in the United States.” In *Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans*, edited by Huping Ling, 18-33. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

Ng, Frank. “Towards A Second Generation Hmong History,” *Amerasia Journal* 19, no. 3, (1993): 51-69.

Ngaosyvathn, Mayoury and Pheuphanh Ngaosyvathn. *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778-1828*, Studies on Southeast Asia no. 24. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asian Program, Cornell University, 1998.

Nguyen, Tram. *We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories from Immigrant America after 9/11*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s.* New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

Ong, Aihwa. *Buddha Is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship and the New America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Osborne, Milton. *River Road to China: The Mekong River Expedition 1866-1873*. New York: Liverlight, 1975.

Osborne, Milton. “The Indochinese Refugees: Causes and Effects,” *International Affairs* 56, no. 1 (January 1980): 37-53.

Owen, Norman, ed. *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.

Oxfeld, Ellen and Lynellyn Long, eds. *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind.* Philadelphia: University of University Press, 2004.

Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." *President Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1, (2006): 75-88.

Palumbo-Liu, David. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Paul, Roland A. "Laos: Anatomy of An American Involvement." *Foreign Affairs* 49, no. 3 (April 1971): 533-547.

Peterson, Sally. "Translating Experience and the Reading of a Story Cloth." *Journal of American Folklore* 10, no. 339, (1988): 6-22.

Phillips, James A. *Moscow's Poison War: Mounting Evidence of Battlefield Atrocities.* Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1982.

Phumirot, Thammarot Lae. *The Historical Background and Tradition of the Meo.* Bangkok: Chuan Printing Press, n.d..

Porter, D. Gareth. "After Geneva: Subverting Laotian Neutrality." In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred M. McCoy, 179-212. New York, Harper and Row, 1970.

Pouvatchy, Joseph R. "Cambodian-Vietnamese Relations," *Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (April 1986): 440-451.

Prados, John. *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006.

Pryke, Sam. "British Serbs and Long Distance Nationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26, no. 1 (January 2003): 152-172.

Public Affairs Institute, *Indochinese Refugees in Thailand: Prospects for Longstayers.* Bangkok: The Public Affairs Institute, An Institution of the Public Affairs Foundation, 1989.

Quincy, Keith. *Harvesting Pa Chay's Wheat: The Hmong & America's Secret War in Laos*. Spokane: Eastern Washington University Press, 2000.

Quincy, Keith. *Hmong: History of A People*. Cheney: Eastern Washington University, 1998.

Rabé, Paul. *Voluntary Repatriation: The Case of Hmong in Ban Vinai.* Bangkok: Refugee Information Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992.

Reagan, Ronald. "A Time For Choosing (The Speech—October 27, 1964)." Retrieved 15 March 2010. http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/timechoosing.html

Reagan, Ronald. "Address before a Joint Session of Congress of the State of the Union, February 6, 1985." *Public Papers of the Presidents: Ronald Reagan 1985*. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988.

Reder, Stephen. *The Hmong Resettlement Study*, Prepared by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon. Washington, D.C.: Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1985.

Reder, Stephen. *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Fresno, California*, Submitted by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Official of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1983): 1-64.

Reder, Stephen. *The Hmong Resettlement Study Site Report: Fresno, California*, Submitted by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon to the Official of Refugee Resettlement, Washington, D.C., (1984): 1-62.

Refugee Policy Group (RPG). *The Second International Conference on Indochinese Refugees: A New Humanitarian Consensus?* Washington, D.C.: The RPG, 1989.

Robinson, Julian, Jeanne Guillemin, and Matthew Meselson. "Yellow Rain: The Story Collapses." *Foreign Policy* 68 (Autumn, 1987): 100-117.

Robinson, W. Courtland. *Terms of the Refugee: The Indochinese Exodus and International Response.* New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1998.

Robinson, W. Courtland. "Laotian Refugees in Thailand." In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, edited by Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, 215-240. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Robinson, W. Courtland. *Thailand: Background Paper on Human Rights, Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, A Writenet Report commissioned by the UNHCR, Protection Information Section (DIP), July 2004.

Robinson, W. Courtland. "The Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees, 1989-1997: Sharing the Burden and Passing the Buck." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 3, (2004): 319-333.

Robinson, W. Courtland. "Buying Time: Refugee Repatriation in Thailand," in *World Refugee Survey* 1992, Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Service, 1992.

Robinson, W. Courtland. "Refugees in Thailand." *World Refugee Survey 1987*.

Robbins, Christopher. *The Ravens: The Men Who Flew in American's Secret War in Laos*. New York: Crown, 1987.

Roosevelt, President Frank D. *The Pentagon Papers* (GPO), January 24, 1944, Bk. 1, V.B. 1, A-14.

Roy, Jules. *Battle of Dienbienphu.* New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora* 1, no. 1, (1991): 83-99.

Safran, William. "Comparing Diasporas: A Review Essay." *Diaspora* 8, no. 3, (1999): 255-292.

Salehyan, Idean. "Safe Haven: International Norms, Strategic Interests, and U.S. Refugee Policy," Working Paper 41, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California-San Diego, (June 2001): 1-39.

Santoli, Al. *Forced Back and Forgotten: The Human Rights of Laotian Asylum Seekers in Thailand.* New York. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989.

Savina, F. M. *Historie des Miao*. Franborough: Gregg, 1972.

Schanche, Don A. *Mister Pop.* New York: David McKay Co., 1970.

Schein, Louisa. "Hmong/Miao Transnationality: Identity Beyond Culture." In *Hmong/Miao in Asia,* edited by N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas, and G.Y. Lee, 273-290. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004.

Schein, Louisa. "Diaspora Politics, Homeland Erotics, and materializing of Memory." *Positions* 7, no. 3 (1999): 697-729.

Schein, Louisa. "Homeland Beauty: Transanational Longing and Hmong American Video," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 2, (May 2004): 25-58.

Schein, Louisa. "Mapping Hmong Media in Diasporic Space." In *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin, 229-244. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Schiefer, H.B. "Possible Use of Chemical Warfare Agents in Southeast Asia," Conflict Quarterly 3, (1983): 32-41.

Scott, George M. "The Hmong Aspirations for A Separate State in Laos," *Secessionist Movements in Comparative Perspective,* edited by R.R. Premdas, S.W.R. de A. Samarasighe, and Alan B. Anderson, 110-125. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Schiller, Nina Glick and Georges Eugene Fouron. *George Woke Up Laughing: Long-distance Nationalism and the Search for Home.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001.

Schiller, Nina Glick. “Long-distance Nationalism.” In *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, edited by Melvin Ember, Carol Ember, and Ian Skoggard, vol. 1, 570-580. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004.

Scott, James. *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Seagrave, Sterling. *Yellow Rain: A Journey through the Terror of Chemical Warfare*. New York: M. Evans, 1981.

Shafer, Michael. *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.
Shain, Yossi. *Marketing the American Dream Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and their Homelands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Shain, Yossi. “Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy.” *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 5, (Winter 1994-1995): 811-841.

Shain, Yossi. “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation or Resolution,” *SAIS Review* 22, no. 2, (2002): 115-144.

Sheffer, Gabriel. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Short, Anthony. *Origins of the Vietnam War*. New York: Longman, 1989.

Shultz, George. “America and the Struggle for Freedom.” Address to the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, 22 February 1985.

Shultz, George. “New Realities and New Ways of Thinking.” *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1985): 705-721.

Simon, Sheldon. “Kampuchea: Vietnam’s Vietnam.” Current History 77, no. 452, (December 1979): 197-198 and 221-223.

Simpson, Christopher. *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of U.S. Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995.

Siriphon, Aranya. “Local Knowledge, Dynamism and the Politics of Struggle: A Case of the Hmong in Northern Thailand.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37 no. 1 (2006): 70.

Siong, Heu Tcha, Ya Tcha Nzeu, Ya Va Thay. *Keeb Kwm Hmoob Rws Tsev Koom Haum Vib Nais* (Origin of the Hmong According to Vinai “Confraternity,”). Recorded and published by Yves Bertrais. Village de Javouhey, France: Association Communauté

Hmong, 1985.

Skrbiš, Zlatko. *Long-distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

Smalley, William, with Chia Koua Vang and Gnia Yee Yang. *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Messianic Script.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.

Sommer, Rebecca. *Report on the Situation in the Xaysomboun Speacial Zone and 110 Hmong-Lao Refugees Who Escaped to Petchabun, Thailand 2004-2005*, May 2006. Retrieved April 21, 2007. http://www.rebeccasommer.org/documentaries/Hmong/news.html.

Songprasert, Phuwadol and Noppavan Chongwatana. *Thailand: A First Asylum Country for Indochinese Refugees.* Bangkok, Thailand: Institute for Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1988.

Southeast Asian Resource Center. "The Riddle of the 'Yellow Rain'." *The Southeast Asian Chronicle* 90, (June 1983): 1-29.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." In *Subaltern Studies IV: Writing on South Asian History and Society*. Edited by Ranajit Guha, 330-363. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

St. Cartmail, Keith. *Exodus Indochina*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann Publishers, 1983.

Stalker, Peter. *The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration.* London: Verso, 2001.

Standing Bear, Luther. *Land of the Spotted Eagle.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1933.

Stevenson, Charles A. *The End of Nowhere: American Policy towards Laos since 1954.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

Stein, Barry. "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study." *International Migration Review* 15, no. 1 (1981): 320-330.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. *Laos*. London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1986.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. *A History of Laos*. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1997.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. *Historical Dictionary of Laos*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. "National Defense and Internal Security in Laos." In *Contemporary Laos*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 220-244. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. "Factors Influencing Relations between Communist Parties of Thailand and Laos." *Asian Survey* 19, no. 4, (April 1979): 333-352.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. "Political Culture of Corruption in the Lao PDR," *Asian Studies Review* 30, (March 2006): 59-75.

Stuart-Fox, Martin. "Laos: Politics in A Single-Party State," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2007): 160-180.

Suhrke, Astri. "Indochinese Refugees: The Law and the Politics of First Asylum." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 467, (May 1983): 102-115.

Sutthi, Chantaboon. "Highland Agriculture: From Better to Worse." In *Hill Tribes Today*, edited by John McKinnon and Bernard Vienne, 107-142. Bangkok: White Lotus-Orstom, 1989.r

Symonds, Patricia. *Calling in the Soul: Gender and the Cycle of Life in a Hmong Village*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004.

Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1989.

Tapp, Nicholas. "The Hmong Diaspora." In *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*, edited by Melvin Ember, Carol Ember, and Ian Skoggard, vol. 1, 103-113. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2004.

Tapp, Nicholas. "The State of Hmong American Studies (An Essay on Bibliography)." In *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, edited by N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas, and G.Y. Lee, 3-37. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004.

Tapp, Nicholas. "Hmong Diasporas in Australia." In *The Hmong of Australia: Culture and Diaspora*, edited by N. Tapp and Gary Y. Lee, 59-96. Canberra, Australia: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, 2004.

Tapp, Nicholas. *Sovereignty and Rebellion: the White Hmong of Northern Thailand.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Tapp, Nicholas. "The Impact of Missionary Christianity Upon Marginalized Ethnic Minorities: The Case of the Hmong." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 20, no. 1, (1989): 70-95.

Tapp, Nicholas. “Reformation of Culture: Hmong Refugees from Laos,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, no. 1 (1988): 20-37.

Tapp, Nicholas. *The Hmong of Thailand: Opium People of the Golden Triangle*. London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1986.

Tapp, Nicholas. “Yellow Rain: Bees or Bombs?” *Inside Asia*, (February-March 1985): 42-44.

Tarrow, Sidney. *Power Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Task Force on Terrorism & Unconventional Warfare, House of Representatives. *The Vietnamese Use of Chemical-Biological Warfare in Southeast Asia*. Washington, D.C.: 13 June 1990.

Thao, Chue. “Hmong Migration and Leadership in Laos and the United States.” In *The Hmong in West: Observations and Reports*, edited by Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, 99-121. Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, U of MN, 1982.

Thao, Kao Seng and Amanda Yang. *Looking Back, Stepping Forward: the Hmong People*. Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2008.

Thao, Paoze. *Mong Education at the Crossroads*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999.

Thayer, Carlyle A. “Laos and Vietnam: The Anatomy of A ‘Special Relation’.” In *Contemporary Laos*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 245-273. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Thompson, Paul Richard. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Tinker, George E. *Missionary Conquest: the Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993.

Tollefson, James W. “Indochinese Refugees: A Challenge to America’s Memory of Vietnam.” In *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination*, edited by D. Michael Shafer, 262-280. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Tomforde, Maren. “The Hmong Mountains: Space and Culture in Northern Thailand.” In *The Impact of Globalization and Trans-Nationalism on the Hmong*, edited by Gary Yia Lee, 95-119. St. Paul, MN: Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University, 2009.

Tölöyan, Kachig. “Rethinking Diasporas: Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment.” *Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1, (1996): 3-36.

Toye, Hugh. *Laos: Buffer State or Background.* London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

Truman, David B. *The Government Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.

Tucker, Jonathan B. "The 'Yellow Rain' Controversy: Lessons for Arms Control Compliance." *The Nonproliferation Review*, (Spring 2001): 25-42.

Um, Khatharya. "The Vietnam War: What's in a Name?" *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2, (2005): 134-139.

Ungar, Sanford J. *Fresh Blood: The New American Immigrants.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

United Lao Council for Peace, Freedom and Reconstruction, *The Lao Conflict: Background, Basic Strategies and Intelligence*, Fresno, CA, 2004.

United Lao National Liberation Front. *Policies on Internal Affairs and International Relations*, (no date).

United Lao National Liberation Front. *Statement on the United Lao National Liberation Front*, June 1981.

United Lao National Liberation Front. *Manifesto of the United Lao National Liberation Front*, 7 September 1981.

United Lao National Liberation Front. "The Lao National Liberation Army, Proclamation I & II," 5 December 1989.

United Lao National Liberation Front. *White Paper on the Situation of Laos*. 7 September 1981.

United States Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 2009*, http://www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx?id=2316 (accessed 23 November 2009).
U.S. Committee for Refugees. "Indochina Refugees: No End in Sight." *World Refugee Survey 1981*. Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Services, 1981.

U.S. Committee for Refugees. *World Refugee Survey 1986*. Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Services, 1986.

U.S. Committee for Refugees. *World Refugee Survey 1988*. Washington, D.C.: American Council for Nationalities Service, 1988.

