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Hmong Americans' Protest Movements and Political Incorporation
in the United States, 1980-2012

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Yang Sao Xiong

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hmong Americans' Protest Movements and Political Incorporation
in the United States, 1980-2012

by

Yang Sao Xiong

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Min Zhou, Chair

This dissertation examines the political participation and political incorporation of Hmong American communities across three states—California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—between 1980 and 2012. This study asks two main questions: First, given Hmong Americans' particular contexts of exit and contexts of reception, how and to what extent have Hmong former refugees and their U.S.-born children been incorporated into the U.S. political system? Second, how do broader political contexts or homeland circumstances shape Hmong American politics and the state's treatment of Hmong in the U.S. and abroad?

I address these questions through two historical analyses of Hmong Americans' non-electoral and electoral participation and two detailed case studies of Hmong Americans' social movements. The first historical analysis focuses on Hmong Americans' protest events from 1980 to 2011. Through news media reports and relevant archival materials, I examine 84 Hmong American protests, their contents, and their consequences on public policies and mobilizers' organizational capacity. My findings show that during the past three decades, Hmong Americans' patterns of protest participation are oriented toward both the host society and

the homeland. Homeland-oriented protests, rather than declining in frequency, have occurred at a rate almost equal to domestic-oriented protests. The findings also show that Hmong Americans' engagement in protest activities, regardless of domestic or international orientations, has helped them nurture their civic sense and strengthen their organizational capacity. Specifically, protest mobilization has offered ample opportunities for Hmong Americans to develop younger leaders, form new civic organizations, and cultivate a broad alliance system. Protest mobilization has also helped Hmong to refine methods for building collective identity and building collective consensus through the use of common protest symbols such as the uniformed Hmong veteran and master frames such as the military service frame.

My second historical analysis focuses on Hmong Americans' electoral participation across three U.S. states—California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—between 1990 and 2012. I find evidence that Hmong Americans have achieved greater descriptive representation in Minnesota and Wisconsin compared to California. This difference in the level of descriptive representation appears to be due to differences in state and local political contexts. But a significant relative ethnic population size and the presence of ethnic collective mobilization are common to places with higher levels of descriptive representation.

The first extended case study examines two interrelated social movements of the early to late-1990s: Hmong Americans' multi-site movements against the benefit ineligibility provisions in the federal Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and their movements in support of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act since 1990. This study reveals that framing plays a crucial role in the success of protest/social movements. In both the movements against Welfare Reform and for naturalization provisions, 'ordinary' Hmong social actors were able to construct and their institutional allies were able to make effective use of a specific collective action frame—the

military-service frame—to bring about benefits and naturalization accommodations in existing state policies specifically for Hmong veterans. I argue that the state’s dominant ideology and its foreign policy interests influenced its positive reception of the military-service frame.

The second extended case study builds on the first case study to the extent that it examines in detail the contentious, interactive processes of social problem construction that underlie two other Hmong American movements for greater political inclusion. However, this second case differs from the first in that its central focus is on understanding how *intra-ethnic conflict* affects competing groups’ ability to construct social problems and subsequently their ability to make claims upon the state—a state that is usually highly suspicious of *ethnic* movements for political inclusion. Drawing on interviews and primary written sources, I examine a Hmong American-led social movement that sought to incorporate Hmong history into the social science curriculum of California’s public schools and the emotionally intense ethnic counter-movement that arose to meet it. My findings suggest that the mass media play crucial roles in creating cultural opportunities for the emergence of certain social problems and in (de)legitimizing such social problems. Although the California State Legislature showed deference to the military service frame and was willing to give token recognition to a broad, informal, quasi-racial category such as Southeast Asians, it trivialized and refused to hear the claims of an ethnolinguistic group regarding institutionally-produced language material inequity.

I conclude that the collective mobilization of endogenous and exogenous resources in response to perceived political opportunities has been the key mechanism through which Hmong Americans have been able to participate in the U.S. political system. Hmong Americans’ degree of political incorporation is a byproduct of the interplay between Hmong-led mobilization and the responses of the state.

