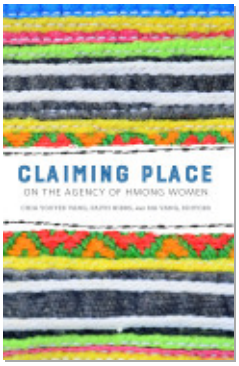
Claiming Place

Chia Youyee Vang, Faith Nibbs, Ma Vang



Published by University of Minnesota Press

Vang, Chia Youyee, et al.
Claiming Place: On the Agency of Hmong Women.
University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/44989.

· CHAPTER 2 ·

Rechronicling Histories

Toward a Hmong Feminist Perspective

Ma Vang

The history of the U.S. "secret war" in Laos (1961–75) is a complicated story with multiple stakeholders and competing perspectives. The narratives of first and 1.5-generation Hmong refugees, in particular, have been an important source of knowledge contributing to the ongoing discussions about the Hmong involvement during this period of U.S. intervention in Laos against international mandates to leave the former Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in peace, outlined in the Geneva Accords of 1954. Such narratives are especially crucial because the war was not publicly fought and there were few written records to document not only the diplomatic and military practices enforced upon and carried out by the Hmong "secret army" but also the human legacies of what was undeniably a project of U.S. empire. Yet these narratives have been framed either as testimonies of historical injustice, to garner U.S. government and public recognition, or as evidence of the degenerative psychological impact of war trauma that required culturally competent health-care practices. Although these narrative frames and their resulting material outcomes are important for addressing gaps in state accountability and health-care practices, they operate on methodological models that rely on a singular understanding of how Hmong refugees discuss their wartime and displacement experiences and for what purpose. They represent Hmong as what Randall Williams calls "appealing subjects" in the human rights framework—those seeking help and rights in a subjugated relationship to the state and international rights regimes. This gendered comprehension recuperates Hmong refugees and their stories when they are useful and rejects them when they contradict the state and its regimes. This latter move is evidenced in the *Radiolab*

podcast titled "Yellow Rain," in which the show's hosts reject Eng Yang's claims of Hmong encounters with chemical warfare and repudiate his stories as distortions of Western scientific facts by a "Hmong refugee." This chapter intervenes in this broader gendered construction of knowledge that has informed Hmong subjectivity within restrictive historical genealogies.

To compound this gendered formation of knowledge, the narrative about Hmong involvement has been told through a masculinist and patriarchal perspective that valorizes Hmong men as heroes and the United States as a benevolent savior–rescuer. Hmong refugee women's narratives about their wartime experiences have been crucial yet marginal to a historical analysis of the conflict. With few written records, a past relationship of military alliance with the U.S. government has often been used to explain Hmong presence in this country. This has been a salient narrative about the Hmong because it aligns their sacrifices with the U.S. project to advance its militarism in Southeast Asia. The story of Hmong heroism and alliance supports the nation-state's liberal discourse of rescue and liberation in which the U.S. government purported to have saved the Hmong from the abject conditions of war by accepting them as refugees.[1] As such, Hmong Americans have had to recuperate this story in order to publicly communicate their history and to reclaim the thousands of Hmong lives that were lost in order to save American ones. This particular account on the part of Hmong men and women has been important in gaining some recognition for Hmong wartime sacrifices—especially the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, which expedited Hmong veterans and their spouses' naturalization by waiving the English and history requirements of the test (Vang 2012a).

Although important in revealing the historiographic gaps about U.S. wars in Southeast Asia, the hero and ally narrative tends to portray a singular, masculinist depiction of Hmong agency through their wartime efforts. In this chapter, I am interested in the discourse about wartime experiences that do not fit within the masculinized retelling of history and cannot easily support the myth of U.S. rescue after the war. These are largely stories from Hmong women about their experiences of forced migration to stay ahead of the fighting and to escape Communist persecution in the immediate aftermath of the war. In addition, I examine the strategies of storytelling that reveal how warfare permeated Hmong women's everyday lives and how these stories reflect their subject formation.

By focusing on Hmong women's perspectives, this chapter does not presume that Hmong women have not been speaking or talking. Instead, it suggests that we have not been listening, and it also points to the gaps in the listening and reading practices that cannot account for the nuances in refugee women's speech acts. In fact, their stories are part of the everyday conversations and interactions that link what is in the past to the present to strengthen relationships between generations and family members. This chapter expands the scholarship on Hmong women's refugee experiences by highlighting their narrative strategies of recalling past experiences that refuse to adhere to linear forms of historical accounts. Therefore, I propose a methodological guide for listening that centers Hmong knowledge and asserts Hmong women as knowing subjects. I found that Hmong women's assertions about their wartime experiences of forced internal migration prior to the diaspora from Laos bring to the fore a central paradox about the so-called "secret war": the zones or spaces of military hostility overlap with and rub up against the places of Hmong civilian life.

I argue that Hmong women's narrative patterns in everyday practice, which emphasize a nonlinear path of migration and narrative refusal, rechronicle histories of war violence and displacement to disrupt the gendered project of militarism that institutes war violence as rescue. The narrative patterns as everyday practices challenge the production of knowledge about the Hmong involvement in war and Hmong women's place in that history. Historically speaking, the war permeated all aspects of Hmong life because the U.S. secret bombings and guerrilla warfare occurred in the northeastern region of Laos in Military Region II, where most Hmong lived. Hmong women experienced the difficulties of both sending their husbands and sons into war and having to flee their villages when the fighting got too close. Their narratives expose how the sacrifice of Hmong lives occurred not only on the front lines but also in the villages, where Hmong families became targets of bombings and Communist aggression, causing multiple displacements. I expand this argument about the indistinction between war violence and everyday life in the women's narratives to show how the accounts critically rechronicle Hmong wartime experiences as part of a historical process of U.S. militarism shaped by race and gender.

My analysis of the narrative strategies that Hmong women employed in the interviews takes a feminist approach that is informed by the scholarship on transnational and native feminist theories in which they interro-

gate colonialism, racism, U.S. liberal empire, and (hetero)patriarchy as ongoing structures of power through the lens of gender and sexuality. In addition, I borrow from the work of Native and feminist anthropologists who suggest "ethnographic refusal" and critical-listening practices, respectively, to articulate Hmong women's narrative strategies. In the following discussion, I begin first by teasing out a methodology of listening to Hmong women that is drawn from feminist anthropology and political trauma literature. Second, I show how accounts of Hmong forced migration, which produced their precarious diasporic condition, disrupt the U.S. Cold War imagination of Laos as an empty landscape for warfare. In their accounts, Hmong women recall war memories by naming the different places to which they moved and therefore assert their geographic knowledge. This discussion highlights some of the specific ways in which Hmong women and men rechronicle how warfare permeated Hmong daily life, which coerced their participation in the war effort through their everyday responsibilities and family obligations. Finally, I show how the pattern of Hmong women's life stories that are shaped by movement, by a refusal to fully communicate their stories, and by not remembering brings to the fore the crucial act of listening and interpreting stories as feminist practices that contend with the gaps in Cold War historiography's silence on U.S. military violence in Laos. These strategies open up possibilities to conceptualize a Hmong feminist perspective that centers gender and movement to expose the problems of Western knowledge formation and to theorize history.