U.S. Congress, House, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1999*, 106th Congress, 1st Session, H.R. 371, *Congressional Record*, 19 January 1999.

U.S. Congress, House, *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1997 and Canadian Border Boat Landing Requirements*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, Committee of the Judiciary, 105th Congress, 1st Session, 26 June 1997.

United States Congress, House of Representative. *Indochinese Refugees.* Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, One Hundred Third Congress, second, April 26, 1994.

U.S. Congress, House. *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1990,* 101st Cong., 1st Session., H.R. 4513, *Congressional Record,* 4 April 1990

U.S. Congress, House. *Foreign Policy and Arms Control: Implications of Chemical Weapons.* Hearing before the Subcommittees on International Security and Scientific Affairs and on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Cong., 2nd Session., 20 March and 13 July 1982.

U.S. Congress, House. *Prisoners of War/Missing in Action: Oversight*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 97th Congress, 1st Session, Part I, 25 June 1981.

U.S. Congress, House. *Use of Chemical Agents in Southeast Asia Since the Vietnam War*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 1st Session, 12 December 1979.

U.S. Congress, House. *POW/MIA's: U.S. Policies and Procedures*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 96th Congress, 1st Session, 10 April, 7 May, 5 June 1979.

U.S. Congress, Senate. *POW/MIA's*. Report of the Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 13 January 1993.

U.S. Congress, Senate. *Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1990,* 101st Congress, 2nd session, S. 2687, *Congressional Record*, 24 May 1990.

U.S. Congress, Senate. *Yellow Rain: The Arms Control Implications*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Arms Control, Oceans, International Operations and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 98th Congress, 1st Session, 24 February 1983.

U.S. Congress, Senate. *Yellow Rain*. Hearing before Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Operations, and Environment, Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 10 November 1981

U.S. Congress, Senate. *A Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Subcommittee on the Judiciary*, 28 September 1970.

U.S. Department of State. “Long Wait Is Over: Hmong from Wat Tham Krabok Begin Arriving in U.S.” *U.S. Refugee Admissions Program News* 2, no. 3, (July 23, 2004): 1-2.

U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1984.* Washington: Joint Committee Print, February 1985.

U.S. Department of State, *Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan: An Update*. Report from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, November 1982, (Special Report No. 104)

U.S. Department of State. *Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan*. Report to the Congress from Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig, Jr, 22 March 1982, (Special Report No. 98).

U.S. Department of State. *Update to the Compendium on the Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons*. Washington, D.C.: Department of State, March 1981.

U.S. Department of State. *Reports of the Use of Chemical Weapons in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea*. Washington, D.C.: Department of State, June 1980.

UNDP, “The Economy of Laos: an Overview.” In *Laos: Beyond the Revolution*, edited by Joseph J. Zasloff and Leonard Unger, 67-83. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991.

UNHCR. *The State of the World Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

UNHCR. “Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Person in Southeast Asia Convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at Geneva on 20 and 21 July, 1979, and Subsequent Developments.” 7 November 1979.

Van der Kroef, Justus M. “Laos and Thailand: The Balancing of Conflict and Accommodation.” In *Contemporary Laos*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 274-290. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Van-es-Beeck, Bernard J. “Refugees from Laos, 1975-1979.” In *Contemporary Laos*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 324-334. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Vang, Chia Youyee. “U.S. Cold War Policies in Laos and the Hmong, 1961-1975.” In *De-Centering the Cultural Cold War: U.S. and Asia*, 1-22. Tokyo: Kokusai Shoin, 2009. [Original manuscript].

Vang, Chia Youyee. “Hmong Anti-Communism at Home and Abroad.” In *Anti-Communist Minorities in the U.S.: Political Activism of Ethnic Refugees*, edited by Ieva Zake, 211-231. New York: Plagrave Macmilan, 2009.

Vang, David. “Operation POPCORN: A Comprehensive Plan of Action, Coup

Operation," no date.

Vang Pobzeb. "The Hmong Council Education Committee: Grassroots Advocacy." In *Refugee Empowerment and Organizational Change: A Systems Perspective*, edited by Peter W. Van Arsdale, 37-49. Arlington, VA: Committee on Refugee Issues, General Anthropology Division, American Anthropological Association, 1993.

Vang Pobzeb. *White Paper on Human Rights Violations in Laos Since 1975*. Presented and Presented to the First Conference on Human Rights in Laos, Yale Law School, 8 December, 1990.

Vang Pobzeb. *White Paper on Forced Repatriation on Hmong Refugees From Thailand to Laos*. Lao Human Rights Council, 7 March 1992,

Vang Pobzeb. *White Paper on the Purposes of Hmong and Laotian Demonstrations in Washington, D.C., on June 9-10, 1991*. Lao Human Rights Council, 3 June 1991.

Vang Pobzeb. *White Paper on Demonstrations of Hmong Refugees and Letters From the Napho and Ban Vinai Camps, Thailand, to President Bill Clinton in 1993*. Lao Human Rights Council. 1993.

Vang Pobzeb, "The Politics of Hmong Organizations in America." Paper presented at the "Conference on the Hmong in Higher Education" on July 27-28, 1990, at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire.

Vang Pobzeb, "Accomplishments of the Lao Human Rights Council, 1987-1997," http://www.laohumrights.org/laoact02.htm, accessed 19 September 2005.

Vang Pobzeb, "Nine Principles of the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.," at http://www.laohumrights.org/laoact01.html. Retrieved 19 September 2005.

Vang Pao, *Against All Odds: The Laotian Freedom Fighters*. Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1987.

Vang Pao. *Doctrines on Laos: Putting the People First*. 26 November 2003.

Vang, Tou Fu. "The Hmong of Laos." In *Introduction to Indochinese History, Culture, Language and Life*, edited by J. Whitmore, 93-129. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, U of Michigan, 1979.

Vang, Xeu. "A Message to Hmong Refugees," *Lao Family Monthly News* 5, (August 1981): 8-9.

Võ, Linda Trinh. "Vietnamese American Trajectories: Dimensions of Diasporas." *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 1, (2003): ix-xviii.

Warner, Roger. *Back Fire: The CIA's Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Warner, Roger. *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos.* South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1996.

Waters, Mary C. *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Wekkin, Gary D. "The Rewards of Revolution: Pathet Lao Policy toward the Hill Tribes since 1975." In *Contemporary Laos*, edited by Martin Stuart-Fox, 181-198. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Westermeyer, Joseph, Tou Fu Vang, and Gaohli Lyfoug. "Migration and Mental Health: Association of Pre- and Post-Migration Factors With Self-Rating Scales." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 171 (1983): 92-96.

Westermeyer, Joseph, Mayka Bouafuely, and Tou Fu Vang, "Hmong Refugees in Minnesota: Sex Roles and Mental Health." *Medical Anthropology* 8 (1984): 229-245.

Whitmore, John K. "The Thai-Vietnamese Struggle for Laos in the Nineteenth Century." In *Laos: War and Revolution*, edited by Nina S. Adams and Alfred McCoy, 53-66. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Weinrod. W. Bruce. "Thirty Myths About Nicaragua." The Heritage Lecture No. 54. Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1986.

Weins, Herold J. *China's March toward the Tropics*. Hamden, CT: Shoe Strings Press, 1954.

Winant, Howard. *The World Is A Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Winichakul, Thongchai, *Siam mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of A Nation*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1994.

Winland, Daphne. "The Role of Religious Affiliation in Refugee Resettlement: The Case of the Hmong." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 24, no. 1, (1992): 96-120.

Winland, Daphne. "Christianity and Community: Conversion and Adaptation among Hmong Refugee Women," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 1, (1994): 21-45.

Winter, Roger P. "1982-the Year in Review." *World Refugee Survey 1983.* Washington, D.C.: American Council for National Service, 1983.

Wu, Frank. *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Wyman, M. *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Worsley, Peter. *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia.* New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Xiong, Victor Neej Thoob. *Where in the World do I Belong? Hmong Refugee to Hmong American.* Milwaukee, WI: PIP Printing, 2006.

Yale Law School. *Laos: Human Rights in a Forgotten Country*. 8 December 1990.

Yang Dao. *Hmong at the Turning Point*. Minneapolis: Worldbridge Association, Ltd., 1993.

Yang Dao. "Why did the Hmong leave Laos?" In *The Hmong in the West*, edited by Bruce T. Downing and Douglas P. Olney, 3-18. Minneapolis, MN: Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1982.

Yang, Dao. "Hmong Culture is Hmong Soul." In *The Impact of Globalization and Trans-Nationalism on the Hmong: Selected Presentations from the First International Conference on Hmong Studies*, edited by Gary Yia Lee, 53-56. St. Paul: Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University, 2009.

Yang Dao. "The Hmong: Enduring Traditions." In *Minority Cultures of Laos: Kammu, Lua, Lahu, Hmong, and Mien*, edited by Judy Lewis and Damrong Tayanin, 249-315. Rancho Cordovo: California Southeast Asian Community Resource Center, Folsom Cordova Unified School District, 1992.

Yang Dao, "Hmong Refugees from Laos: The Challenge of Social Change." In In *Hmong/Miao in Asia*, edited by N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas, and G.Y. Lee, 477-485. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004.

Yang, Kao Kalia. *The Late Homecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2008.

Yang, Kaiyi. "Hmong-Mongolian?" *Hmong Forum*, (1996): 48-62.

Yang, Kou. "Hmong American Contemporary Experience." In *Emerging Voices: Experiences of Underrepresented Asian Americans*. Edited by Huping Ling, 236-253. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

Yang, Kou. "Hmong Diasporas of the Post-War Period." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 12, no. 3, (2003): 271-300.

Yaj, Nyiaj Xeeb and Tsooj Ceeb Thoj, *Phau Ntawv Txuj Txoog Hmoob*, (Chiang Mai, Thailand: 1998).

Yaj, Txooj Tsawb. *Rog Paj Cai*. Recorded by Y. Betrais in Sayouboury (Laos), 1972.

Yoshikawa, Taeko. "From a Refugee Camp to the MN State Senate: A Case Study of a Hmong American Women's Challenge," *Hmong Studies Journal* 7, (2006): 1-23.

Zasloff, Joseph. *The Economy of the New Laos.* Vol. 2. Hanover, NH: American Universities Field Staff, 1981.

Zasloff, Joseph. "Laos 1977: The Realities of Independence." *Asian Survey* 18, no. 2, (February 1978): 164-174.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this dissertation, I employed mixed research methodologies. My research methods consisted of archival research in Thailand and the United States; ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation in Laos and the United States; and in-depth oral history interviews with Hmong people in Laos and the United States. These various methods complemented each other, and they were necessary to chart the complicated history of Hmong transnational politics that I analyzed in this dissertation. The archival research provided insights on the organizations and movements that I explored in the dissertation from an *etic* or outsider perspective. Meanwhile, the oral history interviews and my own ethnographic fieldwork, which consisted largely of informal and un-taped conversations with people in the field, enabled me to understand the organizations and movements from an *emic* or insider perspective. More specifically, the archival research was great at locating statistical and other factual data about the organizations that I explored in this study, but the voices of the people involved in these organizations were absent. The oral history interviews gave us the voices of the people which could not be found in the documents deposited at the archives. The ethnographic fieldwork was essential in understanding how the people felt and what they were thinking about a particular issue in their everyday lives. People sometime expressed their deepest thoughts and feelings outside of an informal and structured setting such as an interview.

Archival Research

For this dissertation, I conducted archival research in Thailand and the United States. In the United States, I looked at the International Institute of Minnesota (IIM) records and the Refugee Studies Center (RSC) collections at the Immigration History Resource Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota. The IIM records contain many Hmong refugee case files from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s. I looked, in particular, at Series 6 (Refugee Case Files on Hmong from 1975-2002), Series 18 (Casework Files from 1975-1993), and Series 19 (General Case Files on “Not Made Cases” and “Open

Cases" from 1970-1980). The "Not Made Cases" and "Open Cases" files contain cases where refugee families had applied for resettlement but never actually came to the United States. The RSC collections consist of statistical reports, files documenting Hmong history and culture, newspaper clippings, monographs, research papers, dissertations, government reports, and information regarding U.S-based organizations and NGOs working with Hmong refugees.

In the United States, I also visited the Vietnam War Archive at Texas Tech University and the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California at Irvine. At the Vietnam War Archive, I looked at the Allen Cates Papers, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Papers, Douglass Pike Papers, George Veith Papers, Odgen William Papers, Tom Matthews Papers, and William Colby Papers. The Vietnam War Archive has digitized many of the documents in these various collections and made them available in PDF format online. One can search for these online documents through the Vietnam War Virtual Archive. To get those not accessible online, one would have to go to Texas Tech University and search from them at their location. At the Vietnam War Archive, I found an oral interview with William Lair, the American CIA agent responsible for initiating and finalizing the deal with Hmong General Vang Pao in late 1960 to get the Hmong to fight for the United States during the Vietnam War. There was also an interview with Bee Vang, a Hmong pilot during the war, by Roger Warner, author of two books on the CIA and the Hmong.[1232] At the Vietnam War Archive, I also located invaluable documents on "Yellow Rain," the term that Hmong refugees originally coined to describe the chemical weapons that the Pathet Lao government and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam allegedly used against the Hmong in the Lao jungle in the late 1970s. These documents on Yellow Rain are instrumental to our understanding of the U.S. position on the issue and for exploring how the Hmong engaged in transnational politics framed and used the issue to advocate for rights and protection for their co-ethnics back home. Most of all, at this archive, I found a few documents by the United Lao National Liberation Front, the main organization advocating regime change in Laos.

[1232] Roger Warner, *Back Fire: The CIA's Secret War in Laos and Its Link to the War in Vietnam*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) and *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos*, (South Royalton, Vermont: Steerforth Press, 1996).

At the Southeast Asian Archive at UC-Irvine, I looked at the Brigitte Marshall and Gayle Morison collections. These are their files on Southeast Asian refugees from the 1981-1995 and 1969-2001, respectively. In the Brigitte Marshall collection are some fascinating transcripts of audiocassettes that Hmong refugees sent to their relatives in Fresno, California, expressing their fear of repatriation to Laos in the early 1990s and asking for help. The other pieces that I find fascinating in this collection are the Phanat Nikhom newsletters that contain brief letters and short essays that Hmong refugees and other groups wrote while they were in the Phanat Nikhom refugee processing center. The letters and essays focus on their visions of what America was like. Gayle Morrison has collected many oral histories from the Hmong in the United States, and she has published them in her work, *Sky Is Falling.*[1233] Any historian who wants to study the Hmong during the Secret War should find these oral histories fascinating to look at. Unfortunately, Gayle Morrison has not yet made these available for research.