The dissertation of Yang Sao Xiong is approved.

David Halle

Thu-Huong Nguyễn-Võ

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2013

DEDICATED

To my mom and dad—Shoua Her and Nhia Pao Xiong—who, in the aftermath of the devastating war in their former homeland, courageously crossed the Mekong River and endured the consequences of statelessness alongside hundreds of thousands of other Southeast Asian refugees for over a decade so that they could bring us, their children, to the United States. To Mary Moua who is the love of my life and the inspiration that sustains me. To Maimoua Saoirse whose smile and laughter give daddy abundant joy and happiness each and every day.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AB 78	Assembly Bill 78 (of California)
ACS	American Community Survey
AFDC	Aids to Families with Dependent Children
ALC	Asian Law Caucus
APIs	Asian Pacific Islanders
CCLS	Central California Legal Services
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPA	Comprehensive Plan of Action (for Indochinese Refugees)
DFL	Democratic Farmer Labor Party
EL	English Learners
FCNA	Fresno Center for New Americans
FUSD	Fresno Unified School District
HND	Hmong National Development, Inc.
HSIC	Hmong Students Inter-Collegiate Coalition
HVNA	Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Services
IOM	International Organization for Migration
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LPRs	Legal permanent residents
LVA	Lao Veterans of America
MFI	Mong Federation, Inc.
MSF	Military service frame
NAPALC	National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium
PMSCs	Political migrant-sending countries
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
SMO	Social Movement Organization
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Aid to Needy Families
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAP	Voting-age population
WAHL	Women's Association of Hmong & Lao

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Introduction

Sociologists who study post-1965 immigration to the United States have examined the complex processes and outcomes of immigrants' spatial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic assimilation. Because of their efforts, we have accumulated a vast body of empirical knowledge about the individual factors and structural conditions that affect the assimilation prospects of immigrants and their U.S.-born children. However, as some have observed, the immigration literature has paid less attention to the political participation and incorporation of immigrants (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Waters 2008). As such, we know much less about when, where or how immigrants groups have been able to enter or participate in the U.S. political system—a political system that has historically been highly selective in its incorporation of racial minorities and immigrants (D.S. King 2000).

Despite their experiences with historical disenfranchisement and racial exclusion from the United States, Asian immigrants and their descendants have been engaged in various domestic and non-domestic political activities since their immigration to the U.S. in the 1800s but especially after World War II (Chan 1991; Lien 2001). Yet, research on Asian American political participation remains fragmentary (Nakanishi and Lai 2003). But if research on Asian American politics is fragmentary, research on Southeast Asian American political participation is even more so. Although much has been written about Southeast Asian former refugees' adaptation and assimilation, the empirical research on their political participation and political incorporation has only recently begun to appear (Lien 2003; N.-N.T. Ong and Meyer 2004; Võ 2004; Doherty 2007; Y. Lor 2009; J.S. Lai 2011; H. Vang 2011; Wong, Ramakrishnan, Lee, and Junn 2011). As such, we still know little about who among Southeast Asian Americans engage in political activities such as protests and electoral campaigns. We still lack empirical data on

various important aspects of Southeast Asian Americans' electoral participation such as their registration and voting behavior, participation in party caucuses, contributions to campaigns, and so on. We know even less about the impact that Southeast Asian American political participation has on local communities' representation or the feedback effects that participation has on co-ethnic communities' ability to mobilize toward future collective political actions. Finally, we still do not know enough about how and to what extent Southeast Asian American politics is intertwined with U.S. politics and international politics more generally. This dissertation aims to fill some of these voids. By studying Hmong American politics, this study hopes to shed light on immigrant politics and on American politics more generally.