Listening to Hmong Women

The scholarship on Hmong refugee displacement has primarily discussed their exodus from Laos across the Mekong River into Thailand's refugee camps and eventually to the United States or to another country of resettlement (Warner 1996; Hein 1995).[2] Those that focus on Hmong military activities often privilege the male perspective as the carrier of more accurate historical accounts (Morrison 2007). The scholarship that focuses specifically on Hmong women's lives has also missed the opportunity to situate their experiences within the historiography of U.S. militarism and a *critique* of U.S. liberalism. This research instead focuses on Hmong difficulties in adapting to U.S. society, especially through the oft-reported clash with Western medicine. Such portrayals reinforce Hmong cultural backwardness and their racialized status as a people who has been recently

transported from the past into modernity (Fadiman 1997). Yet the literature that highlights Hmong refugee women's narratives overwhelmingly describes a pristine "pre-war" life in Laos to explain their daily lives and choices in the diaspora (Donnelly 1994; Rice 2000; and Mote 2004).

Hmong women have also served as objects of study in the research on the physical and mental health of Southeast Asian refugees who escaped from war, yet their perspectives are largely unwritten and unexplored in this scholarship. Oftentimes, mental health frameworks are used to understand Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugee women's wartime experiences to explain their depression and posttraumatic stress disorder among a host of other psychological concerns (Kroll et al. 1989; Rozée and Van Boemel 1990). Specifically, the study of refugee women and their recollections of wartime experiences and displacement have focused on their psychological trauma and their coping mechanisms (Cole, Espin, and Rothblum 1992). This range of scholarship emphasizes the needs of women and interprets their experiences within a deficit model that understands this group as requiring help to adjust to U.S. society. Often, their voices become muted as objects of study rather than as subjects who struggle with but also negotiate their traumatic wartime experiences. This chapter's concern with writing Hmong women's narratives is especially significant, since so much of the focus has been on Hmong men as soldiers who sacrificed for the United States. It also attempts to explore a style of ethnographic writing that would better capture the conditions of Hmong lives lived in war (Abu-Lughod 1993, 1–2). Writing Hmong women's narratives opens up the exploration of women and gender in history-making processes when that history has not been properly dealt with in official and public discourses.

The term "Hmong refugee women" is not used here as a descriptor for a monolithic group but as a category to expand on the analysis of the refugee figure in order to interrogate the gendered project of U.S. militarism. Examining Hmong refugee women's narratives, in particular, animates key questions about the U.S. project of "secret" intervention in Laos and the colonial relationship between the United States and the Hmong.[3] I have investigated elsewhere how the war as a historical period is also a project of knowledge production (Vang 2012b). I suggest that secrecy not only hides U.S. violence against "racialized peoples and terrains" but also produces racial knowledge to configure the Hmong as gendered racial subjects who belong in the past and exist outside historical time (Kim 2010, 16).[4]

Thus, systemic government secrets perpetuate the representational absence of Hmong Americans, which threatens to erase Hmong histories of war and displacement. Furthermore, secrecy enables a gendered military strategy of surrogacy, which involves the replacement of Hmong lives for those of Americans, when groups of Hmong soldiers would rescue American soldiers. My discussion here adds to the conceptualization of the refugee that expands the research on gender to the feminist critique of U.S. imperialism, war, and migration. I position the refugee as a transnational analytic to examine immigration histories that were produced by U.S. imperialism. Hmong diasporic women are a part of this refugee analytic, which expands the research on women and gender in transnational migrations. As such, their life stories represent an alternative site of knowledge from which to investigate the patriarchal structure of U.S. militarism.

In this way, transnational feminism is a helpful framework from which to situate a Hmong feminist perspective that links the processes of patriarchies, colonialisms, cosmopolitanisms, racisms, and feminisms (Kaplan and Grewal 2002, 73, 75). Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1999, 350) propose transnational feminist cultural studies as a methodological guide and a practice of resistance and critique to transform traditional divisions that keep systems of power and epistemological innovation separated. Their concept offers a feminist analysis that "refuses to choose among economics, cultural, and political concerns" (358). Instead, transnational feminist cultural studies suggest using critical practices that link seemingly disparate processes, which for Hmong refugee women and men are war violence, displacement, and trauma. Alternatively, the work in native feminism provides an important guide to articulate Hmong feminist perspectives that challenges the structure of colonialism and Eurocentric knowledge formation. In addition to the work of Renya Ramirez (2007), Andrea Smith and J. Kehaulani Kauanui (2008), and others, which centers on gender and indigeneity in problematizing U.S. settler colonialism and U.S. empire, Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angela Morrill (2013) propose native feminist theories as an epistemological mode that makes claims to "an ongoing project of resistance that continues to contest patriarchy and its power relationships" (21). Native feminist theories make clear the interconnectedness across native and non-native feminisms, which places it with other feminist scholarship and within modernity (23, 26). Their important intervention in the field of feminist scholarship helps to imagine alternative forms of knowledge about gender and the figure of the Hmong women.

Therefore, I pursue a historical analysis by situating oral histories as "cultural products" that renew local, indigenous knowledge (Marshall 1994, 972). Over a two-year period, I conducted formal and informal interviews with twenty participants from Hmong communities on the U.S. West Coast. I interviewed fifteen men and five women, including former soldiers and community leaders and members. The interviews took place in the participants' homes or in their organizations' offices. My questions were structured around childhood memories and places of birth, war memories, camp experiences, and life in the United States. Because I was interested in Hmong experiences in Laos, during the war, and in resettlement, I initially approached former soldiers through veterans' organizations to learn about their stories. This contributed to the higher pool of Hmong men interviewed over women. I expanded my interview participants through acquaintances and the snowball method, seeking out women who would be willing to talk to me about their life experiences and family histories. Although some women were willing, others were more wary and reluctant about sharing personal histories, some simply saying that they did not have stories to tell.[5] This chapter's analysis is drawn from these five women's narratives, using the men's stories to supplement their accounts, because their unique perspectives incisively contribute to understanding Hmong wartime experiences through a nonmasculinist perspective of forced migration. Due to its small sample size, this case study does not presuppose its findings on Hmong women in general but does the work of illuminating the larger limitations of, and the need for, knowledge about this group.

Thus, I analyze Hmong women's narratives as life stories and as texts to be shared, listened to, and read. In doing so, I draw from feminist anthropologist Ruth Behar's (1990) use of the term "life story" rather than "life history" to name the ethnographic text, because it emphasizes "the fictions of self-representation, the ways in which a life is made in the telling" (224–25). Rethinking life history as a text denaturalizes the link between text and person. It also allows for a closer analysis of the narrative, using "critical forms of analysis and self-reflexive mediation on the relationship between the storyteller and the anthropologist" (227). Rather than approach the life history as a story full of information, Behar focuses on the "act of life story representation as reading," which transforms the listener into a storyteller (228).