Outside of the United States, I looked at the collections at the Thailand Information Center (TIC) at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. This is Thailand's largest and most prestigious university. In the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University authored a series of studies or reports on Hmong refugees. These reports and studies were what I gathered from the TIC. These reports provide great insights into why Thailand closed the refugee camps and why Thailand agreed to the repatriation of Hmong refugees to Laos. They also show why Hmong refugees were reluctant to accept resettlement and why they resisted repatriation at the same time. At TIC, I also located a few studies on Thailand's racial attitudes toward Hmong refugees and the Hmong Thai (Hmong citizens of Thailand) alike. One study shows how Hmong Thai intentionally concealed their ethnic identity to blend in with ethnic Thai and to avoid discrimination in schools and the workplace.[1234]

Of all the archives I visited, I found the Hmong Archives in St. Paul, Minnesota, to be the most promising location to do any research on the Hmong, especially on Hmong

---

[1233] Gayle Morrison, *Sky Is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA's Evacuation of the Hmong From Laos*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999).

[1234] Prasit Leeprecha and Yangong Trakarnthamrong, "Concealment of Ethnic Identity: Impact of Ethnic Discrimination on Highland Ethnic Groups in Urban Chiang Mai," Paper presented at the 4th National Conference of Anthropologists in Thailand, (Bangkok, Thailand: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindorn Anthropology Center, 2005). [Report is in Thai language]. Located at Thailand Information Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. Call no. 68477.

transnational politics. It currently holds the largest collection of Hmong-related materials in the world. As of December 31, 2009, the Hmong Archives possessed over 125,378 items, including some 4,539 books, 2,810 newspapers, 3,506 periodicals, 81,500 files, 9,811 photographs, 2,108 videos, 2,072 audios, and 677 maps. At the Hmong Archives, I looked at the Bee Moua photos and papers collection. Bee Moua was a former representative of the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) in Michigan. In this collection were three binders of photos of Chao Fa "freedom fighters" in Laos and Thailand. The photos were mostly taken from the 1970s to the early 1990s. Many of the photos were dated, but many others were not. In the same collection were Bee Moua's correspondences with various right-wing American supporters in the 1980s. The bulk of the correspondences were letters exchanged between Bee Moua and American supporters, including retired Major General John K. Singlaub of the United States Army, to arrange for Pa Kao Her's trip to Angola and Texas in 1985. At the Hmong Archives, I also found a collection of Chao Fa documents that Soua Her, a Chao Fa liaison in Fresno, California, had compiled to present to the United States Congress in 1994. These documents contained the policies and by-laws of the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos. They provided great insights into the motivations behind the formation of the Chao Fa Party. At the Hmong Archives were also the series of articles by freelance journalist Ruth Hammond that detailed the financial problems that engulfed the United Lao National Liberation Front in the late 1980s.

In this dissertation, I also used government publications on the Hmong that I gathered through Wilson Library of the University of Minnesota and the Memorial Library of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The publications I gathered are congressional hearings on Yellow Rain in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan, Hmong repatriation in Thailand, and the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act. Hmong community leaders from the various community organizations working on these issues were invited to testify at these various congressional hearings. Their prepared statements are included in the publications. Other documents are reports by NGOs, such as Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, and the United Nations. These are reports mostly on the refugee crises in Thailand and human rights abuses in Laos. Others are country reports on the state of human rights in Laos and Thailand by the United States

Department of State and the United States Committee for Refugees. Most of all, my written sources include newspapers and periodicals such as *Hmong Times*, *Hmong Today*, *Sacramento Bee*, *Fresno Bee*, *New York Times*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Star Tribune*, and *Bangkok Post*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), and *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS).

Oral History Interviews

Oral history is the systematic method of gathering, preserving and interpreting living people's testimonies about their own experiences, past events and ways of life. For the Oral Historical Association, oral history "refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past."[1235] For this dissertation, I interviewed twenty-eight Hmong people between 2007 and 2010. Twenty six were men, and two were women. One was born in the United States and the rest in Laos. Two were under twenty five years of age, and the rest were above thirty. Three interviews took place in California, but one of these interviews was with someone visiting relatives in California from Laos. Three interviews took place in Laos, and the rest of the interviews (twenty two) were with the Hmong in Minnesota. One of the interviews that took place in Minnesota was with a Hmong person from Thailand during his visit to the United States. Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to three hours. Four people were interviewed twice, meaning that the sum total of interviews was thirty two.

All the interviews, except two, were conducted in the Hmong language. These other two were conducted in English, and these were with young Hmong activists who founded or co-founded their own group in the United States to bring attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle. English was their preferred language; therefore, English was used during the interviews. I did all the translation and transcription of the interviews. The transcripts of the interviews, both those in English and those translated

[1235] Oral History Association, "Principles and Practices for Oral History," October 2009, at http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/principles-and-practices/#intro, (accessed 7 July 2010).

from Hmong, had been edited for clarity and to reflect standard English usage. Here I take the view of historian Sucheng Chan who argued that "it would be insult to them [the Hmong] to translate their stories into an English script that contains grammatical and spelling errors, under the misguided notion that such a rendering would be more 'authentic'."[1236] After all, the interviewees themselves do not speak "broken" Hmong. To represent Hmong speakers in non-standard English, therefore, as John Duffy has written, rephrasing Chan, is "to expose adult men and women to the patronizing attitudes and overt racism directed at refugees and immigrants who are not fluent in spoken or written English."[1237]

Who were the interviewees?

In this dissertation, I contended that there were two major political streams to Hmong transnational politics. One was the separatist and the other the reformed or restorative. The separatist argued for the separation of the Hmong from the Lao, both culturally and politically. Advocates of this stream sought to gain greater cultural and political autonomy within Laos as well as to create a completely separate Hmong state in the homeland of Laos. The organizations that identified with this separatist stream included the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) and its cognate, the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, that operated in the 1980s and 1990s and the newer organizations, including the Hmoob Mojthem Foundation, the World Hmong People's Congress, the Congress of World Hmong People, the Chao Fa Foundation, and the Northern Lao Development Project (known as 411) that emerged in the early 2000s. The organization that identified with the reformed or restorative stream was the United Lao National Liberation Front. Of the twenty eight people I interviewed, twelve were those associated with the separatist stream and eight with the reformed stream of Hmong transnational politics.

My primary informants on the lives and activities of these organizations associated with the separatist stream of Hmong transnational politics included the former

---

[1236] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), xiii.
[1237] John Duffy, "Writing From These Roots: Literacy, Rhetoric, and History in A Hmong-American Community," (Ph.D diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000), 30.

secretary general of the ELOL and the DCFPL; a former Hmong Chao Fa fighter with Pa Kao Her and Zong Zoua Her in the Lao jungle in the 1970s, a fighter for the ELOL in the 1980s, a loyal supporter and contributor to Pa Kao Her in the 1990s, and a teacher and Board member of the Hmong Language Institute of Minnesota, where the Pahawh writing script and the religious and moral teachings of Yang Shong Lue, the progenitor of the Chao Fa movement, are taught; a Hmong fighter for the ELOL in the early 1980s who went as part of the group of fighters that Pa Kao Her sent to get training and weapons in Yunnan province, China; a sniper for the Royal Lao Government during the war in the 1960s; the co-founder and leader of the Chao Fa temple in Ban Vinai; the co-founder and leader of the WHPC and the Chao Fa Foundation; the spokesperson for the Congress of World Hmong People; and the founder and spokesperson for the Hmong Mojtheem Foundation and former supporter of both the ULNLF and the Chao Fa. The other people I interviewed to gain information on the Chao Fa included another teacher and the director of the Hmong Language Institute of Minnesota and the host of the radio program, "Haiv Hmoob Radio," which promoted the history, life and religion of Yang Shong Lue; a student of Yang Shong Lue, who taught the Pahawh to Lee Chai, a co-founder of the Chao Fa temple in Ban Vina, and who continued to teach the Pahawh in St. Paul, Minnesota; and the owner of the Jao Fa (a variant of the spelling of Chao Fa) grocery store in St. Paul, Minnesota.

My primary informants for the life and activities of the United Lao National Liberation Front included the former secretary general of the ULNLF who later defected from the organization; a stronger supporter and advisor to General Vang Pao, the Hmong leader of the ULNLF; the son of a prominent military leader who defected from the organization; the Hmong tasseng who led an army of Vang Pao supporters to fight the communists in the Lao jungle in the 1970s; a clan leader who served as the recruiter and collector of monetary contribution to the organization; a fighter for the organization who stayed in Thailand to fight in the resistance until the very last moment when he had to be airlifted from the border to the refugee camp to submit his application for resettlement in the United States in the early 2000s; a former colonel in the Royal Lao Army and now the Hmong cultural specialist at a local Hmong organization who is highly regarded in

the community; a former radio operator during the war and now a Board member of the Special Guerilla Units (SGU) organization in Minnesota.

How were the people selected?

I chose people for interview based on their role in the history of the politics of the Hmong diaspora after 1975 that analyzed in this study. As the description of the people above demonstrates, many of the people I selected for interview were directly involved in founding the organizations that I explored in this dissertation. I chose the former general secretary of the ELOL for interview, for example, because of his knowledge of and involvement in the organization. Likewise, I also chose to interview the founder of the Hmoob Mojthem Foundation because of his involvement and role in the organization as well as his knowledge of and past involvement in the ELOL and the ULNLF and other political organizations. I also interview a former Chao Fa fighter who was part of the group that Pa Kao Her, President of the ELOL, sent to receive arms and training in Yunnan province, China, in the early 1980s to gain information about how they were selected and sent for training in China at the time.

Knowledge and involvement in the above political organizations, however, were not the only criteria I used to select people for interview. In this study, I also interviewed people who were not necessarily knowledgeable about or involved in these political organizations, or people who were not necessarily associated with either of the streams of Hmong transnational politics. These people included three Hmong businessmen who returned to establish long-term residence in Laos; and two young activists who co-founded organizations and led marches to bring attention to the plight of the Hmong in the Lao jungle in the early 2000s; one elderly person who came to visit relatives in the United States from Laos; another elderly person who was forced by his brothers to go into the military in their place during the war because he was the only one who did not have any children; an elderly Hmong man who came to the United States in the early 2000s from the Buddhist monastery in Thailand called Wat Tham Krabok. The three Hmong businessmen were interviewed to understand why they returned to Laos, what they did after they returned, how they re-established their lives in Laos after they had lived in exile for so many years, and how the local Hmong and Lao communities

perceived and treated them. Their stories shed light on their return migration, but they also helped us think critically about how the return migration of the Hmong diaspora to the homeland affected their transnational identities, communities, and politics. The same could be said about the other people I interviewed. The two young activists were interviewed for their involvement in the organizations they co-founded. These interviews were instrumental in understanding how their politics were similar or different from the politics of the Hmong elders and what prompted them to become interested in transnational politics. In the larger context of Hmong transnational politics, these interviews helped us understand the shifting nature of Hmong transnational politics among the different generations. As I pointed out in the epilogue, the young activists were involved in transnational politics for a very different reason. Unlike their elders who were involved in transnational politics because they were longing to return home, the young activists were not interested in returning to Laos. They became involved in transnational politics solely to secure protection of human rights for the people back in Laos. Finally, I chose people, such as the one elderly man who just arrived from Wat Tham Krambok and the one elderly woman who came to visit her relatives in California from Laos, for interview to gain perspectives on what life was like for them during the war in the 1960s, in the refugee camps, and urban communities in America. To be sure, they could not provide me with any information about the organizations and movements above, but they provided great insights into what life was like for the Hmong refugees at Wat Tham Krambok and for the Hmong people in the villages in Laos before, during and after the war. Their stories also provided me with a broader context for understanding why *some* Hmong elders wanted to go home and they would support the transnational political efforts of the exiled political and military leaders to democratize communist Laos or create a separate Hmong nation in the homeland.

How did I come into contact with the people I interviewed?

Prior to 2003, when I began my study at the University of Minnesota, I only knew two of the people I interviewed. These two were related to my father. The rest were people I met and came to know since 2003. One of these people was someone who stimulated my interest in this subject of Hmong transnational politics. This was someone

who had previously enrolled in the history department at the University of Minnesota and ended up terminating his study to start a business and become involved in Hmong transnational politics. When I met him in the fall of 2003, he had been spreading and promoting what he called "Hmong nationalism" in the communities both in the United States and back home in Laos. Through this person, I eventually came into contact with other political actors like him. Soon, I was a regular at meetings, protests, and rallies organized by some of the key leaders in the newer Chao Fa organizations in the Twin Cities. In one instance, I even helped drive a group of supporters from St. Paul to Washington, D.C. to participate in a protest. After returning from the trip, one of the organizers asked me to write a report of the protest, which I did and later published in *Hmong Times*, a local newspaper in St. Paul, Minnesota.[1238] It was through my attendance at the various meetings, gatherings, protests and rallies that I eventually came into contact with the people who I interviewed in this dissertation. In a real sense, I interviewed the people I did in this study because these were the people I came into contact with at these various meetings, gatherings, protests and rallies I attended.

Another way that I came to select the people above for interviews was through a strategy known as purposeful or snowball sampling. In this procedure, the researcher locates people qualified to talk about a subject of interest and asks these people for recommendations about other people to interview. In this way, the researcher expands his or her number of informants and develops a network of knowledgeable informants. In retrospect, I should have used this strategy more consistently and effectively. There were some people who I had forgotten to ask for recommendations about other people to interview. Needless to say, the snowball technique was also one strategy that I came to interview the people I did for this dissertation. The former secretary general of the ELOL, for example, was someone who I came to interview using this snowball technique.

What were the interview questions and what were the focuses of the interviews?

The interview questions were open-opened, and they were generally informal although I brought a question script to each interview (see Appendix B for the script).

[1238] Her Vang. "Another Step toward Freedom for Hmong People: Demonstration in Washington, D.C.." *Hmong Times*, 1 July 2005.

The questions on the script were too many, and I never asked all the questions that I had prepared. I used the script only as a compass to point me in directions I might want to go. The questions I asked during the interview varied from person to person depending on who the person was. In other words, I did not ask every person the same questions. Instead, I tailored my questions to the people accordingly depending on their role in the history that I explored in this study.