In a recent book on explaining immigrant political incorporation, Jennifer Hochschild and John Mollenkopf (2009:19) present readers with the following illustration:

Traits well beyond a person's legal immigration status affects his or her ability to enter, and likelihood of entering, the political arena. For example, even if both are legal permanent residents of the host country, an English-speaking South Asian with a college degree moving to Canada under its point system is much more likely be politically incorporated than is a Hmong refugee with less than a high school education moving to the United States as part of a family reunification plan.

As I will elaborate on below, Hochschild and Mollenkopf recognize that an immigrant person's (or immigrant group's) degree of political incorporation is shaped by the resources that he/she (or their group) possesses as well as by the opportunities and constraints of the contexts of reception. I cite Hochschild and Mollenkopf's example not only because it mentions the Hmong, the multi-generational ethnic community¹ whose "politics" in the U.S. is the focus of my

¹ In this paper, I use "ethnic community" interchangeably with "ethnic group." I am aware that the term "community" does not resolve the problem of "group" reification, but I use it with the understanding that community boundaries are porous and changing. According to Max Weber, ethnic groups are "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation" (1978:389).

dissertation, but also because it hints at the puzzling questions that my study aims to address.

Similarly, Steven Rosenstone (1982:44) observes,

The most troubling implication of the relationship between economic adversity and turnout is that unless the poor, unemployed, and financially troubled represent a very large proportion of the population, candidates are ill-advised to focus their campaigns on these groups. They are unlikely to show up at the polls.

This leaves us, then, with a paradox. Theories of democracy generally view political participation as a way for citizens to constrain elected officials and influence public policy. In most instances, intensity of concern increases the likelihood that people will become politically active; but when people suffer economic adversity, the very problem that is foremost in their minds impedes their participation in the political process.

The paradox to which Rosenstone refers is part of what motivates my study.

Unlike most other post-1965 immigrants to the United States, foreign-born Hmong came as political refugees from Laos. Like other Southeast Asian refugees, Hmong refugees' migration to the U.S. was the direct result of the U.S.' failed foreign policy and military intervention in Southeast Asia. But in the aftermath of the American-Vietnam war in 1975, the U.S. government had no plans to resettle Hmong in the U.S., even though in that same year, the U.S. Congress was anxiously considering how to resettle over a hundred thousand Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees. Indeed, declassified government documents reveal that in the autumn of 1975 the U.S. government secretly planned to resettle Laotian Hmong refugees permanently in Thailand, with or without Thai approval.² Fortunately, as the result of the efforts of well-positioned refugee advocates and other structural conditions that remain understudied, the first major 'wave' of Hmong refugees made it to the U.S. in the spring of 1976. Secondary waves of Hmong refugees would arrive between 1980 and 1995. Hmong refugees who arrived in the second and later waves, came with very little socially valued resources. With most of their pre-migration skills largely devalued in the host society, many able-bodied, working-age Hmong

² For a discussion of this plan and relevant citations, see Chapter 2.

former refugees were unable to secure gainful employment to support themselves or their families. Unemployment and underemployed coupled with increasing costs of living had the net effect of making Hmong Americans³ one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in American society.

Of all post-1965 immigrant groups, Hmong former refugees remain one of the most economically disadvantaged. Ample research has documented Hmong's struggle with poverty since their arrival to the U.S. in the mid-1970s (Downing, Olney, Mason, and Hendricks 1984; Reder, Cohn, Vangyi, Vang, and Vang 1984). But besides economic disadvantages, Hmong are also disadvantaged by their racialization as a foreign minority. Asian Americans in general and Hmong Americans in particular are further disadvantaged because of their numerically small and relatively young population and an even smaller electorate.

Given Hmong Americans' relatively low socioeconomic standing and given their stigmatization as a poor Asian immigrant population, how and to what extent have Hmong interest groups⁴ been able to enter and participate in the U.S. political arena(s)?⁵ How do Hmong American challengers⁶ mobilize co-ethnic actors and how do they mobilize other social actors outside of the ethnic community in order to make political claims upon or counter-claims

³ Here and throughout this dissertation, I use the term "Hmong Americans" to refer to the multi-generational population of Hmong former refugees and their U.S.-born children in the United States.