By exploring the politics of Hmong women's wartime narratives, this chapter interprets and pays critical attention to the unspoken narrative

strategies that empower these stories. The analysis employs a listening practice of these narratives that highlights how the experiences of forced migration serve as the context for women's memories about the war's violence.[6] The validation of these life stories as a listener, through representation and transformation into a storyteller, centralizes them as important for our understanding of the social world. Listening gives weight to a narrative: "It is up to anyone who listens to a woman's tale to hear the implicit message, interpret the powerful rage, and watch for ways in which the narrative form gives 'a weighted quality to incident,' extending the meaning of an incident beyond itself" (Dell Hymes [quoted in Behar 1990, 233–34]).

In listening to Hmong women, I also read their narratives as texts that do not reveal a truth about the past but rather work to expose history's gaps. The narratives constitute a decolonial practice of communicating how the past is always there as an interwoven network or repertoire of memories. Thus, I follow Behar's approach to "woman reading (and representing) woman," in which she uses the notion of "reading" to "ask anthropological questions about issues of representation" (228). As such, the process of storytelling contributes to an understanding of Hmong women's subjectivity because, as Behar suggests, it is an act that the storyteller engages in, and it reflects her processing and interpretation of experiences and events. Behar explains that women's orally related life histories in non-Western settings and "beyond to the ways in which women reflect on their experiences, emotions, and self-construction" (similar to women's written autobiographies) operate as a "vehicle for constituting the female subject" (233). Focusing on the five narratives, I show that they suggest possibilities for seeing Hmong women as multidimensional subjects. And because I also include two narratives from Hmong men, I suggest that the totality of narratives reveals a feminist dimension that shows how they critique power, patriarchy, and U.S. imperialism and war. If we understand that "women's stories about themselves have a concrete, context-specific texture" (233), then they are illuminating for our interrogations of the heteropatriarchal structures that produce violence, displacement/migration, and erasure of history and knowledge.

I find that these life stories convey a refusal on the women's part to fully tell or communicate a comprehensive narrative. Refusal has been a practice of doing ethnography that resists full depictions or thick descriptions of the lives of the group being studied for social scientific knowledge. Anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner (2006) critiques this practice of "ethnographic

refusal" among postcolonial scholars. She claims that resistance is already in the writing of subjects in the text because they also push back so that "no text, however dominant, lacks the traces of this counter force" (61). Ortner concludes, then, that "resistance studies are thin because they are ethnographically thin: thin on the internal politics of dominated groups, thin on the cultural richness of those groups, thin on the subjective" (61–62). Native feminist scholar Audra Simpson (2007), on the other hand, takes up this very notion of "ethnographic refusal" and contends that this refusal is on the part of those groups whom we purport to study. The refusal of interviewees to tell, and the particular limits to the knowledge produced here, underscores "the sovereignty of the people we speak of, when speaking for themselves, [and] interrupt[s] anthropological portraits of timelessness" (68). Simpson argues that voice is "coupled with sovereignty that is evident at the level of interlocution, at the level of method and at the level of textualization." In doing so, she considers "what analysis will look like, or sound like, when the goals and aspirations of those we talk to inform the methods and the shape of our theorizing and analysis" (68). The stories I gathered "refuse" coherence and recuperation of a missing past for a "fuller" understanding of the subjects and their experiences. This refusal demonstrates narrative agency to convey events in a form that does not support and may differ from any popular notions about the past.

In the narratives, the refusal by Hmong women to fully discuss their wartime experiences brings into sharp relief the stories' incompleteness. Hence, I do not purport to offer a full portrayal of Hmong women's wartime experiences but to underscore the accounts about escaping the fighting and being coerced into the war efforts as the ways in which this group recalls how warfare permeates their daily lives. In her study of the internment experiences of Japanese Canadian Nisei women, including her mother, Pamela Sugiman (2006) explains that her mother continued to relay a story about one particular train ride as a way to talk about the internment. Sugiman states: "Through my childhood, whenever my mother was asked about the internment, she would highlight one story—the story of the long train trip that she endured from Rosebery, BC, to Toronto, Ontario, the site of her first job as a domestic worker" (71). This reflection shows how recollections of the past are always already incomplete, often culminating in a few well-remembered memories. Thus, what we learn from Hmong women about the historical moment of the war are episodic insights that invoke more questions than provide answers. Hmong women's

fragmented narratives suggest that memories of the "secret war" are still ungraspable and shaped by the social and political contexts through which they surface. Lindsay DuBois (2000, 76) reminds us that personal memories are constructed and made sense of in social contexts so that social relations shape how the stories are told.

In addition, how much we know about the past is a result of both the lack of information and the inadequate language with which participants talk about that past because, as Jenny Edkins (2003) puts it, the unspeakable is a problem of language as a social and political process to comprehend traumatic events. The work on trauma theory in relation to historical analysis, then, approaches the historical power of trauma as rooted in its "inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (Caruth 1996, 17). What gets passed on through trauma narratives, then, does not represent the violence of the event but "the impact of its very incomprehensibility," so that the thing that continues to haunt the victim includes the reality of the violent event and "the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). The narratives I analyze dwell at this tension in grasping the trauma of the war as a violent event for the Hmong and its *secrecy* that has yet to be fully known. Trauma takes place when the site of protection and refuge becomes a source of danger, but traumatic events are a revelation of the contingency of the social order, compelling survivors to "bear witness to these discoveries" (Edkins 2003, 4–5). Edkins explains how this trauma introduces a politicized notion of time, a "trauma time" that intrudes and disrupts the linear progression of time maintained by the nation-state to forget its past violence (16). Hence, the state rewrites these traumas into a linear narrative of national heroism to conceal the trauma it has produced. Edkins maintains that resistance to the state's rescripting is resistance to sovereign power (xiv–xv).

Thus, Hmong women's narratives must be situated historically precisely because this group occupies an already hidden and unknowable place in this context of the "secret war." The significant gap in Hmong women's perspectives is explored in Doualy XayKaoThao's *National Public Radio* report "Family History: The General, His Sisters and Me." XayKaoThao, the granddaughter of one of General Vang Pao's sisters and a reporter for NPR, interviewed a couple of General Vang Pao's sisters shortly after his passing on January 6, 2011. She wanted to know what it was like to have a brother like the general, a prominent military and community leader, and revealed, "This is the first time the sisters of Gen. Vang Pao have been

asked to speak publicly about their brother, and about their lives." By listening to their stories, she learns that "there are many more secrets and tales from the past," including one in which one of the sisters confided that, in her opinion, her brother did not marry his eight wives to unite the Hmong clans but rather for love. Through these interactions, XayKaoThao is charged with the task of "keeper of their stories," because these secrets from the past are often viewed as family histories to be passed down within the family, and they cannot be seen as important to our historical knowledge. Although this practice of keeping secrets is encouraged within the family to avoid shame or to contradict a public image, I suggest that the interactions between XayKaoThao and the general's sisters exemplify the social context in which Hmong women share their knowledge through their children and grandchildren. Yet Hmong men's narratives also bear witness to secrets that cannot easily be subsumed into the masculinist representations of warrior or hero, which must also be closely examined.