For all the people, I began with questions designed to get a synopsis of their biography. The questions I asked for this brief biographical sketch of the people included: (1) When and where were you were? (2) Who were your parents, and what were their occupations? (3) Did you get any formal education? If so, where did you get your education? (4) What was your occupation before, during and after the war? (5) How and when did you get to Thailand? (5) How and when did you come to the United States? Was it through church, organizational, or familial sponsorship? (6) If you could, would you return to Laos and why?

From there, I delved into questions about their specific role in the history that I examined in the dissertation. When I interviewed, for example, the Hmong elderly man who came as part of the last wave of Hmong refugees from Thailand to the United States in the early 2000s, I tailored my questions to solicit information about his decision to stay in Thailand since the early 1980s and what life was like for him and others in the refugee camps, including Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham, and at the Wat Tham Krabok Buddhist monastery. When I interviewed the former secretary general of the ELOL, I tailored my questions to solicit information about the goals and activities of the ELOL and its cognate, the Democratic Chao Fa Party of Laos, from its inception in the early 1980s to the assassination of its president, Pa Kao Her, in the early 2000s. When I interviewed the former Chao Fa fighter who went as part of the group of fighters to Yunnan province, China, to receive training and weapons in the early 1980s, I tailored my questions to solicit information about what it was like for him to go on that trip, why he went, and who went with him. When I interviewed the former secretary of the ULNLF who defected from the organization, I tailored my questions to solicit information about the goals of the organization and why he defected from the organization. When I interviewed the three businessmen who returned to Laos, I tailored my questions to solicit

information about their decision to return to re-establish long-term residence in Laos and what life was like for them since their return. And when I interviewed the founder of Hmoob Mojthem Foundation, I tailored my questions to solicit information about how the organization came about and what the goals, strategies and activities of the organization were.

To say the least, I prepared a script for each interview, but my questions for the people were not always the same. I asked all the people the same questions to get a brief biographical summary of their lives, but the rest of the questions were tailored to the specific role that they played in the history that I studied in this dissertation. Not only that, the focus of the interviews was not on *their life histories* as much as it was on *the life of the organization* they supported. For example, when I interviewed the secretary general of the ELOL, the focus of the interview was not on the detail of his involvement or role in the organization. It was on the goals, objectives, and activities of the ELOL. In other words, my goal was not to get a thorough biography of his life. I was more intent on getting a biography of his organization. The same thing could be said about my interview with the former secretary of the ULNLF and the political advisor to Vang Pao. I did not focus my interviews with them on their personal biographies as much as I did on the biography of the ULNLF. Likewise, when I interviewed the Hmong elderly man from Wat Tham Krabok, I was not only interested in his personal biography. I was also interested in what other Hmong people who he interacted with at the monastery thought and said about the lead abbot of the monastery and his significance to the Hmong people.

Not focusing too deep on the personal biographies of the people, for me, was also a way to build rapport with the people I interviewed and to respect their comfort zones—something that oral historians greatly emphasized. During my interviews, I allowed the people to disclose as much of their life histories as possible without forcing them to do so. My goal was to get enough background information about who they were. At the same time, I tried not to probe for intricate and detailed information about their involvement with the political organizations that I analyzed in this work. If they voluntarily disclosed such information, I would undoubtedly take it. At the same time, I recognized the sensitivity of the information, and I empathized with them if they were uncomfortable to reveal their involvement with the organization. I made sure that they understood that

they had the right to withhold or disclose any information they wanted by emphasizing this right from the outset. I told them that they could choose not to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable answering. This was especially if they were just members of the organization. To be sure, if they were key leaders in the organization, I would explore their connection with the organization more in depth. The leaders, I found, not only were more knowledgeable of the organization, they were also more at ease talking about their involvement with the organization. Overall, all the people were more comfortable talking about the organization—why the organization was developed, what it wanted, why it sought what it did, and so on—than they did about themselves and their involvement in the organization. Thus, the bulk of the interviews concentrated on the biographies of the organizations and not on the personal biographies of the individual interviewees.

It was with this focus on the lives of the organizations, such as the ELOL and the ULNLF, in mind that the personal biographies of the people I interviewed faded into the background while the lives of the organizations were highlighted in the chapters in the dissertation. In hindsight, I should have focused more closely on the biographies of the people I interviewed in order to explore more fully the interaction and relationship between the personal and the organizational. At the same time, I also recognized the risks involved in focusing too much on the personal biographies of the people I interviewed. A focus on the lives of the people I interviewed, especially those who occupied important positions in the organizations and had engaged in sensitive and covert military or political actions against the Lao PDR government and its armed forces, could potentially expose them to peril—something that I tried to avoid by focusing instead on the life of their organization rather than on their personal life. The United States government could, for example, use such information to charge them for violating U.S. federal laws that prohibit U.S. residents from engaging in warfare with a country or government with which the United States government is at peace. Oppositional groups or parties could also use the information disclosed about the person, especially his location, to harm him or deny him visas to make international travels to certain countries.

Limits to the Interviews

The number of people interviewed *was not pre-determined*. The number of people I was able to interview was determined by the way that I selected people for interview. As I stated above, I did not choose any random person to interview. I selected the people for interview based on their specific role in the history I analyzed in this study. This meant that I had to know something about the person and how he or she could contribute to the study before I tried contacting the person through one of my social networks. The questions that I asked the person were tailored accordingly to solicit information about his or her specific role in the history that I explored in this study. Unless I knew something about the person, what the person's role was in the history I examined, or how the person could contribute to this study, I did not know what questions to ask. In a real sense, I was able to interview twenty seven people I had come to know through my social networks and the people who I felt also had something to contribute to the study. I also arrived at this number of interviews and had to stop the interviews because I needed to start analyzing the data and writing the dissertation. More importantly, I concluded the interviews when I felt that I had gathered enough information to begin charting the evolution of Hmong transnational politics and explore the forces that influenced the flow of their politics in the diaspora after 1975.

Scholars who conduct oral history interviews in the Hmong community can face a number of issues related to their informants' attitudes toward them (the investigators) and toward the topic under study. The set of challenges and difficulties a scholar faces in conducting fieldwork and interviews with the Hmong people will vary from person to person. In her research on the Hmong in Wisconsin, for example, Jo Ann Koltyk found that the Hmong people were not easily accessible because of a general mistrust and reluctance to talk to outsiders about them.[1239] Their clan-based social organization, gender roles, age hierarchies, and divisions between Hmong and non-Hmong Christians also made the use of an interpreter problematic in conducting research in Hmong

[1239] Jo Ann Koltyk, *New Pioneers in the Heartland: Hmong Life in Wisconsin*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 12-16.

communities.[1240] Similarly, during his research on Hmong literacy development, John Duffy found that he had excellent contacts with the educated class of Hmong professionals, mostly men in their thirties and forties but limited access to other segments of the Hmong population, including elders, women, and non-English speakers. He also never reached anyone who could read and write the Hmong writing system known as the Sayaboury Script even though he knew of a Hmong person who could read the script. "Some people that were recommended refused to meet with me," he wrote, "and others would agree to meet but never get around to scheduling the visit."[1241] Mai Na Lee, in her dissertation on the Hmong under French colonialism, also acknowledged that she did not gain access to the Hmong on the political left (that is, the people who fought on the communist side or the political rivals to Touby Lyfoung and General Vang Pao during the war in the 1960s) because of the "deeply polarized sentiments among the Hmong." In the end, Lee said, "My effort to collect the oral history of the Hmong has awakened me to the deep chasms that have separated my people during the last fifty years. Although I was not born in time to play any role in this division, I have not escaped its consequences."[1242]

During my field research, I discovered that there were several potential obstacles that limited my access to people and information in the Hmong community. Some of these obstacles reflected the deep chasms of the people in the community to which Lee had alluded. Others were inherently embedded in Hmong mores and cultural norms. The first of these obstacles had to do with my gender. In the culture, it is customarily the husband who entertains the male guests when they come to visit unless the wife is a public figure and people come specifically to the house to talk to her. As a man, I had more limited access to Hmong women. Take, for example, the time when I went to interview a couple who came to Minnesota as part of the last wave of Hmong refugees from Thailand to the United States in the early 2000s. To be sure, I wanted to talk to both the wife and the husband. During the interview with the husband, the wife

---

[1240] Jo Ann Koltyk, "Telling Narratives Through Home Videos: Hmong Refugees and Self-Documentation of Life in the Old and New Country," *Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 422, (Autumn, 1993): 430-435.
[1241] John Duffy, "Writing From These Roots: Literacy, Rhetoric, and History in a Hmong-American Community," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2000), 22-24.
[1242] Mai Na Lee, "The Dream of the Hmong Kingdom: Resistance, Collaboration, and Legitimacy under French Colonialism, 1893-1955," (Ph. D Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 20-21.

periodically interjected to make some remarks. When I, however, wanted to interview her, she responded, to the effect of, "Oh. That's okay. What the old man says is enough. That's pretty much everything. I do not really know anyway." Because it is customary for the man to talk to another man, a male researcher, like me, will gain access to information largely through the man of the house unless the woman is the most vocal and a public figure herself or unless the male researcher is conducting a focus group with a collective of Hmong women. It is culturally inappropriate for a male researcher to do a one-on-one interview with another Hmong woman if she is not someone with some leadership position in the community. During the course of my research, I also found that the husband would do the interview with me and not the wife even when both the wife and husband were active in transnational politics. The wife would only occasionally interject during the interview, but she would not sit down for a separate interview.

Another barrier to getting data that I encountered during my field research had to do with my lack of family status or prestige. The Hmong people, I discovered through this process of research, still place a very high emphasis on family status or prestige. Having low family status in the community did not prevent me from getting access to people in the community altogether. Nevertheless, coming from a prominent family would certainly make it easier for me to gain access to people. The very first thing that people consistently did when they first met me was to ask who my father was and who my sub-clan leader was. Except for my own immediate and extended family members, no one knew my parents. My parents had no formal education. They are both illiterate. They cannot even read and write in the Hmong language, not to mention a complex and complicated language like English. My father was no high-ranking military officer, and he had not established any close connection with those most knowledgeable about the Secret War and those most active in Hmong transnational politics in the diaspora. My father was never a member of any of the Hmong transnational political organizations. My parents spent most of their lives in Laos as poor peasants. On numerous occasions, I had to tell my informants the sad reality that they would not know my parents because my parents were not "well-known" in the community. Because of the lack of family prestige and well-established familial and social networks, I had to develop my own

social networks. It took time to develop such networks. As a result, my access to people in the community was more limited.

Because the Hmong were a closely-knit and much politicized community, I found that my clan affiliation was a mixed blessing. My affiliation with the Vang clan was *supposed to* give me limitless access to informants in the Vang clan, many of whom were Vang Pao supporters. Being a member of the Vang clan alone, however, did not automatically guarantee access to informants in the clan. Again, family status and prestige would help. Unfortunately, I lacked that family status and prestige to give me access to informants in the Vang clan. We belonged to the Vang clan, but not all the people in the clan knew my parents. During my field research, I gained access to three of my informants through my parents' network. The rest of my informants, including a close associate of General Vang Pao who is a Vang, were the people who I had made contacts with through my own initiative and network in the community.

Sometimes, my affiliation with the Vang clan was a barrier to gaining access to people. Because of my clan affiliation, members of other clans, particularly those who were members of a competing political faction to that of General Vang Pao, were less willing to talk to me. They feared that I would be a spy for the general and his organization because I was a Vang. An informant once told me that members of the World Hmong People's Congress warned each other to be very cautious with me and about what they said in my presence after I had been to a few of their meetings in St. Paul because of my clan affiliation. He turned out to be right. I had the most difficult time trying to set up interviews with members and leaders of the Word Hmong People's Congress (WHPC) and its offspring, the Congress of World Hmong People (CWHP). Only after repeated calls and attempts did one of the founders of the World Hmong People's Congress agree to talk to me. One advocate of the Congress of World Hmong People agreed to set up an interview with the organization's spokesperson for me only because I was the son-in-law of one of his cousins. That is, I got the interview with them because he was related to my father-in-law (my wife's father). I was able to set up an interview with one leader from the World Hmong People's Congress only after he had defected from the Congress of World Hmong People and only after numerous encounters at different community events and phone calls. Strangely, however, both the WHPC and

CWHP were not shy to disclose their intentions and statements over the internet. I found many useful sources by the organizations online, including press releases, policy statements, and declarations. This, it seemed, pointed to the problematic nature of my clan affiliation. Similarly, only after repeated calls and attempts was I able to finally set up an interview with a rival of General Vang Pao even though this person and I had met each other on numerous occasions and known each other.

The last potential barrier to getting data that I encountered during my field research in the Hmong community had to do with my own ethnicity or race. This barrier, simply put, had to do with the *insider versus outsider* dilemma. One would think that, as a member of the Hmong community or an insider, I would have better access to the community than an outsider or a non-Hmong. This, unfortunately, had not always been the case. Sometimes, an outsider seemed to gain better access to the Hmong community than an insider like me. My first hypothesis is that, as an insider, people automatically assumed that I, being a male researcher from the highly politicized Vang clan, had a stake in the politics that I studied beyond my academic interest. They thought that I would use the information that I gathered to promote my own political agenda within the Hmong community. Because they feared that my political ambition may contradict and impede their political agenda, they were less willing to talk to me. In contrast, an outsider, or a non-Hmong researcher, had no long-term interest and commitment to Hmong politics. An outsider would not become directly involved in Hmong political affairs, and he or she had no other ulterior motive to become interested in Hmong politics. My other hypothesis has to do with the general feeling that the Hmong people had toward non-Hmong individuals and members of their own community—a feeling symptomatic of a *colonized mentality*, which expresses a general sensitivity, respect and appreciation for the outsiders, especially white researchers, but a general mistrust and pessimism about the intention of the insiders themselves. Most of all, the non-Hmong researchers did not have the answer the question of who their father were and their sub-clan and clan leaders were to establish some relationship with the potential informants the way that a Hmong researcher did.

During my field research, I found that Hmong separatist nationalists were more willing and open to interviews than Hmong reformed nationalists. This, I think, was

because Hmong separatist nationalists had consistently preached Hmong unity, pride, and power and told the community to love and help one another. To deny me any interview and to not assist me in the project would work against their gospel of Hmong love and unity. It would make them seem hypocritical. In contrast, the experience of the restorative nationalists had been a reliance on the outsiders to advocate for the Hmong community and help bring Hmong political issues to the outside world. When an outsider requested these restorative nationalists for an interview, he or she was more likely to get an interview because the Hmong believed that the outsider would use the information he or she gathered to promote Hmong political cause and broadcast their message to the outside world. On the contrary, when an insider asked them for an interview, their immediate reaction was a fear that the insider would use the information to promote his or her political agenda; therefore, they were more reluctant to talk to the insider.