⁴ I follow Armand Mauss' use of the phrase "interest group" to refer to "those individuals who have the most to gain or lose by the outcome of the issue" (1975:12). Interest groups emerge from and operate within an "issue-specific public"—that context "made up of all the people who care about a certain issue, no matter what side of the issue they may be on" (1975:11-12). This issue-specific public is nested in a more general public. An interest group may develop into a "pressure group" when "it begins to engage in lobbying and other political activities aimed directly at government" (1975:12).

⁵ There is not a single U.S. political arena but rather multiple, sometimes overlapping political arenas or fields. These arenas include the public offices of the local, state, and federal governments; the public policies that these governments enact; the complex set of government agencies or bureaucracies through which public policies are practiced and enforced.

⁶ In this paper, I use "challengers" to mean much the same as what Mauss (1975:12) means by pressure groups (see footnote above). I follow Amenta, Bonastia, Fetner, and Young's (2002:47) use of "challengers" to refer to social actors who "make claims on the state on behalf of groups or issues that are disadvantaged in politics." The main difference between interest groups and challengers is that the latter specifically target or make claims on the state.

against the ‘state’?⁷ That is, a state that is not simply an isolated entity with exclusive domestic interests but rather one whose political relations and interests shape and are shaped by the larger international political contexts. These questions, in turn, raise other more general analytical questions about ethnic immigrant communities’ political participation and political incorporation in the United States context, such as the following:

1. Given Hmong Americans’ particular contexts of exit and contexts of reception, how and to what extent have Hmong former refugees and their U.S.-born children been incorporated into the U.S. political system?
2. How do broader political contexts or homeland circumstances shape Hmong American politics and the state’s treatment of Hmong in the U.S.?

The central goal of this dissertation is to describe and analyze the complex social processes through which a relatively powerless immigrant group becomes politically incorporated in the face of the state’s practices of indifference and disincorporation. Toward that end, this dissertation seeks to clarify how three kinds of contexts—contexts of exit, contexts of reception, and broader political contexts—shape Hmong former refugees’ political narratives, resources, and opportunities for engaging in collective political action and entering into relationships with the state or its institutions. I pursue this goal by examining the collective political actions of Hmong Americans across three states (California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), over a 32-year period (1980 – 2012). By attending to the social interactions among Hmong American groups, other social actors (established residents, other ethnic/racial categories, formal organizations, political parties and leaders), the mass media, and the state

⁷ I follow the definition of Amenta, Bonastia, Fetner and Young (2002:49) of states “as sets of political, military, judicial, and bureaucratic organizations that exert political authority and coercive control over people living within the borders of well-defined territories. States engage in action or ‘policy,’ including taxation, social spending, and regulatory policy, that is official, legitimate, binding, and backed by the aforementioned organizations.”

within a changing political context, this dissertation hopes to fill some gaps in the literature on immigrant political participation and incorporation.

I have just stated the basic research problem that motivates my work and presented the research questions that guide it. In what follows, I present the key findings of my work while discussing their broader significance for understanding immigrant incorporation. Next, I provide an overview of my theoretical framework. Then I describe my methods and data. Finally, I present what is to come in the subsequent chapters.

What are the main findings of my research and how do these new findings inform our understanding of immigrant political participation and incorporation in the U.S.? My study shows that political interactions between immigrant groups and the state take place in nested political contexts. Nested cultural and political contexts not only powerfully shape the opportunities for immigrant groups to engage in collective political action but also affect immigrants' degree of political incorporation into the political system. My study suggests that three types of contexts—the contexts of exit, contexts of reception, and contexts of the 'homeland'—influence immigrant groups' political mobilization and the state's practice of selective incorporation. Next, I highlight three sets of findings related to these three contexts.