Life on the Run: Rechronicling History through Hmong Knowledge of Place

Hmong women's accounts of constant migration within Laos show how the multiple displacements of Hmong families, whose husbands and sons were off fighting, constitute escape strategies to stay ahead of the fighting. The women I interviewed describe this fleeing as "*khiav khiav laus li no*" (we have been running to this old age). This oft-repeated phrase reflects the structure of their lives around forced migration from their homes. Youa Yang, an elderly Hmong woman who was part of the more recent Hmong resettlement from Wat Than Krabok in 2004 and whose husband fought in the war, recounts, "I had three children by the time the war began, so we are at war until now, and we lost our country so we have been on the run until this old age." Her recollection of constant flight may be attributed to her more recent arrival in the United States, but it also suggests that resettling in the United States is a form of flight and escape even when it should constitute U.S. rescue. This ongoing impact of flight structures how she narrates her experiences when she explains that with three children at the beginning of the war they fled to " 'Naj Kias' to Long Cheng to 'Xam Xiam,' 'Khwv Lom Paub,' to the land of 'Taws Npoom' down to 'Muas Theeb' to 'Naj Vej' to 'Phuv Xev' until we followed General Vang Pao's flight to Nong Khai from where we went to Vinai and then Wat Than

Krabok." The process in which she summarizes and sums up all these places of her life—leaving and arriving—instantaneously draws together time and place to illuminate how migration still persists in the present. This method of narration shows how Hmong women recall historical memories through retracing the path of their forced migrations.

Hmong women's accounts about their life on the run during the war allow for a rechronicling of history through Hmong geographic knowledge. In this way, their wartime experiences of forced migration actually record the impact of war through their path of displacement. This path follows places that are known only to Hmong because they reassign different names to the villages and geographic landscapes that have official state and French colonial designations. These places that Youa refers to are only known to the Hmong, because they were not yet mapped as knowable locations of the state. Thus, Hmong women's narratives about their escape from place to place assert their geographic knowledge and capture a Hmong sense of place that resists the colonial and war cartography. Glen Coulthard (2010) suggests that "place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world—and these ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place" (79). While Coulthard's formulation of place is linked to the indigenous connection to land as resource, identity, and relationship, I find his analytic of place useful for understanding Hmong refugee narratives that are structured around the state's unmapped places (81). For my informants, a place gathers history and embodies its events and people so that it symbolizes a site from which to tell their stories. For instance, place constitutes an epistemology to chronicle Hmong ways of knowing and experiencing the world in order to remember the violence and the erasure of their flight. Hmong women's knowledge about these places of their escape and arrival refuses to adhere to the U.S. colonial and war policy mapping of Hmong as "natural" warriors onto the landscape of Laos.

This place-based knowledge unravels the totality of the colonial landscape sought by U.S. foreign policy to distinguish the Communist areas that required military aggression from the neutral zones that warranted protection. While there are few records about the war, the ones that do exist overwhelmingly chart an empty Laotian landscape that was conducive to U.S. and Communist takeover, and map Hmong soldiers as "natural" warriors who could traverse the land (Vang 2012b). Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose contend in *Writing Women and Space* (1994) that "maps were

graphic tools of colonization, themselves colonizing spaces perceived as empty and uninscribed" (9). As such, the routes built by the French colonial administration along with the U.S.-constructed Lima sites (aircraft landing strips) constituted the intertwining projects of colonial cartography and colonization and war. The development of roads and landing strips enabled France and the United States to represent Laos as a knowable landscape for the efficiency of colonial and military occupation. The process of unmapping and undoing this colonial cartography underscores how Hmong women's narratives complicate the historiography of U.S. war in Laos. Although scholars who study Hmong in Southeast Asia find that migration has been a Hmong historical practice for cultural, health, agricultural, and political reasons (especially their migration from China into peninsular Southeast Asia) (Michaud and Culas 2000), I insist that their displacement during the conflict in Laos exposes how U.S. political conflict produced forced migration.

While Hmong women used village or place names to mark their escape path, I found through my interviews that Hmong men recall place or village names that relate to well-known battle sites and as a way to chronicle their narratives as soldiers. This corroborates the masculinist war narrative, which tended to focus on heroic battle stories. Hmong veterans typically explained their wartime experiences in the context of their recruitment, training, and military duties. Their stories are detailed and formal as a result of more narrative practice. For example, my interview with Colonel Wangyee Vang, president of Lao Veterans, began in this way: "My name when I was younger and in school is Vaj Yis. I became involved in the war in 1961. An American took us to train on Route 6 in Laos" (Col. Wangyee Vang, 2009). This methodical introduction of his name, the year he became a soldier, and the location of his training frames this story in a familiar war narrative with identifiable characteristics. While useful for inserting Hmong involvement into the broader historical trajectory, this particular narrative strategy also serves the U.S. national image that the Hmong were its principal surrogate ally. The year 1961 was an important start to the beginning of Hmong armed conflict through U.S. aid. Furthermore, Route 6 represents a recognizable French colonial road that was crucial for carrying out U.S. military operations in Laos.

In undoing the colonial mapping of war strategies, the stories about escaping told by my female informants describe an instability of life on the run, in which they could not stay in one place for any significant period of

time. They were constantly on the move because they "were at war and didn't have a stable or peaceful place to live" (Soua Lo, 2010). Soua Lo, whose husband fought in the war, recounts that she was born in Nong Het, but because there was war, they moved to Laj Huab. She explains that her family's "life is a refugee life" because her parents had been carrying her to escape from war since she was five years old. Her family moved from Laj Huab to Loob Kuas, then to Long Cheng until the war ended, and then they had to move again to "live in small places." This constant migration from place to place illustrates what it means to be "living in a country that is in turmoil," because they could not complete one season of farming before they had to move (Soua Lo and Youa Yang). Curiously, in a life marked by leaving, that leaving must necessarily be unmarked.

What interviewees remember are not events but the measures they had to take to erase their presence as they escaped from the bombings during the war and from Communist persecution afterwards. Yer Vang,[7] secretary for Lao Veterans, explained his family's escape after the U.S. retreat in this way: "We would just stay at a place for ten to twenty days, because if you stay at a place for too long the grass and plants that you step on will have your footprints" (Yer Vang, 2009). This description narrates place not as a specific location but as a process of leaving, so that what Yer conveys is how not to leave his footprints on the ground. Rememberings are marked by displacements and erasures, but such memories make poignant the spatial dimensions of leaving. These narratives represent decolonizing practices to relocate the fleeting Hmong presences in places where not even the grass was allowed to be permanently marked by footprints of movement, leaving, and escaping—lives lived in displacement. Indeed, the stories refuse the naming of such places as legible dots on the mapping of war, therefore exposing how the spaces of exception and violence are indistinguishable from the nation-state's territory.