In spite of these obstacles and challenges in doing ethnographic fieldwork in the Hmong community, I was able to use my experience and position to develop my own network in the community and in each of the political factions. Although I was not an active participant in any of the Hmong transnational political organizations, most of the people I interviewed had, by the time of our interview, seen me enough in the community and thought of me as a double-insider. By "double-insider," I mean simply both a member of the Hmong community and a "potential" member of their organization. In spite of the odds against the insiders, they can still get access to information if they use their resources effectively and use them as their point of power. The insiders, I discovered, can have great potential to get access to the Hmong community *if* they move beyond just an insider to a double-insider. It is at the second layer of one's insider identity where one is perceived as a potential recruit to the organization that one is given access to information. To get access to information as a double-insider, one must express empathy toward the informants' cause and politics. By empathy, I do not necessarily imply sympathy or agreement. While it is difficult to sustain one's feelings of sympathy for their cause, it is not impossible to do so. During the course of my research, I found that a few of my informants were willing to talk to me because they thought I was sympathetic to their cause. They agreed to the interview because they wanted to use the

opportunity to persuade me to join their cause and to recruit me into their organization. They also hoped that I would be a voice for their cause. Through me, they hoped to be heard and understood. To be sure, I empathized with them, but I was not necessarily sympathetic to their politics. I did not agree totally with their ideas and, especially some of their historical claims. Many of them, for example, clearly engaged in what some might call revisionist history or what Ernest Gellner has called "cultural revivication"—efforts to revive or reconstruct identity through symbolism and historical interpretation.[1243] They were making historical claims based on national symbols and myths and unfounded historical artifacts. On rare occasions, I would challenge their ideas, and I would try to convince them to explore other alternatives, besides the solutions that they proposed to the ongoing conflict between the LPDR government and segments of the Hmong population back home. Most of the times, however, I just asked the questions and let them talk. I did not share my own views because my goal was to understand their views, perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and dreams from the "inside out." Showing empathy for them and their movement was, thus, one powerful and effective way to gain their trust and access to their world.

Other Oral History Sources

I recognize that I need to conduct more in-depth oral history interviews with people in Hmong communities. To do that, I need to identify more of the key players in the history I explored in this study, and I need more time to navigate through the different barriers to gain access to them. Meanwhile, I have sought to supplement my own oral history interviews in this study with the oral history interviews that other people had conducted. My personal interviews provided great insights into the lives of the organizations that I examined in this dissertation, but they did not shed light on the context and the mood of the people at the time when the organizations were established. To get a sense of how the Hmong felt and what they were thinking, beyond the people directly involved in the organizations, I relied on other oral history interviews. I used, in particular, the oral testimonies that the D.C. Everest Area Schools in Weston, Wisconsin, collected for their Hmong Oral History Project. The D.C. Everest Area Schools

[1243] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* (Itacha, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 101-109.

published these oral histories of Hmong individuals in the area in *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, *The Hmong and their Stories*, *Hmong in the Modern World*, and *Looking Back, Stepping Forward: The Hmong People*.[1244] Other published oral histories that I looked at for this dissertation included those in Sue Murphy Mote's *Hmong and American* and Wendy Mattison and her colleagues' *Hmong Lives: From Laos to La Crosse*.[1245] The oral histories that the D.C. Everest Area Schools put out were especially important because they had not been analyzed and studied. For this dissertation, I also tapped into the Hmong Oral History Project at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota. This project was perhaps the single most extensive oral history project on the Hmong in the world. Since its inception in the spring of 2001, Dr. Paul Hillmer of the History Department at Concordia University and his staff had interviewed more than 200 Hmong Americans. Hilmer and his team had not yet finished transcribing the bulk of their interviews. Some of the finished transcriptions were, however, available online. When all the transcriptions are completed and made available to the community of scholars at large, I am confident that these rich oral histories will be one of the most valuable sources to document the lives of the Hmong in the diaspora in modern history.

Why did I use oral history interviews?

To start, oral history is used in this dissertation because it is, as Paul Thompson reminds us, "as old as history itself. It was the *first* kind of history. And it is only quite recently that skill in handling oral evidence has ceased to be one of the marks of the great historian."[1246] Oral history, doubtless, cannot replace analysis of traditional historical materials (official documents, letters, newspapers, secondary sources, etc.). It can, however, be an invaluable addendum to traditional historical materials, and it can be "a valuable source of evidence for understanding the experiences of individuals or groups

---

[1244] D.C. Everest Area Schools, *Hmong Oral Histories: From the Hmong of Central Wisconsin*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2000); *The Hmong and their Stories*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001); *Hmong in the Modern World*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2005); and *Looking Back, Stepping Forward: The Hmong People*, (Weston, WI: D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2008).
[1245] Sue Murphy Mote, *Hmong and American: Stories of Transition to a Strange Land*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004); Wendy Mattison, Laotou Lo, and Thomas Scarseth, *Hmong Lives: From Laos to La Crosse*, (La Crosse, WI: The Pump House, 1994).
[1246] Paul Richard Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19.

within a certain historical period and the role of individuals in shaping the past and/or how larger trends impacted the individual… When an oral history essay places the experiences of an individual within the context of a historical period, it can help illuminate both the individual's experience and the historical period."[1247] It was, perhaps, with this recognition of oral history as a valuable source for documenting and preserving past events and ways of life that American oral historians founded the Oral History Association (OHA). The OHA, established in 1966, "seeks to bring together all persons interested in oral history as a way of collecting and interpreting human memories to foster knowledge and human dignity," and has since published articles from different scholars through its official publication, the *Oral History Review*.[1248] Oral history, that is, has been a well-established method of inquiry. It is also not an entirely foreign method for studying the Hmong. There have been a number of significant studies on the Hmong based on the oral testimonies of Hmong participants. These included Sucheng Chan's *Hmong Means Free*, Lillian Faderman's *I Begin My Life All Over*, John Duffy's *Writing from These Roots*, Paul Hillmer's *A People's History of the Hmong*, and Daniel Detzner's *Elder Voices*.[1249]

In this dissertation, I also used oral history because it is a method of research most familiar to the Hmong who, besides the educated few, are still a predominantly non-literate community. Like many oral communities, the Hmong did not record their lives and histories in texts. They did so mostly on the leaves of their memory. They orally passed down their histories from one generation to the next. Recording their history in texts was something that they learned in America and that they had only begun to do in recent years. To date, there are still few Hmong autobiographies out there. The only ones I have come across are Kao Kalia Yang's widely read and publicized memoir, *The Late Homecomer*, Houa Vue Moua's *Trails Through the Mists*, and Victor Neej Thoob

---

[1247] The Writing Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, "Oral History," at http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/oral_history.html, accessed 7 July 2010.
[1248] See the official website of the Oral History Association and information about the Oral History Review at http://www.oralhistory.org/publications/oral-history-review/, accessed 7 July 2010.
[1249] Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Lillian Faderman, with Ghia Xiong, *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); John Duffy, *Writing From These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: MN Historical Society Press, 2010); and Daniel F. Detzner, *Elder Voices: Southeast Asian Families in the United States*, (New York: Altamira Press, 2004).

Xiong's *Where In the World Do I Belong?*[1250] Most Hmong still record Hmong history through oral sources. The plethora of documentary videos on the Hmong in the Secret War and thereafter is a testament of Hmong oral historicity. These were videos produced by the Hmong "public historians." As public historians, they were not trained to do history in the academia. Rather, they studied and chronicled Hmong history with a passion to preserve the history and to educate the community about their history. These videos are widely distributed and sold in the community. Most Hmong elders probably got their understanding of Hmong history from these videos and not from the few dozen books that Hmong and non-Hmong authors had written on the Hmong. To get a more complete and dynamic story of Hmong political engagements in the diaspora, we have to use oral histories to supplement the written sources.

I also used oral history because I felt that oral history is the best way to understand the subjects from an *emic* or insider perspective. It is the best way to give them agency and let them speak for themselves, and it is the best way to understand why people did the things that they did and why they framed certain issues and debates the way that they did. Oral history, in other words, allows us to invite the collaboration of the Hmong people to record their history in writing, and it enables us to tap into their deeply held values, attitudes, and the full range of their human experiences, rational and emotional, that cannot be derived from the written sources or documentary records.[1251] Oral history ensures that we see the people who we study, regardless of whether they are literate or not, as people with voices, mind and intelligence, and that we recognize the historical importance of the memory of everyday people, not just the rich and famous. To be sure, many Hmong involved in transnational politics were victims of historical oppression and societal injustices. Yet, they were certainly not just victims. They were also agents of social change, whether they were conscious of it or not. Many of them were beaten down, and many were scared by the traumas of wars and displacements. But they were also resilient. They rose again and again to fight for their rights and to

---

[1250] Kao Kalia Yang, *The Late Homecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2008); Houa Vue Moua and Barbara J. Rolland, *Trails through the Mists*, (Eau Claire, WI: Eagles Printing Co., 1994); and Victor Neej Thoob Xiong, *Where In the World Do I Belong? Hmong Refugee to Hmong American*, (Milwaukee, WI: PIP Printing, 2006).

[1251] John Duffy, "Recalling the Letter: The Uses of Oral Testimony in Historical Studies of Literacy," *Written Communication* 24, no. 1 (2007): 84-107.

advocate for the rights of their people. To honor them, their struggles, and their sacrifices, we need to treat them as people with voices, mind, intelligence, hopes, and dreams, and collect and preserve their memories, their stories, before they disappear. They may not be literate, but their lives have historical importance. Their visions and ideas may sound ridiculous and unbelievable, but they are unique and valuable treasures of the community. To fully understand them and their politics, we need to take their hopes, dreams, visions, perceptions, ideas, thoughts and fantasies seriously, no matter how "crazy" those may be. We need to record those dreams and visions from the perspective of the people who espoused and embodied those dreams and visions, and we can best achieve this goal with oral history.

Most of all, the oral testimonies of a people like the Hmong may also be as equally reliable as, if not more than, accounts provided by Westernized, modernized minds. Their long reliance on memory and oral communication, as historian Paul Hillmer points out, makes Hmong oral history "more rather than less likely that they would remember specific details." Not only that, but "the intensity of their lives and the frequent traumas they endured increase the likelihood that Hmong who lived in Laos can't forget what they experienced—even if they want to."[1252] The written records are also not without their own errors. Inconsistencies and discrepancies, as Vine Deloria tells us, abound in written records and written histories. Just because a historiography is based on written records, it does not mean that it is free from historical errors. Many scientists and scholars had been wrong on many things that they wrote, based on written sources, in the past.[1253] The written records are neither more nor less reliable than oral sources. There are, as Trevor Lummis tells us, epistemological problems in both forms of sources.[1254] If anything, oral history deserves more credibility than presently given because, as Thompson tells us, the oral historians have the advantage of being able to revisit the interviewees/narrators, challenge, interrogate, and cross-examine them again for clarification and accuracy. To give primacy to written sources may be, as Ronald

---

[1252] Paul Hillmer, *A People's History of the Hmong*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2010), 6.
[1253] Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*, (New York: Scribner, 1995), 37-60.
[1254] Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*, (London: Hutchinson, 1988); and Trevor Lummis, "Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence," *International Journal of Oral History* 2, (1983): 109-20.

Grele said, merely a form of "paper or book fetishism."[1255] Giving primacy to written sources may also be more a reflection of the power struggle within the academia than any real tangible academic or scholarly standard. It is about controlling the art of history and discouraging anything that can potentially threaten and undermine the historical establishment—one that had existed and enjoyed the privileged position of crafting historiography based solely on written sources for more than a hundred years, as Michael Frisch tells us.[1256] Giving primacy to written sources is also tantamount to privileging the literate over the non-literate and the state-linked over the stateless. It is like saying that the non-literate communities, nations, and peoples are not important and do not merit any serious academic attention. If we are truly committed and serious about ensuring academic democracy, then we owe it to ourselves and to the historical profession to "decolonize" our methodologies, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith charges us to do, and recognize the intrinsic value and historical significance of recording the voices and histories of everyday people and of non-literate communities and nations like the Hmong.[1257]

Ethnographic Fieldwork

Beyond the archival research that I did in Thailand and the United States, the oral history interviews that I conducted in Laos and the United States, and the oral history interviews conducted by others that I examined and used in this study, I also did additional ethnographic fieldwork in Laos for this dissertation. This ethnographic fieldwork consisted primarily of my casual and un-taped conversations with fifteen local Hmong vendors, entrepreneurs, and villagers at the Morning Market (Talat Xao) in Vientiane, KM 52, and nearby villages during a month-long research trip to Laos in the summer of 2007. I talked to a Hmong American man in his seventies who had returned to Laos, married a wife in her forties, and reestablished long-term residence there. This man intended to renounce his U.S. citizenship altogether, hoping that such a move would enable him to regain his Lao citizenship. He planned to spend the rest of his life in Laos.

[1255] Ronald Grele, "Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History," *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, (Chicago: Precedent Publishers, 1985), 130.
[1256] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx.
[1257] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

My conversation with him was on the questions of why he returned to Laos, what he did after he returned, how he re-established their lives in Laos after he had lived in exile for so many years, and how the local Hmong and Lao communities perceived and treated him. I also talked to a Hmong man in his forties who came out of the Lao jungle in the early 2000s and worked at a local hotel in Vientiane when I met him. At the time when I met him, however, I did not know he was one of the people who came out of the Lao jungle. Consequently, I did not talk to him about his experience in the jungle and his coming out. My conversation with him focused largely on how the Lao PDR government screened Hmong returnees to grant or deny them visas to visit Laos. I also talked to one other person in his fifties about the effect of the Chao Fa resistance on the local Hmong villages and villagers. My conversations with the rest of the people were on the returns of the Hmong in the diaspora to Laos, both to visit and to re-establish long-term residence. I asked them for their thoughts on these returns and how these returns affected the local communities and the relationship between the Hmong in the homeland and those in the United States.