First, contexts of exit not only condition an immigrant group's initial material resources—as segmented assimilation theory suggests—but they also condition its political narratives.⁸ Political narratives are the raw materials out of which social actors can construct coherent counter-discourses (hereafter also called collective action frames).⁹ During the last 15

⁸ According to Gerald Prince (1982:4), “a narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other.” What makes a narrative a *political narrative* is open to debate (see Shenhav 2006). Here, I use “political narrative” to mean any narrative that is used to support or challenge a politicized perspective or situation. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “political narrative” interchangeably with ideology and episodic discourse (both are defined later on).

⁹ Snow and Benford (2000:58) refer to collective action frames as “emergent sets of ideas and values that function either as innovative amplifications and extensions of existing ideologies or as antidotes to them.”

to 20 years, Hmong Americans in the U.S. have had to draw on their unique historical relationship with the U.S. government to construct a specific collective action frame in order to make claims upon the state on a range of domestic and foreign issues. This unique, albeit historically unequal relationship is Hmong former refugees' military service to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency during the 'Secret War' in Laos from about 1961 to 1975. The U.S. government, in turn, has shown a willingness to listen and in certain circumstances, even grant limited formal accommodations to specific classes of people within Hmong American society (i.e., Hmong war veterans) when social movement actors successfully deploy what I call the *military service* collective action frame (or simply military service frame). For instance, Hmong American pressure groups and their institutional allies have been able to rely on the military service frame to obtain benefit ineligibility exemptions for Hmong former refugees under the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. Additionally, in the late 1990s, Hmong pressure groups were able to use the same military service frame to obtain English language accommodations for Hmong veterans under existing U.S. naturalization laws.

Investigating how the military service frame emerged, how it helped to mobilize collective consensus among social movement actors, and how it motivated segments of the U.S. government (e.g., U.S. Congress, the White House) to take action to grant the requests of social movement actors was one of my central aims. I suggest that Hmong Americans were able to draw on their political narratives of war and U.S. betrayal to construct a military service frame that specifically attributed the cause of their social problem to the political system and that resonated with the experiences of influential third parties. However, the effectiveness of the military service frame rests primarily on the fact that its key claims are consistent with rather than opposed to the state's most compelling (read converging political and military) interests

during the present historical period. This finding suggests that contexts matter for immigrant political participation and incorporation.

The second major finding is that contexts of reception affect a) an immigrant group's prospect for forming ethnic communities, b) its access to politically relevant resources, and c) individual U.S. states' treatment of ethnic immigrants and their political claims. My study finds that in the 1980s, the formation of sizable Hmong American communities was neither easy nor inevitable; in fact, a number of factors but especially overt racial prejudice and physical violence from established residents prevented Hmong communities from forming in certain neighborhoods and cities. In spite of these historical and contemporary forms of social closure, Hmong Americans have formed sizable ethnic communities in particular states. Since the early 1990s, three states have been home to about 80 percent of Hmong Americans in the U.S.: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Hmong Americans in these three states have been more politically involved, as measured by the frequency of their engagements in protests and in electoral campaigns, than their co-ethnics in other states. This finding is consistent with past studies (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984), which find that the size of an ethnic population in a certain community affects its level of political incorporation.

But how exactly does ethnic population or the formation of an ethnic community facilitate ethnic political participation? To say that ethnic population size matters for ethnic communities' ability to engage in forms of politics is to suggest at least two things. First, the informal and formal social networks within an ethnic community form the communications and organizational infrastructure of that community and the presence of this infrastructure is a prerequisite for the direct and indirect mobilization of ethnic social actors. Political mobilizers and political leaders depend on some minimal organizational infrastructure in order to mobilize

resources and collective consensus (or solidarity) prior to mobilizing collective action. Compared to small emergent Hmong American communities, large established Hmong American communities (e.g., over 10,000 persons) are more likely to have a greater variety and number of informal and formal social networks. In other words, larger ethnic communities are more likely to be more institutionally complete; but this does not mean that the ethnic community no longer has to rely on ‘mainstream’ institutions (schools, businesses, community centers, media, etc.) to satisfy its members’ evolving economic and political needs.