Hmong women and families lived their lives on the edges of the escape paths in makeshift shelters constructed with banana leaves to shield the rain. The unrootedness of flight makes place and shelter precarious luxuries. Soua's niece, who was present during our conversation, asserts that they made lives on the side of the road and cooked in the rain under a banana leaf, like in the (Hmong) movies. Although they could not see the fighting, they heard gunfire (and saw fires burn) day and night. "We did not have any place of significance to set roots," said Soua, "I am sad whenever we talk about our life [tears up, long pause]." Soua shared a metaphor

for her experiences during the war: "It was like we were being sifted, and whoever could hold on will live." She describes the experience of this makeshift life in the following way:

> You know that your parents and grandparents, we couldn't live in any secure place to raise any pigs or chickens to eat. With the bombing on vegetation, the animals were sick and we couldn't raise or eat them. Those who had businesses could get good meat but it was expensive. You can only buy one kilo of meat at a time to eat with vegetable and other foods. We struggled a lot when you talk about the refugee life. They dropped rice for us to eat but we didn't have anything to eat it with. We just ate so we wouldn't starve. . . . For us Hmong, you must bring a pot and a knife so that you can use it to find and cook food wherever you go. When the group leader decides that we'll stay there, then everyone will go cut down bamboos and trees to build shelter (*txiav xyoob txiav ntoo los ua tsev*). We'll live there for a while, but if Communists come then we have to move again. (Soua Lo, 2010)

This passage sums up the precarious life in Laos both during the war, when Hmong were displaced from their villages by the encroaching bombings and Communist takeover, and immediately afterwards, when they escaped from Communist persecution. Here she addresses me directly with a familiarity that says my parents and grandparents also lived through a similar experience. This reference of "you know" draws on the fact that I am a familiar listener and I should know from my elders what life must have been like. It asserts a shared experience of escape, fear, and starvation. Soua narrates the hardships in regard to livestock and the inadequacy of food because the bombings and "yellow rain" either destroyed or contaminated the vegetation and made the animals sick. The displacements and chemical warfare ruined their subsistence way of life, so they had to rely on United States Agency for International Development (USAID) rice drops for food. Without anything to eat except for rice, the Hmong "just ate so we wouldn't starve."

Long Cheng embodies the precarious quality of a Hmong life on the run. My informants recall Long Cheng—deemed the "most secret place on earth" because it was the site of General Vang Pao's military base—as a refugee settlement and an epicenter of Hmong cultural vibrancy during

the war years. These stories about refugee escape and settlement paint a complex picture of Long Cheng, making it not only a "secret" military base or the site of Hmong cultural vibrancy but a place where Hmong refugees who had been on the run end up. Soua recounts:

> At that time, I was still very young and didn't know that much. But when they opened Long Cheng, everyone moved from the land of (*teb chaws*) "Pam Khaum" and Xieng to the place of Long Cheng. Then Americans began coming and General Vang Pao and them came to live in Long Cheng. They moved there, but there was always war, there was not a day with peace. (Soua Lo, 2010)

Long Cheng itself had not been a "place where people had always lived," as Soua Lo claims, but because General Vang Pao was displaced there to build his military stronghold, it became a place where the refugees also "came to live" (Soua Lo, 2010). Hmong refugees either were headed to Long Cheng or were pushed there to seek protection from the fighting. According to Soua, her family went to Long Cheng because they could not live in the other places anymore: "When we all came [to Long Cheng], the land of "Laj Huab" and Xieng were uninhabitable, the Communists already occupied them. We could live in Long Cheng because the soldiers protected it. War was always going on and we could not live in peace." Although she does not remember how long they lived there, Soua recalls living there from when she already had two children until they left Laos to go to Thailand and eventually to the United States.

Although Long Cheng provided some protection from the constant moving, it could not insulate the Hmong residents from other conditions of war, such as starvation and fear. Soua explains that Long Cheng was "not a well-built city": "it was a village in a ditch/valley (*kwj ha*). Mountains protect it on two sides. There was a small rise in the middle and they made the airstrip on its flat surface. It is not a good village." Long Cheng also represents the convergence of U.S. war strategies and a Hmong sense of place. First, the image of Long Cheng's airstrip is a well-remembered feature that was "not wide but very long" (Youa Yang, 2009). This landmark served as a reminder to residents that they lived in a time of war because they witnessed a constant flow of planes carrying out Hmong soldiers and bringing in body bags. Second, another poignant memory about Long Cheng is that of planes dropping rice for Hmong refugees. Soua explains,

"At that time, planes dropped rice for everyone to eat, so we ate like that. I don't remember when they started dropping us rice, but they had been dropping it since we lived there, otherwise we would starve." These rice drops were crucial for the survival of Hmong refugees in Long Cheng and those still on the move. They also demarcated certain Hmong places as knowable to U.S. militarism and humanitarian aid. Third, my informants also remember Long Cheng as a fun place to live. The Hmong transformed Long Cheng into a vibrant cultural center, creating radio stations to promote national propaganda and lift morale through Hmong folk songs and music, and many Hmong entrepreneurs built up thriving businesses. Because "everyone moved there" and started businesses and farmed (Soua Lo, 2010), Long Cheng constituted a vivacious place to live. Youa elaborates that because "there were a lot of Hmong and it was fun/lively (*lom zem*) with lots of activities," Long Cheng would have been a good place to live if the war had not ended (*lub teb chaws txhob tawg*). In this way, Long Cheng, as a dot on the map, represents the convergence and collision of U.S. war mapping and Hmong cultural knowledge of place.

Yet Long Cheng was not a permanent place for Hmong, as even General Vang Pao was forced to leave it, and thousands of Hmong who lived there had to escape the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese armies in the aftermath of the Fall of Saigon. Even though Soua's family stayed longer, she still describes it as a refugee life: "We did have houses to live in but we couldn't live in peace." While some Hmong made Long Cheng a more permanent settlement after all their migrations, others did not stay long. Youa's family lived there for half a year because it "was primarily a place for soldiers and their families so there were many houses built closely together so we got to live there for a while." It could not become a haven for Hmong because "when the Vietnamese communists came [even] the General couldn't stay" (Youa Yang, 2009). This noted instability illuminates the Hmong diasporic condition that is compounded by war violence and the significance of a Hmong place-based knowledge.

Toward a Hmong Feminist Perspective

Hmong women's accounts about forced migration revealed how all Hmong were enmeshed in the fighting and violence. The narratives illustrate Hmong women and their families' roles as civilian "soldiers" who bore responsibility to the war efforts through their everyday practices,

such as household activities. Witnessing the increasing numbers of dead Hmong soldiers that others did not see made Hmong women unwilling participants in the war. The women I interviewed talked about their lives as daughters, mothers, and wives, revealing their invisible efforts as those who stayed at home to help save the lives of their loved ones who were fighting in the battlefield. They explain the work of refraining from domestic responsibilities in order to protect their husbands' lives. Soua elucidates that she refrained from cooking and sewing while her husband was away on the front lines because "if you stab through cooking, then it makes it easier for others to kill or hurt him." She elaborates that "you must help from the home too so he is safe out there." For Soua, this practice is consistent with a Hmong tradition that dictates that the wife refrain from domestic responsibilities and the husband act morally (refrain from sexual misconduct) when he is away so that he will not be killed or taken as a prisoner. Once the husband is relieved from the field and comes home, his wife can resume her household activities. However, practice of this tradition occurred on an individual basis, and it was up to each person to observe it. Soua proclaims that it was partly due to her efforts of self-restraint that her husband was not hurt on the battlefield.