My conversations with these individuals were mostly informal and unstructured. I talked to them as though I was a curious tourist who wanted to understand how they felt about certain issues in the Hmong diasporic communities. My conversation with them were mostly about their feelings toward Hmong Americans—how they felt about the return of some Hmong Americans to visit family members, get married, invest in local economy, purchase land and property in Laos in local people's names, and establish long-term residence in Laos. Sometimes I also discussed politics with people, especially those who were related to me. Through these conversations, I learned that the Lao government banned on Hmong arts and crafts that had explicit political theme. On that list of arts banned by the government were the Hmong *pajntaub* or story cloths that depict the persecution of Hmong villagers, the looting of Hmong villages, and the rapes of Hmong women and girls by Communist soldiers, and the flight of the Hmong across the Mekong River to Thailand. In these conversations, I never used a tape recorder, and I never took notes during the conversation. I feared that they would not talk to me and openly express their thoughts if I looked too formal or official. Because we were in a communist country, where freedom of speech was severely restricted, I knew the discussion would

freeze if I took out a piece of paper to write on during the conversation. What I typically did was to rush back to my hotel room and write down my notes immediately after the conversation.

When General Vang Pao and the others were arrested on June 4, 2007, I was still conducting research in Laos. After the arrest, I was afraid to go anywhere outside of Vientiane, the capitol of Laos. I especially had reasons to fear because there was a rumor that some members of Vang Pao's organization had already penetrated Laos and that they were ready to use the weapons they acquired to stage a coup against the LPDR government. I wanted to get out of the country immediately. I was petrified that the LPDR government would arrest and charge me as one of the "terrorists" who infiltrated Laos because of my clan affiliation. The LPDR government was notorious for denying visas to members of the Vang clan who wanted to visit Laos. It was also notorious for arresting, imprisoning, and murdering individuals based on mere suspicion and allegation alone. I decided to stay after more Hmong American tourists arrived at the hotel where I was staying. Some of them, like me, had been there before Vang Pao was arrested. Others came into the country after the arrest. I felt safe with other Hmong American tourists around. It also helped that the owner of the hotel we were staying was a Hmong American, a relative of my father-in-law (my wife's father). Nevertheless, I stopped traveling to nearby towns to conduct additional interviews. I stayed at the hotel for the next week and a half. I took my flight out of Laos to Bangkok, Thailand as soon as it was time to leave. When I arrived in Bangkok, my Thai driver, who had been a long-time friend to the Hmong diasporic community, told me that a few days before I arrived, some assassins killed two Hmong Americans in Nong Khai near the Lao-Thai border.

In this dissertation, I also used some audiocassettes and videotapes that I collected in the past few years. I have, for example, in my possession one audiocassette that a Hmong man named Koua Tong Lee in Wisconsin. The cassette was recorded in 1984, and it was on the words of Yang Shong Lue, the Mother of Writing, the Hmong prophet who invented the Hmong Pahawh writing script for the Hmong in 1959. While I was conducting research in Laos in the summer of 2007, I was told that the LPDR government banned this audiocassette in Laos because of its politically charged content. Anyone caught with this tape could face imprisonment and death in the communist

country. I also have in my possession the videotape by Koua Tong Lee on many of the things that he said in 1984. This videotape, released in the early 2000s, was supposedly an update to the 1984 audiocassette. Other audiotapes that I used in the dissertation included a few old cassettes by Hmong singers in the 1980s and one by a Hmong improvised poetry (*kwvtxhiaj*) singer. From these cassettes, I extracted their songs and used them to show how Hmong migrants felt in the 1980s. This context was necessary to understand the development of the two major Hmong nationalist movements at the time. Finally, I have a videotape by Chao Fa supporters in the United States of the Chao Fa fighters and their families in Sayaboury, Laos, in the early 1990s after the Thai military evicted them from northeastern Thailand. This videotape, along with some other videos, depicted the harsh conditions under which these fighters and their families had to live in those difficult hours.

My ethnographic research experience in Laos awakened me to the potential perils of conducting fieldwork in Hmong communities in the United States and back in Laos. It was because of my awareness of the potential perils that my informants might encounter in their lives that I had intentionally focused the dissertation on the lives of the organizations and not on the personal biographies of the people involved in these organizations. I did not want to reveal the location and activities of the people in these organizations because I wanted to avoid the risk of exposing the people I interviewed for any potential peril. Focusing on the lives of the organizations, for me, was an effective way to capture the history of Hmong political engagement with politics in the homeland without exposing any one particular person to potential danger.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name_____ _____

Interview Date

Address_____ _____

Interview Location

City _____ Zip Code_____ _____

Year Arrived in US

Age at Arrival in US _____

Age today _____

Birthplace _____

Gender: Male Female

Current Occupation _____ _____

Occupation in Laos

Marital Status

____Married
____Separated
____Divorced
____Widowed
____Single

Educational Level

___No formal education
___Some formal education in Laos
___Some formal education in US
Highest level:_____

# of Children _____

Return to Laos: Yes No

Year of Naturalization _____

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Childhood Memories/Experience

1. What was life like for you as child in Laos? Describe a few childhood activities that you had.

2. Was this type of lifestyle also true for other children around you?

3. As a child, what kinds of stories did your parents and/or grandparents and others tell you? Did they ever talk about their parents' or grandparents' migration to Laos? If so, could you share how they describe that migration experience?

4. People, especially the older generation, often talk about "the way it was back then or back home." What do you think they mean by this? What does "back home" or simply "home" mean for you?

5. People, especially the older generation, also often talk about "peb qub teb qub chaw" (our old land old place). What do you think they mean by this? How do they view their relationship with this old land and old place?

6. What do you remember about your family's property in Laos? Do you have any land? If so, how was the land used, or unused? How do you show that the land, or any of your possessions and properties, was yours?

7. What was life like for you and your family before the Secret War?

The War Years

1. Whether you were directly or indirectly in the war, we now know that the consequences of the war affected all Hmong people in various ways. Were you directly involved in any way? If so, could you please describe what you did? If not involved directly, were there other members of your immediate or extended family who were involved and how did that affect your family's well-being?

2. For the last 30 years, people in the Hmong community as well as supporters of the Hmong people have talked about the "promise" that Central Intelligence Agency representatives made in recruiting the Hmong to fight against communist forces (food and medical supplies, help in either win or lose situation, and an autonomous kingdom as some have claimed). What is your knowledge of this promise? If you knew about it, how did you learn about it?

3. While many Hmong people sided with the Americans, there were some who supported the communist regime. Could you share why you decided to side with the

Americans at the time and whether you had changed side during the war? How did you learn that Communism was bad and what information was available to tell you and other Hmong people that American democracy was preferable? What do you think you were fighting for in the war—ideology or something else?

4. Today, the Hmong are largely united, whether they sided with the communists or the Americans during the war. But many families were split during the war. Some sided with the Americans while others sided with the Communists. Was there anyone in your family who joined the communists? How did you and your family feel about that member of the family who supported communism? Why do you think they joined the communists?

5. In thinking about the "promise," do you think that it has been fulfilled? Why or why not? If not, what else needs to be done to fulfill it?

6. When did you leave Laos and how did you make that decision? How did you leave the country?

7. Thinking back to the time when you were preparing to leave, what important items did you bring with you? Do you still have them? Why did you choose these items over others?

Refugee Experience/Coming to America

1. Which refugee camp did you spend time at and how long were you there?

2. In thinking back to your experience camp experience, what was your understanding of the refugee camps' objectives? Why were there refugee camps? How were these set up?

3. What was life in the refugee camp like for you? Could you describe your daily activities in the camps? What did you do and what did others around you do? What were some of your memories, both positive and negative, of the refugee camp?

4. Many refugees had to live in a refugee processing center called Phanatnikhom before coming to the United States. How long did your family lived there? What was life like in that camp for you and your family? What were some of your memories, positive and negative, of the life in the camp?

5. When and why did you consider coming to the United States of America? Did you consider going to other countries of resettlement? Why or why not?

5. When did you arrive in the United States, and how old were you?

6. Where did you first resettle in the United States? How did you end up where you are today? What other places have you lived since your arrival in the US?

[ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR NEWLY ARRIVED REFUGEES FROM WAT THAM KRABOT CAMP, THAILAND]

1. How and what did you hear about the Buddhist monastery, Wat Tham Krabot?

2. When and why did you move to the Buddhist monastery?

3. How would you describe the life in the monastery? What are some of your memories, positive and negative, of the life in the camp?

4. The camp was not funded by the UNHRC, like other refugee camps prior to the 1990s were. How did people manage to survive in the camp?

5. How did you and your family come to that decision to immigrate to the United States after all these years of refusal to come?

Experience Since Arrival in the U.S.

1. Who were your sponsors? If they were not your relatives or family members, what did you think about them? How did you communicate with them?

2. Could you please describe for me what happened in the first encounter with your sponsor and what happened during the first few days after your arrival? What did you do and where did you go and with whom?

3. What did you consider the role of your sponsors? How did they help you transition to life in America?

4. What were the first few months like? How long before you began to feel comfortable, if ever, with life in America?

5. Before coming to America, what did you think America was like? Were your expectations of life in America or of America itself fulfilled? If you could go back in time and you knew what life in America would be like, would you still take the same path that you did? Would you come to America sooner or never? Why?

6. What kinds of work have you been doing, if any, since you arrived in the U.S.? How would you describe the nature of your work? Were you content with your work and your life in America? Why or why not?

[ADDITIONAL FOR YOUTH AND WOMEN]

1. How old were you when you came to the United States? What grade did you begin your education in America?

2. As you grew up in America, what kinds of stories did your parents and/or grandparents tell you? Did you remember them telling you about what life was in Laos or their war and refugee camps? If so, could you share some of those stories?

3. Where did you go to elementary, middle, high school, college, and graduate training, if any of these? How did you make those decisions?

4. As you were growing up, what did you think of the Hmong culture and tradition? Did you always embrace Hmong culture and tradition, or did you, like many others, reject the culture and tradition? Why did you choose the position that you did? Has your position changed, if any, and when and how did it change?

5. How have those changes, if any, affected your relationship with your parents, siblings, relatives, and the Hmong community?

Citizenship and Return to the Homeland

1. When did you arrive to the United States? When have you naturalized to become an American citizen, if you have? Why did you choose to do and why the wait for so long (if that's the case)? If not yet a citizen, why not?

2. What does it mean to be an American citizen for you?

3. Since your arrival in America, have you returned to Laos? If so, what for? If not, why not?

4. Many people, especially the older generation, have expressed strong desire to return to Laos to live there permanently. If the country is democratized and economically more stable and if Laos welcomes the Hmong people back, would you go back to live there? Why or why not?

5. Since 2000, a few Hmong families have returned to Laos to live while some others have gone to establish business in Laos. Why do you think they are able to do that? If you were given the chance, would you go back to do business there but continue to live in America, or would you go back to live there permanently, even if that might mean giving up your American citizenship? Why or why not?

Involvement in Diaspora/Transnational Politics

1. Life in the United States seems relatively good. There are much more educational and economic opportunities for Hmong people in the United States than in the homeland. Why do you think people continue to have the desire to return to the homeland?

2. We know that there are Hmong people in the jungles of Laos, and that they have been there for the past 30 years. What do you know about them? Why did they continue to stay in the jungle rather than come out to live in the city? What were they fighting for, and why did they continue the fight?

3. How are you involved, if any, in the Hmong's efforts to deal with the ongoing fighting and killing there in the jungle?

4. When and how you did become aware of the crisis in the jungle? What activities have you done to deal with the situation?

5. What do you think the Hmong people should do to end the conflict there? What should the future of the Hmong in the jungles be like? Would you support the integration of those people into Lao society, or would you support the importation of the people to the United States? Why or why not? What do you see as the biggest obstacles to ending the conflict there?

6. Many and more Hmong are participating in ethnic politics in America. Their involvement in politics resulted in the election of Senator Mee Moua and Representative Cy Thao to the MN Senate and House of Representative, respectively. Both have won their re-election this year. What do you think this means for those Hmong people who continue to focus their political efforts on effecting changes in Laos and Thailand for the Hmong people there rather than on changes for the people here in America?

7. If you voted for Mee Moua or Cy Thao, what do you expect of them? Do you expect them to not only represent the Hmong in America but also those in Southeast Asia? Why and why not?

Identity, Future Dreams and Aspirations

1. How would you identify yourself, in racial or ethnic terms? Why?

2. What do you think should be the future of the Hmong people? Should they remain in diaspora, or should they go back to Laos when permitted or should they choose some other options? Why?

APPENDIX C

Hmong Songs and Chao Fa National Anthem

SONG 1 (partial):
Tsoom Hmoob, "Hlub Yuav Tsum Hlub Hmoob."

Man: *Peb Hmoob lub neej nyob tebchaws no nej xav li cas?*

What do you think of our life in this country [America]?

Woman: *Au..peb zoo li tej me ntseeb xwb mas peb yuav tau sib sau sib hlub.*

We are just like a swarm of bees, so we have to unite and love each other.

Man: *Yog. Kuv los xav li thiab. Hmoob tsis hlub Hmoob leejtwg thiaj yuav hlub Hmoob?*

Right. That's what I think too. If Hmong do not love Hmong, who will love Hmong?

Multiple voices: *Muaj tseeb li tiag. Hmoob yuav tsum hlub Hmoob.*

That's true. Hmong must love Hmong.

Peb Hmoob lub neej tom qab	Our Hmong's life in the past
Tsis sib pab thooj siab koom ntsws	Disunited and not helping each other
Tsis sib hwm kho peb neej Hmoob	Disrespecting each other and not improving Hmong
Peb thiaj poob puv thoob qab ntuj	So we are displaced all over the world
Tsis tseem nuj thiab tsis tsim nqi	Having no respect and dignity left
Chorus: Hmoob tsis hlub Hmoob, leej twg thiaj yuav hlub Hmoob?	If Hmong do not love Hmong, who will love Hmong?

SONG 2 (complete):
Hmoob Koom Haum Haum Xeeb

Lee Chai: *Cov menyum… lub sijhawm kho nej Hmoob lub me neej twb los txog lawm. Txhob tsaug tsaug zog.*
Kav tsij los txhim kho txhob pub lub sijhawm nkim mus lawm mog.

Children…the time has come. It is time to improve your Hmong's life. Don't be so sleepy. Hurry up and reform. Don't let time pass by.

Man: *Peb tsoom tub ntxhais hluas yeem thaj thov los kho Hmoob lub neej thiab.*

Our youths are also determined to reform our Hmong 's life.