Within a more institutionally complete ethnic community, at least some of the ethnic social networks will have created some access points to the local or state political system. These politically connected social networks not only function to *directly* mobilize members within the ethnic community, but they, especially formal organizations, also serve as sites for outside political elites or parties to *indirectly* mobilize ethnic members to participate in politics (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). As my case study of electoral participation in St. Paul, Minnesota shows, it was a Hmong person (Soliving Kong), who was employed in the Minnesota state legislature and had been a familiar actor to non-Hmong political actors, that helped inform and recruit the first Hmong candidate (Choua Lee) to run for and win an elected office. Once a few Hmong gained a foothold in politics (i.e., received support from the Democratic Farmer Labor Party), formal organizations such as the Hmong American DFL Caucus helped to support emergent ethnic candidates (e.g., Neal Thao) by endorsing their runs for political office.

Secondly, to say that ethnic population size matters in politics it is to suggest that the mobilization of ethnic solidarity (or collective consensus among co-ethnics) matters for ethnic collective political action as much as the mobilization of material resources does. My case study on Hmong American movements in California and the countermovement that it generated

suggests that, even in places where ethnic population is a given, the process of mobilizing ethnic consensus is a complex, potentially contentious one. Mobilization leaders depend on like-minded followers who not only serve as volunteers in organizing protests or electoral campaigns, but who also can supply the raw materials for the construction of strategic collective action frames. For example, in Hmong's movement against provisions in the Welfare Reform Act shows, it was 'ordinary' Hmong adults who formed the social base and provided the oral and written historical texts (narratives) that gave rise and credibility to the influential military-service collective action frame. Although social problems require no objective condition for their emergence, achieving legitimacy for a social problem can be extremely difficult without actual people who *agree to come together* to collectively define a condition as problematic, identify themselves or others whom they represent as victims of such social problem, and identify the social or systemic perpetrator(s) of that social problem.

Besides influencing the opportunities for ethnic community formation, the contexts of reception also affect the availability of politically relevant resources in a state or locality. My study reveals that although a significant portion of the Hmong American U.S. population remains economically disadvantaged, Hmong American communities' median household income varies somewhat by state and can vary significantly across counties in the same state. Significantly, my study finds that Hmong American communities with the highest median household incomes (county-wide) are not necessarily those with the highest levels of electoral or non-electoral political participation. This finding implies two hypotheses: a) in the case of Hmong Americans, socioeconomic resources by themselves (i.e., in the absence of an ethnic organizational infrastructure through which resources can be mobilized), are insufficient to produce collective political action; and b) the availability of other kinds of resources can better

account for Hmong Americans' political action given their relatively low socioeconomic status. We may need to conceptualize resources more broadly to encompass things other than socioeconomic resources. Besides an ethnic community's socioeconomic resources (of which household income is one indicator), there are other potential resources external to the community, such as established pan-ethnic legal organizations, political parties, the mass media, public officials and major ethnic minority groups. These exogenous political resources could facilitate (i.e., by serving as allies to immigrant interest groups) or constrain (i.e., by serving as gatekeepers, adversaries or counter mobilizers to immigrant interest groups) an immigrant community's access to the local, state, or federal political system.

Moreover, contexts of reception, which are also constituted by individual state governments and their policies, shape state representatives' responses to immigrant groups' political claims. My study on the Mong Federation's movement for ethnolinguistic recognition suggests that California state legislatures were unwilling to take the Mong Federation's claims seriously, probably because their claims indirectly challenged California's anti-immigrant (Proposition 187), anti-affirmative action (Proposition 209), and anti-bilingual education (Proposition 227) policies, which were already in place during that period. Once we take account of this particular political context, it is not surprising that the Hmong American-initiated education bill, Assembly Bill 78, passed into law. I suggest that AB 78 was allowed to pass because it required no more than a symbolic state gesture of immigrant inclusion (it merely "encouraged" but did not mandate the teaching of Southeast Asian history in the social science curricula of the state's public schools), and because its Hmong American supporters deployed a collective action frame—the military service frame—that was compatible with rather than contradictory to the state's dominant discourses on immigration or race.