But the reality of the situation (in the time of war) for which some Hmong women like Soua practiced self-restraint was the increasing number of the Hmong dead brought in daily for those at home to sort through and mourn their loss. Young men who had left the day before were brought back in body bags via helicopter. Soua states:

> You know that they prepared body bags in the helicopters to retrieve the dead, right? They quickly put the bodies in these bags in the field with tags of the first and last names of these individuals and have the helicopters bring them back. At the airport, those at home will go sort through the bodies for their person to bring home. This made us very scared. So I thought about how your uncle [her husband] might one day have the same fate, and it made me not want to do anything. They gave us rice to eat so even if we didn't have anything else to eat, we just ate rice so we wouldn't starve to death. (Soua Lo, 2010)

This wartime reality of seeing and sorting the bodies of the dead constituted additional challenges that Hmong women endured. It also exposed

the unequal numbers of Hmong deaths compared to American losses. When asked if the Americans helped with funeral and burial costs, Soua angrily responds that they did not because they had already paid General Vang Pao to hire the soldiers to fight on their behalf. She implores that "they probably only paid each person $20!" as a way to name the disproportionate value of American lives over those of Hmong soldiers and civilians.

These narratives reveal a gendered formation of the war that involved the commitment of everyone. Despite my informants' willingness to share the different places of escape in Laos, recounting the Mekong River crossing presented a challenge due to its particularly traumatic events of deaths and family separations. As such, the Hmong women I interviewed hesitated to fully reveal the details surrounding their escape into Thailand. While the other interviewees were too young to recall this historic moment, Soua briefly mentioned that they hired men with boats to help them cross. My interview with Youa in particular epitomizes this refusal to tell. I was excited to talk to Youa because her granddaughter and I attended school together, and she accompanied me to the interview due to her own interest in learning more about her family history. She had learned from an aunt a bit about the family's story of crossing the Mekong River and thought her grandmother might be able to elaborate more. But once we started talking, it was clear that Youa did not want to bring up traumatic memories.

When I asked about the family's Mekong River crossing, the story was brief, interjected with long pauses, as if she were trying to sort out what not to say. Youa states, "We crossed the Mekong River. We crossed the Mekong there so when we arrived at the bank of the Mekong . . . um . . . those who had already crossed to the other side sent boats to come get us, and that's how we crossed into Thailand." This monologue can only reveal as much as Youa wants me to know about that time in her life. Only with further prying from her granddaughter did she reveal that the family had been pursued by Communist soldiers and they split up right before they crossed the river, resulting in the death of one of the uncles. The family was reunited in Nong Khai after having crossed separately. In this strategy of selective telling, Youa herself enacts the silences into the story to leave open how that moment of crossing is such a well-known historical occurrence and yet it is filled with the unknowable pain and trauma its survivors endured. Youa explains at the end of the interview, "I only know how to tell the story the way I've told it" (Youa Yang, 2009). Her resistance to

sharing this tragic moment in her family history results from both the necessity to withhold some secrets and the inability for stories to become knowable in trauma time (Edkins 2003). Youa's point that she only knows how to tell the story the way she has told it suggests that the story is incomplete but represents her perspective.

For elder Hmong women who experienced the war's violence and multiple displacements, what must be understood is how the war did not end with their leaving Laos. Two of the elder Hmong women explain that in the United States, their hearts and minds are constantly at war even when they no longer hear gunfire. They link the difficulties of navigating life in the United States with their struggles to survive during war. The difficulties they face include learning English, driving and taking advantage of opportunities, and relying on their children to take care of them. The symbolic forms of violence—the inability to share traumatic events and the continuing effects of war—constitute these women's ongoing struggles. Their accounts defy conventional war historiography, which demarcates clear-cut boundaries of when and where the war ended.

While some Hmong women had been running with their parents at a young age, others were born on the run, in the process of escaping, so their beginnings are shaped by not remembering. May Vue immigrated to the United States with her family at the age of thirteen. When asked to talk about where she was born and her childhood memories, she states, "I don't have much to say, I just tell you what I remember [laughs]. . . . I was born in Laos, I don't remember the name of the village. . . . No, I don't remember anything" (May Vue 2010). This repetition of not remembering the name of the village where she was born or anything else about her childhood exemplifies the erasure of having to forget. Kia Yang, a high school vice principal at the time of the interview, was born in Thailand and moved to French Guiana at a young age. She recounts her birth in this way: "I wasn't actually born in the camp because when we settled there, the Thais came to evict us. We ran through the jungle and then my mom gave birth to me in the jungle so that is my beginning" (Kia Yang, 2009). Kia's use of "my beginning" to describe her birth in the process of the family's escape in the jungle, even when they were already in Thailand, suggests a different tracing of Hmong beginnings interrupted and informed by flight. It is a precarious beginning that is constantly threatened as not existing. Oftentimes, such beginnings are not remembered but put together from the stories told to us.

Yet migration marks defining moments in one's life. Kia explains that her accounts are "just a story, I'm sure there are many more out there." She admits, after my urging, "Yeah, it's my story. . . . There are a few defining moments in your life where you look back and you wouldn't be where you are if those things [did]n't happen." Kia reflects that her mother's passing opened a path for her secondary migration to the United States. Because the family resettled in French Guiana, her father took four of the youngest children, including Kia, to live in the United States with their stepmother after he remarried. Kia reveals, "It's sad that she passed away when I was young but that one thing led me to what I am today to move from one totally different country to the next, to here" (Kia Yang 2009). Moving to the United States gave her the opportunity to continue her education and to pursue her career as an educator. Her family's migration history is unique, first moving to French Guiana and then resettling to the United States, because it makes visible the path of multiple overlapping French and U.S. colonialisms in Laos and their synchronized projects of refugee rescue. While her family's initial settlement in French Guiana was a part of the refugee rescue, the family's migration to the United States reflected their decision-making power and the social capital established through connections to the Hmong community in the United States through marriage.

Hmong women's narrative patterns that follow Hmong movement from place to place coupled with the refusal to fully communicate family histories suggest a reinterpretation of wartime stories that rechronicle the historical context of U.S. militarism. These strategies of storytelling make clear a need to theorize history through the ideas of movement and refusal in order to disrupt the existing gendered formation of knowledge about Hmong refugees who escaped from war—in particular, representations of Hmong women. Wendy Ho (1999) suggests that "in theorizing history from women's experiences and standpoints, one becomes more sensitive to their contributions not only to formations of individuals, families, and communities, but also to the theorizing of the political and public" (27). In this way, the narratives I analyze illuminate the possibility for a broader Hmong feminist perspective that problematizes militarism and U.S. empire as ongoing structures to expose them as problems of Western tools of knowledge and the nation-state. In addition, a Hmong feminist perspective would reveal the ongoing project and experiences of U.S. liberal empire's strategies of surrogate war beyond the Southeast Asian context.