Lee Chai: *Zoo ntau lau.. Yog nej cov hluas xav txog lawm, sawv ntxov me ntsis mog.*

Wonderful. You young people realize it now. So wake up a little early.

Woman: *Yog los mas.* [That's right.]

Body:

Peb tsoom tub ntxhais Hmoob	Our young men and women

Sawv ua pab thiab sawv ua pawg	Stand together as a group
Los sib pab los sib koom siab	Come together to help each other and be united
Tsa lub neej tshiab hauv peb yim neeg	Raise a new life for our Hmong family
Thov kom haivneeg kom vammeej mus	Pray for the success of the people
Peb tsoom pojniam Hmoob	Our Hmong women
Thiab peb txivneej txhua tus	And all our men
Sawv sib koom sib cog ua pa	Stand united and breathe together
Kom los nrog xav seb qhov twg zoo	Come to determine what is best
Txoj kev twg kaj thiaj tsis puas ntsoog	Which way is bright and not destructive
Lub caij nyoog twb dhau mus zuj zus	The time is gradually passing by
Twb tsis tau pib	Haven't even started
Txhob pub sib hawm dhau mus	Don't let time pass by
Tsam peb tig nco ces twb lig lawm	Or it might be too late when we realize it
Peb cov tub ntxhais Hmoob	Our Hmoob men and women
Sawvdaws pib lub neej tshiab	Everyone starts a new life
Tshawb nrhiav lub neej mus rau qhov loj	Searching a better and bigger life
Nrhiav kev nto moo los rau peb taug	Find prosperity for us to follow
Thaum lub neej xaus kom peb zoo li luag	Our life in the end will be like others

Lee Chai: *Yog lau…cov menyuam. Tsheem tsis tau lig mog. Txhob tsaug zog. Kav tsij los kho ov.*
That's right, children. It's not too late. Don't fall asleep. Hurry up and work to reform.

Woman: *Ua li los mas.* Okay.

SONG 3 (complete):
Cob Fab Nkauj Tsa Chij

Peb cov Hmoob yuav sawv ua pab txoos nres ua nceeg.
Peb yuav hawm peb kujkeeb tsa los sawv los roos peb haiv neeg.
Peb cov Hmoob yuav sawv ua pab koom tes ua txoog.
Peb yuav hawm peb kujkeeb tsa los sawv los roos peb haiv Hmoob.

Peb kujkeeb chij toog ntaub.
Peb tsa los nroos kom nqaij toog ntshav hlau.
Peb kujkeeb chij toog luaj.
Peb tsa los nroos kom nqaij toog ntshav tsua.

Hmoob kujkeeb tsa sawv kom ntseg.
Peb tsa peb chij raws lub ntuj kom rub peb Hmoob tes.
Hmoob kujkeeb tsa sawv kom siab.
Peb tsa peb chij raws lub ntuj kom rub peb Hmoob nto siab.

Peb tsa peb chij raws lub hli xiab,
Kom peb cov Hmoob tau lub neej tshiab.
Peb tsa peb chij raws lub hli nra,
Kom peb cov Hmoob tau lub neej keeb nras.

Peb tsa peb chij raws lub hli,
Kom peb cov Hmob nyob mus txawj plhis.
Peb tsa peb chij raws lub hnub,
Kom peb cov Hmoob nyob mus tshav pluv.

SONG 4 (partia):
Zeb Muas, "Nco Txog Looj Ceeb."

Nco txog Looj Ceeb rov yam thaum ub	Thinking of Long Cheng in the past
Vim tebchaws tsis tiaj tsis tus	Because of the instability of the country
Koj thiab kuv thiaj tau ncaim mus	You and I were forced to leave
Puas muaj hnub rov los Looj Ceeb?	Would there be a day when we could return to Long Cheng?

SONG 5 (complete):
Zeb Muas, "8 Xoo Peb Hmoob Tawg Rog."

Xyoo no 8 xyoos peb Hmoob tawg rog	This year 8 years since Hmong lost the war
Kwvtij neejtsa khiav thoob ntiajteb	Cousins and relatives displaced all over the world
Tseem tshuav cov poob rau tebchaws Nplog	Some Hmong were still left behind in Laos
Lub neej txomnyem nyob nrog hav tsuag	Impoverished life living in the jungle
Lub neej tsausntuj nyob ntxuag kua muag	A dark life coping with tears
Peb Hmoob txij thaum ncaim tebchaws Nplog	Our Hmong ever since we left Laos
Lub neej ntxhov nyho nyob tsis ruaj chaw	Living a harsh life without no stable place
Nim no lub neej tsis xws thaum ub	The present life was no longer like that in the past
Nyob luag lub tsev nyob luag lub chaw	Living in their house living in their land
Yuav ua yam twg tsis tau ywj siab	To do anything cannot do it with liberty
Nim no xav txog peb tebchaws Nplog	Now thinking of our country-Laos
Nyablaj cob tsib tuaj kho tag lawm	Communist Viet Minh controlled everything
Puas yuav muaj hnub peb tau rov qab	Would there ever be a day when we could return?
Peb tej tebchaws peb ua dabtsi	Our country, what would we do?
Txog thaum hnub tau thiaj yog peb li	When we reclaim it, it will be ours.

SONG 6 (complete):
Nruas Pov Xyooj, "Hmoob Poob Teb Chaws."

Hmoob poob teb chaws	Hmong lost their country
Tuaj nyob luag tebchaws kawm txujci	Come live in other people's land study their knowledge
Ua cov neeg nyob tsis muaj tswv	Become a lost people
Txhob xav tias yuav ua tsheej lub neej	Don't think that there was a life here
Luag twb yuav ncaws peb Hmoob tawm mus	They would soon kick our Hmong out
Hmoob tsis muaj tebchaws	Hmong do not have a country
Tuaj kawm ntaub kawm txuj luag tebchaws	Come to study and get an education in their country
Tsis muaj Hmoob leejtwg tau ua nom	No Hmong have become a leader
Vim tsis yog peb teb peb chaw nyob	Because it is no our country our homeland
Yog khiav rog lawv pub peb so xwb temporarily	Because of flight from the war, they only allowed us to rest
Hmoob sis lug los nyob ua pab ua pawg	Hmong everywhere flocked to live together
Muaj nomtswv saib xyuas thiaj li zoo	We must have a leader to guide us
Yog tsis raws zaj nkauj no kuv hu	If not according to this song that I sing,
Yuav tsis muaj tebchaws mus tag ib txhis	We'll not have a country forever
Lub neej Hmoob tsaus nti	Hmong's life is so gloomy and uncertain
Tseem tsis paub txoj kev nyob txhawjxeeb	Yet, still unaware of this depressing life
Tsam muaj hnub luag tsis yuav peb Hmoob	One day, they would not want us Hmong
Leejtwg yuav rov los ua tus coj	Who will return to be our leader
Kom txhob pub peb lub npe Hmoob poob	So our Hmong name will not perish?

SONG 7 (complete):
Nruas Xyooj, "Thaum Tsis Mauj Tus Coj"

Peb Hmoob sawvdaws rau qhov twg tas	Where are all our Hmong people?
Thaum peb sib ncaim tsis muaj tus coj	When we depart, we had no leader
Vim lub tebchaws ua tsom ua rog lwj ntxaus	Because the country was in a bloody war
Peb Hmoob thiaj khiav lub neej ua ntsuag	Our Hmong were forced to flee and become orphans
Nco txog peb Hmoob lub kua muag poob	Thinking of Hmong, tears streaming down
Tsis muaj nom tswv nrog saib nrog xyuas	No leader to watch over and to guide
Peb Hmoob thiaj khiav ua zos thoob luag tebchaws	We created villages throughout their country
Luag thiaj saib peb yam li tus npua nyob tsis muaj tswv	Which make them treat us like a bunch of pigs with no owner
Khiav khiav los txog txij no	Fleeing all these years
Twb tsis nrog luag muaj teb muaj chaws	Still have no country of our own
Tseem yam tus puav dai taw nyob hauv qab tsua	Still living like bats hanging upside down by their feet in a cave
Tham txog peb Hmoob lub neej thaum ub	Speaking of our Hmong's life in the past
Kho siab seev yees xav rov qab mus	Feeling sad and melancholic wanting to go back
Xyuas kwv xyuas tij noj nplooj xyoob ntoo nyob tom qab	To visit cousins and loved ones in the old homeland
Tiv tshav tiv nag vaj tsev tsis muaj nyob li	Enduring the rain and the sunshine having no house to live

SONG 8 (complete):
Vas Paj Ntxawg Yaj, (no title)

Kwvtij Hmoob mus neej tsa
nim vim yog thaum xyoo 1957,
peb lub teb coj lub chaw es yuav cia Ameslikas tuaj kav,
nim tuaj nrog NyabLaj liab niag cob tsib ua rog loj los rog nyhav.

Nm vim thaum xyoo 1962
peb lub teb coj lub chaw cas yuav cia rau Ameslikas tuaj nyob
nim tuaj nrog NyabLaj liab niag cob tsib ua rog loj.

My dear Hmong fellows,
Because in 1957,
We let the Americans come and control our homeland
To fight a heavy war with the Red Vietnamese Communists

Because in 1962,
We let the Americans come and control our homeland
To fight a big war with the Red Vietnamese Communists

Kwvtij neej tsa
Nim tsis yog peb Hmoob nyob nyob es nim lam xav khiav
Nim yog zaum no peb lub tebchaws Nplog niaj txhiab mis txhis es
Tej nom tej tswv es tej niam tej txiv nim muaj txoj kev ywjsiab rau peb peejxeem sawvdaws siv nyob mus ywjsiab es Zaum no nim ciaj tau txoj kev cai Kaus-maus-niv nyab laj liab los mas

Kwvtij Hmoob
Nim tsis yog peb Hmoob nyob nyob es lam xav tsiv
Nim yog zaum no peb lub tebchaws Nplog niaj txhiab mis txhis es
Tej nom tej tswv es tej niam tej txiv nim muaj txoj kev ywjsiab rau peb peejxeem sawvdaws siv nyob mus ywjsiab es Zaum no nim ciaj tau nyab laj liab txoj kev cai Kaus-maus-niv los mas

It is not that we Hmoob really want to flee
It is because our leaders and our parents have always given us our freedom
But now we have a new rule—communism---under the Vietnamese

It is not that we Hmoob really want to flee
It is because our leaders and our parents have always given us our freedom
But now we have a new rule under the Vietnamese: communism

Kwvtij neejtsa
Nim vim yog thaum ntuj xyoo 1975, lub 5 hli ntuj, hnub 14
Nim yogh nub peb poob teb coj poob chaw
Peb tej nom tej tswv muab dav tooj dav hlau ya lawv tej sis pluav
Nim yuav ya rag tej sib ntws mus rau niam mab mi Thaibteb
Nim tseg kwvtij neejtsa nyob quaj ntsuag ntuj tom tsev
Nim xav tias yuav mus raws peb tej nom tej tswv rau Thaibteb
Los nim vim yog niag nyab laj liab noj nqaij dev
tuaj txog lawm sis ntua muab rab phom yaj txoog tua tej sis nti
Es nim yuav thaiv tag peb tej kwvtij neejtsa tej hau kev
Nim xav zoj los chim siab thiaj li los rais zoj nqis xib tsev
Es los lis hlos rab phom yaj txoog nim nim yuav zais tib sis rau tej quav tes
Es lis los tig lom lees nyom rov mus taum nte

It is May 14, 1975—the year we lost our homeland
Our leaders took the planes to Thailand
Leaving fellow Hmong behind in tears in their homes
Thinking that they should follow their leaders to Thailand
But because the Red Vietnamese—the ‘dog eaters’—arrived and fired their guns to block our path
They have had to come back, take up arms, and fight

Nim vim yog thaum ntuj xyoo 1975, lub 5 hli ntuj, hnub 14
Nim yogh nub peb poob teb coj poob chaw
Peb tej nom tej tswv muab dav tooj dav hlau ya lawv tej sis pluav
Nim yuav ya rag tej sib ntws mus rau niam mab mi Thaib nrag
Nim tseg kwvtij neejtsa nyob quaj ntsuag ntuj tom qab
Nim xav tias yuav mus raws peb tej nom tej tswv rau Thaib sab
Los nim vim yog niag nyab laj liab niag khaub hlab
tuaj txog lawm sis ntua
Es muab rab phom yaj txoog tua tej sis nti
Es nim yuav thaiv tag peb tej kwvtij neejtsa tej hau kab
Ces ntshe kwvtij neejtsa yuav los rais zoj mus fib ka
Yuav los nkaus lis hlo rab phom yaj txoog zais tib sis rau tej quav npab
Es yuav tig lom lees rov mus tauj tab

It is May 14, 1975—the year we lost our homeland
Our leaders took the planes to Thailand’s side
Leaving fellow Hmong behind in tears in their homes
Thinking that they should follow their leaders to Thailand
But because the ragged Red Vietnamese arrived and fired their guns to block our path
Our Hmong fellows have had to come back, take up arms, and resist

Kwvtij Hmoob,
Peb cov me Hmoob ces nim ncig tej sis yeem es nce tej sis hlo mus rau lub roob toj lug lim taim roob Phuv Npiab
Ntshe yuav mus muab lub roob tom lug lim taim tom Phuv Npliab ua qhov chaw tiv thaiv tus niag qas nyab laj liab

Vim Peb cov me Hmoob ces nim ncig tej sis yeem es nce tej sis hlo mus rau lub roob toj lug lim taim roob Phuv Npiab nyob rov mus nce nto ntsis

Es Ntshe yuav mus muab lub roob tom lug lim taim tom Phuv Npliab ua qhov chaw tauj tab tus qas nyab laj liab Kaus Maus Niv

Fellow Hmong,
Our Hmong were forced to climb the Phou Bia Mouatain
And use the Phou Bia Mountain as a sanctuary to stage our resistance against the Vietnamese

Our Hmong were forced to climb to the top of the Phou Bia Mountain
And use the Phou Bia Mountain as a sanctuary to stage our resistance against the Communists

Kwvtij Hmoob,
Nim mus es mus nrog nyab laj liab sib ntaus sib tua lawm puag niaj puag xyoo nim ua niam tsov niam plis
Ntshe yuav ua niam kauv miv sai nim lug roob dhau hav tsuag
Nim muab muab mi kaus tauj kaus nqeej hmab nroj hmab tsuag rov mus noj txhua
Los tshuav txoj sia los txoom tsis tuag

Nim ua niam tsov niam plis es ua niam nkauv miv sai nim muab hav tsua lug dhau hav zoov
Nim muab tus kaus tauj kaus nqeeb nim muab xawb noj du
Es tshuav txoj siab nyob tsis tu

Fellow Hmong,
We fought the Red Vietnamese year-round
We became like tigers, wild cats, and deer roaming the jungle
Foraging for edible roots and plants and eating them all
To just stay alive

We became like tigers, wild cats, and deer roaming the jungle
Foraging for edible roots and plants and eating them all
To just save our life

Kwvtij Hmoob,
Yuav ua puag niaj puag xyoo yuav tos peb tej nom tej tswv yuav rov los
Yuav tos tos lub ntuj nag tawm plaws rau lub ntuj qhuav
Yuav tsis hnov peb tej nom tej tswv lub suab nqua
Ntshe yuav tu kwvtij neejtsa siab lawm tej sib ntshua
Ntshe yuav ib siab kwv me ntaj tes tej sib yeev nim hos nyob rov los lua

Yuav ua puag niaj puag xyoo yuav tos peb tej nom tej tswv yuav rov los
Yuav tos lub xyoo laus tawm tag lub xyoo tshiab
Nim tsis pom peb tej nom tej tswv los qhov twg los thiab
Ntshe kwvtij neejtsa yuav ua ib siab kwv me ntaj tes tej sib yeev los lua niag nyab laj liab

Fellow Hmong,
We waited year after year for our leaders to return
We waited from rainy season to the dry season
But we did not hear our leader's voice
It saddened our heart
Raising our arms, we are forced to surrender

We waited year after year for our leaders to return
We waited one New Year after another
But we did not see our leaders anywhere
It saddened our heart
Raising our arms, we are forced to surrender to the Red Vietnamese

Vim yog Thaib siab tsis ntev es nim muab peb tej nom tej tswv tsaws hlo rau Asmesliskas lub nkoj ntev
Tuaj ntswm plaws rau Asmesliskas teb
Peb thiaj tsis muaj nom muaj tswv los nrog plhws los pab nres
Zaum no peb Hmoob thiaj ua ib siab mus nris Nyab Laj Liaj hnab
Mus ris Nyaj Laj Liab hnab ces yuav mus Nyab Laj Liaj qhev

Vim yog Thaib siab tsis ncaj es nim muab peb tej nom tej tswv tsaws hlo rau Asmesliskas lub nkoj dav

Tuaj ntswm plaws rau Asmesliskas sab
Peb thiaj tsis muaj nom muaj tswv los nrog plhws los pab
Zaum no peb Hmoob thiaj ua ib siab mus ua Nyaj Laj Liaj qhev
Mus ris Nyaj Laj Liab hnab

Because Thai were impatient, they forced our leaders to board the Americans' long ship (airplane)
To get to America's soil
We no longer had any leader to love and lead
We were then forced to go carry Red Vietnamese's bags
And became their slaves

Because the Thai were unjust, they forced our leaders to board the Americans' wide ship
To get to America's side
We no longer had any leader to love and help
We were then forced to become slaves to the Red Vietnamese
And carry their bags

Kwvtij Hmoob,
Zaum no nim ua puag niaj puag xyoo ua ua txog thaum xyoo 1977-78
Tej hlob yuav hais rau tej yau tias zaum no ces nas kos tau chaw ti
Nyias yuav xia nrhiav nyias txoj kev dim

Zaum no nim ua puag niaj puag xyoo ua ua txog thaum xyoo 1978-79
Yuav tsis pom peb tej nom tej tswv los qhov twg tuaj
Zaum no ces nyias yuav xia nrhiav nyias txoj kev dim
Nyias yuav tau nrhiav nyias kev duaj

Fellow Hmong,
We fought year after year until 1977-78
The older would tell the younger that now the rabbit has been cornered
Everyone is own his or her own

Now we had fought year after year until 1978-79
We did not see our leaders anywhere
Now everyone would be on his or her own
Everyone would find his or her way to escape

Kwvtij neejtsa,
Nim ua niam tsov niam plis ncig los txog rau lub roob toj lug lim taim toj lug taw
Es Nyaj Laj Liaj siab tsis zoo es yuav muab rov phom yaj txoog tua tej sib nthi
Yuav raug peb tej kwvtij Hmoob tuag lawm tsheej phawg

Vim peb tej kwvtij neejtsa es nim ua niam tsov niam plis lug tus hav tsuag dhau hav zoo
Ncig los txog nram lub roob lub taw poj xais
Nyaj Laj Liab siab tsis zoo yuav muab rov phom yaj txoog tua tej sib nti
Yuav raug peb tej kwvtij Hmoob tuag lawm tsheej pab nyob mus tuag tag

Fellow Hmong,
We have become like tigers and wild cats roaming every mountain and valley
Cruel Red Vietnamese soldiers fired their guns at us
Killing our Hmong people, all laying dead in a pile

We have become tigers and wild cats roaming the jungle
Going through every mountain and every hill
Cruel Red Vietnamese soldiers fired their guns at us
Killing group after group of our Hmong people

Kwvtij Hmoob,
Muaj nqee pab ncig tej sis yeev los txog nram tus dej yig dej tsum loj tis loj dav tis dav
Yuav nkaus zog tus nyiaj txiag tawm nruab dab
Ntsaws zog rau niam mab mi Thaib npab
Niam mab mi Thaib yuav muab tus cwb txhej kab kuam tej sis ko

Lub pas dej tawg sib plho,
nkoj txig nkoj lug tej sib nko es tshwm lis nplo rau Thaib zej Thaib zos
Zoo tam li tus mi noog li nruab tawg tej sib plho
Ntshe yuav tim saib qab ces yuav ho nco nco yus lub tebchaw Nplog
Yuav seev yees txoj kev tu siab tag tej sib nrho

Fellow Hmong,
Some people fled to the bank of the Mekong River, so wide
Pulled out their silver bars, necklace from their neck
Delivered them to the arms of the Thai people
Who then peddled the Hmong on their boat across the river to Thai village
Like a flock of birds getting separated
Looking back, we couldn't stop but miss our country, Laos
Humming away in our sadness and sorrow

Muaj nqee pab ncig tej sis yeev los txog nram tus dej yig dej tsum loj tis loj ntev tis ua ntev
Yuav nkaus zog tus nyiaj txiag tawm nruab cev
Ntsaws zog rau niam mab mi Thaib tes
Niam mab mi Thaib yuav muab tus cwb txhej kab kuam tej sis kawv
Lub pas dej tawg sib plhawv,
nkoj txig nkoj lug tej sis zawv es tshwm sis plaws rau Thaib zej Thaib chaw
Zaum no zoo tam li tus mi noog dim li plaws ntawm nruab taw
Ntshe yuav tim saib nqa ces yuav ho nco nco yus lub tebchaw
Yuav seev yees txoj kev tu siab tag tej sib nrawv

Some people fled to the bank of the Mekong River—so long
Pulled out their silver bars, necklace from their body
Delivered them to the hands of the Thai people
Who then peddled the Hmong on their boat across the river to the Thai people's place
Like a flock of birds escaped from capture
But looking back, we couldn't stop but miss our country
Humming away in our sadness and sorrow

Tshiag lum tsis tshiag liag tshiag lum lias tuaj nruab tog
Kwvtij neejtsa niam lam muab Thaibteb thiab Amesliskas teb ua qhov chaw so
Niam ciaj tuag los yuav xa rov qab mus rau yus lub tebchaws nplog

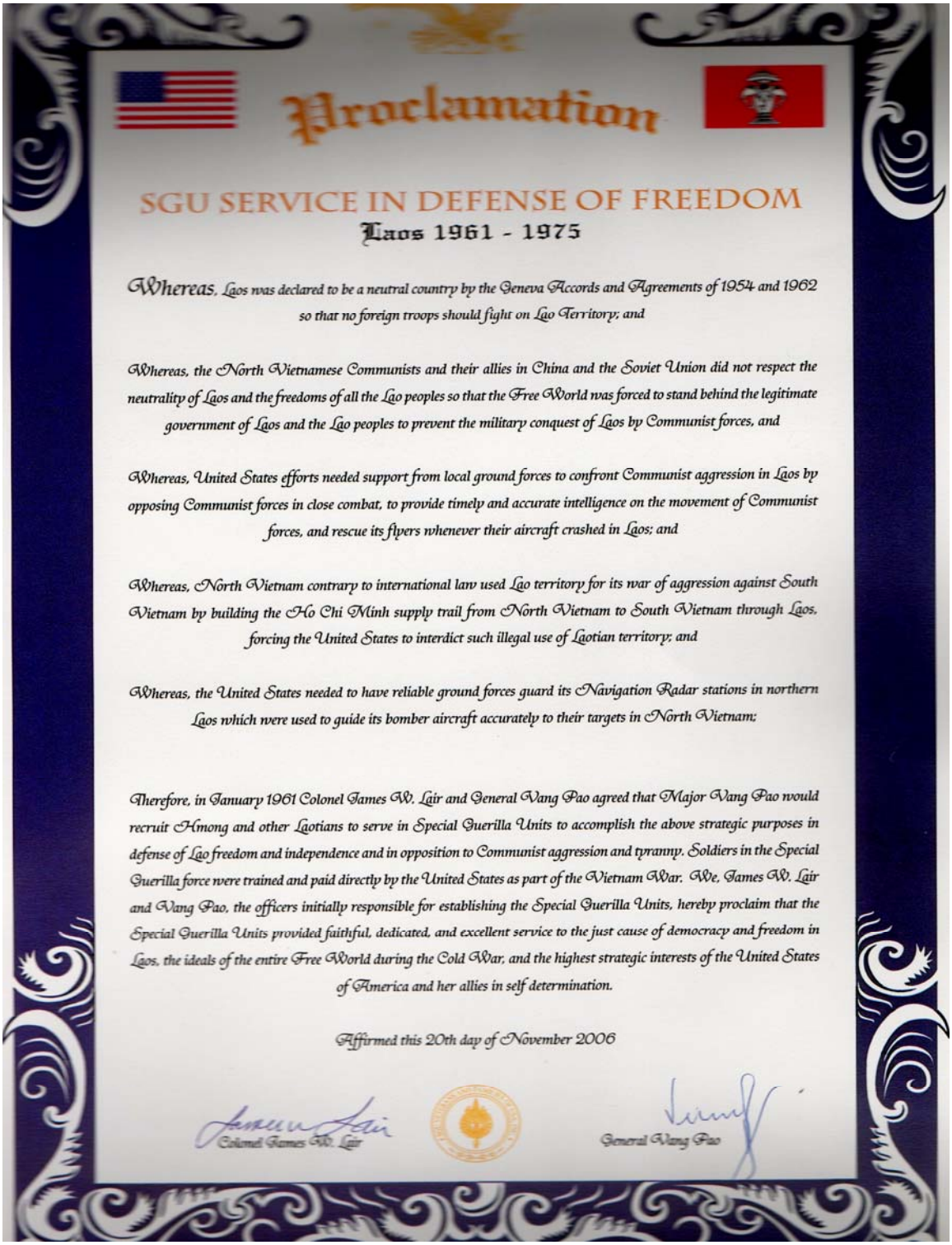
Fellow Hmong,
We had no choice but to use Thailand and America as a temporary resting place
Death or alive, we are determined to go back to our country Laos.

SONG 9 (complete):
Tsoom Hmoob, "Kho Siab Poob Tebchaws."

Peb Hmoob sawvdaws lub neej kho siab	Our Hmong's melancholic life
Thaum peb nyob uake hauv qub tebchaws	When we still lived in the homeland
Sawvdaws sib raws paub txhij txhuaj	Everyone ran around and knew each other
Zaum no poob tebchaws tsis muaj tug	Now losing our homeland we have nothing
Xav txog lub neej dhau los lawm	Thinking about the life in the past
Kho siab seev yees kua muag si law	So sad, tears strolling down
Vim tseg kwvtxij nyob tom qab	Because relatives are left behind
Nyob zoov nuj txeeg noj nploojntoos ntxuag mov	In the jungles eating tree leaves with rice
Thov ntuj hlub peb	Praying to heaven (God) to love us
kom tau sib pom	So we can meet
Yog peb sib nco	If we miss each other
Ces ntsia lub hnub los ntsia lub hli	Look up in the moon or the sun

APPENDIX D

Proclamation on SGU Service in Defense of Freedom in Laos, 1961-1975
(Courtesy of Xang Vang of the Special Guerrilla Unit, St. Paul, Minnesota)



Proclamation

SGU SERVICE IN DEFENSE OF FREEDOM
Laos 1961 - 1975

Whereas, Laos was declared to be a neutral country by the Geneva Accords and Agreements of 1954 and 1962 so that no foreign troops should fight on Lao Territory; and

Whereas, the North Vietnamese Communists and their allies in China and the Soviet Union did not respect the neutrality of Laos and the freedoms of all the Lao peoples so that the Free World was forced to stand behind the legitimate government of Laos and the Lao peoples to prevent the military conquest of Laos by Communist forces, and

Whereas, United States efforts needed support from local ground forces to confront Communist aggression in Laos by opposing Communist forces in close combat, to provide timely and accurate intelligence on the movement of Communist forces, and rescue its flyers whenever their aircraft crashed in Laos; and

Whereas, North Vietnam contrary to international law used Lao territory for its war of aggression against South Vietnam by building the Ho Chi Minh supply trail from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos, forcing the United States to interdict such illegal use of Laotian territory; and

Whereas, the United States needed to have reliable ground forces guard its Navigation Radar stations in northern Laos which were used to guide its bomber aircraft accurately to their targets in North Vietnam;

Therefore, in January 1961 Colonel James W. Lair and General Vang Pao agreed that Major Vang Pao would recruit Hmong and other Laotians to serve in Special Guerilla Units to accomplish the above strategic purposes in defense of Lao freedom and independence and in opposition to Communist aggression and tyranny. Soldiers in the Special Guerilla force were trained and paid directly by the United States as part of the Vietnam War. We, James W. Lair and Vang Pao, the officers initially responsible for establishing the Special Guerilla Units, hereby proclaim that the Special Guerilla Units provided faithful, dedicated, and excellent service to the just cause of democracy and freedom in Laos, the ideals of the entire Free World during the Cold War, and the highest strategic interests of the United States of America and her allies in self determination.

Affirmed this 20th day of November 2006

Colonel James W. Lair

General Vang Pao