This Hmong feminist perspective would bolster the refugee category to centralize gender and *movement* (in all its configurations relating to

place, displacement, diaspora, and geopolitics) to theorize Hmong historical formation and subject making in a global context. Behar (1990) contends that a "life history narrative should allow one to see the subjective mapping of experience" (225). My discussion of Hmong women's narratives serves as a "mapping of experience" and a "mapping" of the migration path and pattern. Movement as an analytic more adequately describes and interprets women's experiences and subjectivities. It moves beyond the often binary representations between the diaspora and home country to assert that the ambiguous positioning within diasporas is an important place from which to theorize a feminist critique. Hmong women's narrations of their life stories are a process of becoming subjects. This perspective and analytic allows Hmong women to form their own subjectivities as actors who are engaged in the representation and creation of their own narratives and life stories. Centering gender and movement also marks an epistemological shift in the formation of knowledge about the U.S. empire's war technologies and the refugee's resistance and critique of those machinations.

For instance, a Hmong feminist perspective establishes how narrative refusal in life stories is a feminist practice that critiques the disciplinary logic of the patriarchal ally rhetoric about the Hmong–U.S. relationship. More urgently, this perspective comprehends acts of listening and interpreting as critical practices that rechronicle Hmong history making. These practices are necessary habits for members of the 1.5 and second generations—those who were born toward the end of the war or in the process of leaving, carried on their parents' backs in the journey from Laos to Thailand to the United States, and the ones who did not experience war except through their parents' and grandparents' stories. Kia Vang volunteered at Lao Veterans to assist the organization with its operations by providing transportation and translation services for its members. Because most of the veteran volunteers have limited English comprehension, her role is important to the daily functions and services of the organization. In this context, she asserts that Hmong elders relay the same story to one another, and as their children listen in on these conversations, they learn and anticipate "how the story will go." When asked if her father talks about his time in the war, Kia recounts:

> With these elders, if there's a new person especially when you see two elders who have fought in the war in Laos but they're not like in the same, the soldiers had many different groups, right? They

> talk about how they went to fight in this village, that village, this mountain, sometimes you always remember how the story will go [laughter]. I don't know about others, but the way my dad talks about it seems as if he remembers it very well, right, about where everything is, he only changes a few words, but mostly his story is the same story. (Kia Vang, 2009)

Her response about how they always tell the same story, one that they remember well, and that she can always anticipate and remember how the story will go curiously points to how the narrative structure of telling the same story with few word variations establishes an impression for history making. When the stories about war are shared among the veterans or with their children, they have a different purpose that is about claiming a shared experience rather than inviting public sympathy. These are fleeting stories impressed upon the younger generations, yet they remind us how to remember—how exchanges are shared when elders meet—rather than what the recounting conveys. This emphasis on "how the story will go" rather than on what was told represents an important shift in understanding how to recall the past. Kia's interpretation of her father's stories as well-remembered moments from his conversations with Hmong of his generation sheds light on Youa's refusal to fully convey her family's Mekong crossing experience. Rather than reading this narrative move as creating more gaps in the already hidden stories of Hmong refugees, listening to the silences reveals the fragmentary process of telling stories so that their pattern of absence represents the design of historical erasure.

Conclusion

At the risk of historical erasure in an already forgotten "secret war," these alternative histories offer another set of tools from which to excavate the past, not for what it truly was but for what they do not say. In this chapter, I focused not only on what Hmong women's narratives reveal about the past but also on how they are productive for the present and future in charting a Hmong active presence in global history. Deploying memory as a conceptual tool critically engages with the politics of historical knowledge. Specifically, it helps articulate the politics of our lack of knowledge about history and the production of such knowledge. Lisa Yoneyama (1999) contends that "memory is understood as deeply embedded in and

hopelessly complicitous with history in fashioning an official and authoritative account of the past" (27). Employing this concept means that our investigations into the past must have an awareness that historical reality can only be made available to us through mediations in the present (27). Critical projects that engage in how acts of remembering can fill the void of knowledge must reckon with the question of "how can memories, once recuperated, remain self-critically unsettling?" (5). In other words, our communication of these narratives should make sure that they remain critical of how they emerge and for what purpose. While the information we attain through these narratives is important, capturing moments when the interviewees do not remember or choose not to convey certain things generates the most poignant lessons for our understanding of how historical knowledge emerges. Not remembering is a form of pushing back, and it reminds us of memory's complicity with history in comprehending the past.

In this chapter, I analyzed Hmong women's narratives to show the precarious diasporic positioning between places and their refusal to fully reveal these experiences. I contend that these practices help articulate some parameters around a Hmong feminist perspective that centers gender and movement as important analytics for doing historical analysis to critique patriarchy and U.S. liberal empire. It also sheds light on the politics of a Hmong public telling that is often fraught with questions about Hmong subjective, internal knowledge that purportedly distorts the "truth" to gain sympathy for their plight or is used to corroborate the U.S. government's policies, since the Hmong were its main ally in Laos. An analysis of Hmong histories, therefore, involves being faithful to the past by listening to the stories that emerge and reading them against the grain. Caruth (1996) states that "the possibility of knowing history is . . . a deeply ethical dilemma: the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*" (27; italics in original). This dilemma to not betray the past refers to how the very act of telling threatens to erase the very past it seeks to convey. Faithfulness means maintaining the event of violence against the larger narrative of personal/national redemption and refugee rescue (31). This practice shows how Hmong women's negotiations of the past reveal the traces of violence that are embedded in the process of displacement. In addition, it exposes the unequal grounds upon which history has been narrated to show that the struggle over historical memory is based on Western textual knowledge. My focus on Hmong women does not intend to feminize memory, in which the categories "woman" and "feminine" serve as a trope

for the carrier of memory. Instead, I contend that listening to how Hmong women narrate their life stories offers a different language to access history.

Notes

1. See Espiritu 2006a and 2006b. For a broader analysis of the rescue and liberation discourse, see Yoneyama 2005.

2. This particular focus on Hmong exodus from Laos emphasizes the perspective of scholars and practitioners in the resettlement countries who attempt to understand how Hmong and Southeast Asian displacement and migration have impacted their "integration" into the new society.

3. Some of these key questions are as follows: How was the project of secrecy a U.S. military strategy of surrogacy to train and arm replacement soldiers? How did secrecy produce historical absence, and what does it mean to do research on a history that was not supposed to exist?

4. Kim's excavation of the Cold War as an "epistemology and production of knowledge" because it "exceeds and outlives its historical eventness" helps me pinpoint the "secret war" as a historical event and knowledge production project.

5. One particular challenge I faced in talking to some elder Hmong refugee women was their unwillingness to share their personal histories with me without their husbands' approval or presence. For example, I became acquainted with a couple, whom I call grandmother and grandfather, and was interested in pursuing formal interviews with them. However, the husband was either away from home or sick whenever I called, and I did not get to talk to him. Whenever I called, his wife always picked up the phone, and I would ask her if she would allow me to come by the house to talk to her. She conveyed that she wanted to wait until her husband came home before agreeing to an interview. This type of behavior made it difficult to reach out to some Hmong women who could have shared their stories with me.

6. Soua L. Lo reminds me that she wants the Hmong children of my generation, including her children and me, to achieve educational success so that we may live up to and atone for the experiences of the first-generation Hmong: "I am happy for you. You are a daughter who wants to learn about Hmong life and you are steadfast in your education. I think that, your parents think the same as me, we have sons and daughters and they do well (*tsim txiaj rau ntawm lawv*). Like I tell my kids, you should go represent/do your part for me for the Americans (*ua kuv tug rau Meskas thiab*). Do you know that I came to this country and worked for America as a servant, I want Americans to work for you as a servant like I've worked for them? I tell them that. I am satisfied that you are all steadfast in your education. Americans will work for you like we have worked for them." This multilayered statement captures the aspirations of Hmong narratives to speak to present and future goals for Hmong children. My intention in framing the interviews in

this way aims to show how the narratives can be productive for understanding the past in relation to the present. Most of the interviewees, male and female, impart this message as a necessary lesson for listening to their stories.

7. I met Yer Vang in September 2009 on a research trip to Fresno, California, to visit the Lao Hmong American Veterans Memorial and to interview members of the planning committee about its conceptualization and construction. At the time, he volunteered as the secretary for Lao Veterans of America, one of the major organizations involved in creating, in his words, the statue. I went to their office to interview Colonel Wangyee Vang, president of Lao Veterans and a memorial planning committee member. Yer happened to be in the office on the same day, and I asked to talk with him after my conversation with Colonel Vang. He graciously agreed to this impromptu request, and I interviewed him on the same day in their office.

Works Cited

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Arvin, Maile, Eve Tuck, and Angela Morrill. 2013. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Hetero Patriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1: 8–34.

Behar, Ruth. 1990. "Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman." *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 2: 223–58.

Blunt, Alison, and Gillian Rose, eds. 1994. *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies.* New York: Guilford Press.

Caruth, Cathy. 1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narratives, and History.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Cole, Ellen, Oliva M. Espin, and Esther D. Rothblum, eds. 1992. *Refugee Women and Their Mental Health: Shattered Societies, Shattered Lives.* New York: Haworth Press.

Coulthard, Glen. 2010. "Place against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-Colonialism." *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4, no. 2: 79–83.

Donnelly, Nancy D. 1994. *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

DuBois, Lindsay. 2000. "Memories out of Place: Dissonance and Silence in Historical Accounts of Working Class Argentines." *Oral History* 28, no. 1: 75–82.

Edkins, Jenny. 2003. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Espiritu, Yen Le. 2006a. "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon.'" *American Quarterly* 58, no. 2: 329–52.

———. 2006b. "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in U.S. Scholarship." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1–2: 410–33.

Fadiman, Anne. 1997. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Hein, Jeremy. 1995. *From Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia: A Refugee Experience in the United States.* Immigrant Heritage of America Series. New York: Twayne.

Ho, Wendy. 1999. *In Her Mother's House: The Politics of Asian American Mother-Daughter Writing.* Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.

Kaplan, Caren, and Inderpal Grewal. 1999. "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Postructuralism/Feminism Divides." *Between Women and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State,* edited by Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem, 347–63. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

———. 2002. "Transnational Practices and Interdisciplinary Feminist Scholarship: Refiguring Women's and Gender Studies." In *Women's Studies on Its Own,* edited by Robyn Wiegman, 66–81. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Kim, Jody. 2010. *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kroll, Jerome, Marjorie Habenicht, Thomas Mackenzie, Mee Yang, Sokha Chan, Tong Vang, Tam Nguyen, Mayjoua Ly, Banlang Phommasouvanh, Hung Nguyen, Yer Vang, Langsanh Souvannasoth, and Roberto Cabugao. 1989. "Depression and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Southeast Asian Refugees." *American Journal of Psychiatry* 146:1592–97.

Marshall, Mac. 1994. "Engaging History: Historical Ethnography and Ethnology." *American Anthropologist* 96, no. 4: 972–74.

Michaud, Jean, and Christian Culas. 2000. "The Hmong of the Southeast Asia Massif: Their Recent History of Migration." In *Where China Meets Southeast Asia: Social and Cultural Change in the Border Regions,* edited by Grant Evans, Christopher Hulton, and Khah Eng Kuah, 98–121. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Morrison, Gayle. 2007. *Sky Is Falling: An Oral History of the CIA's Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.

Mote, Sue Murphy. 2004. *Hmong and American: Stories of Transition to a Strange Land.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.

Ortner, Sherry B. 2006. "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006.

Ramirez, Renya K. 2007. "Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no. 2: 22–40.

Rice, Pranee Liamputtong. 2000. *Hmong Women and Reproduction.* Westport, Conn.: Bergin and Garvey.

Rozée, Patricia D., and Gretchen Van Boemel. 1990. "The Psychological Effects of War Trauma and Abuse on Older Cambodian Refugee Women." *Women and Therapy* 8, no. 4: 23–50.

Simpson, Audra. 2007. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures* 9 (December): 67–80.

Smith, Andrea, and J. Kehaulani Kauanui. 2008. "Native Feminisms Engage American Studies." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2: 241–49.

Sugiman, Pamela. 2006. " 'These Feelings That Fill My Heart': Japanese Canadian Women's Memories of Internment." *Oral History* 34, no. 2: 69–84.

Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Vang, Ma. 2012a. "The Refugee Soldier: Critique of Recognition and Citizenship in the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1997." In "Southeast Asian/American Studies." Special issue, *Positions: Asia Critique* 20, no. 3: 685–712.

———. 2012b. "Displaced Histories: Refugee Critique and the Politics of Hmong American Remembering." PhD diss., University of California, San Diego.

Warner, Roger. 1996. *Out of Laos: A Story of War and Exodus, Told in Photographs.* Rancho Cordova, Calif.: Southeast Asia Community Resource Center.

XayKaoThao, Doualy. 2011. "Family History: The General, His Sisters and Me." *National Public Radio,* May 27. www.npr.org/2011/05/27/133664172/family-history-the-general-his-sisters-and-me.

Yang, Kao Kalia. 2012. "The Science of Racism: Radiolab's Treatment of Hmong Experience." *Hyphen: Asian American Unabridged,* October 22. http://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2012/10/science-racism-radiolabs-treatment-hmong-experience.

Yoneyama, Lisa. 1999. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2005. "Liberation under Siege: U.S. Military Occupation and Japanese Women's Enfranchisement." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3: 885–910.