Finally, the contexts formed by the relations among a constellation of homeland-affiliated states, which I am calling broader political contexts or simply homeland circumstances continue to shape an immigrant group's political grievances and activities long after their immigration to the U.S. Like other social movement scholars, I suggest that state policies form a key part of the national political contexts, and that the mass media and their discourses form a key part of the cultural contexts. But beyond the national contexts, there is the broader political contexts comprised of bilateral and multilateral policies that evolve over time and influence individual states' foreign and domestic policies. Given that states are embedded in broader political contexts, immigrant groups and social movements in general have to be prepared that no matter how morally compelling their political claims may be, the state may still prioritize its own national interests ahead of non-government groups' (domestic) interest to obtain resources, rights, or representation.

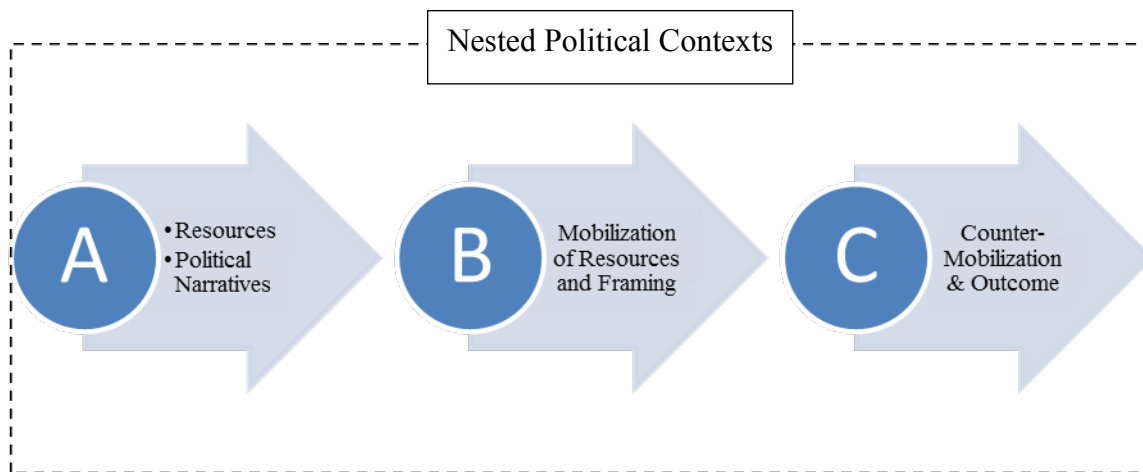
My study shows that during the last three decades, patterns of Hmong Americans' political incorporation are oriented toward both the host society and the homeland. Homeland-oriented protests, rather than declining in frequency, have occurred at a rate almost equal to domestic-oriented protests. This finding is interesting because it suggests that immigrant politics is not simply concerned with immigrants becoming more incorporated or assimilated in the host society. Rather, immigrant communities and their political interests and activities need to be understood in relation to broader, nested political contexts. Furthermore, my study shows that Hmong American communities do not simply react to perceived political threats. Rather, they often actively engage with domestic and foreign governments in response to both the perceived political threats posed by homeland circumstances and the perceived political opportunities

afforded by their relatively privileged position (vis-à-vis foreign compatriots) as U.S. permanent residents and/or U.S. citizens.

Theoretical Framework: An Overview

Some concepts of my theoretical framework have been mentioned in the section directly above. What the concepts mean and how they are related to each other is the focus of the next chapter (Ch. 1). For now, I present the basic causal sequence of my analytical model of immigrant political incorporation as follows:

Basic Model of Immigrant Political Incorporation



A) Immigrant groups arrive in the host society with certain resources and political narratives, shaped by their particular contexts of exit. These resources and narratives are subject to change as immigrant groups acquire new resources and political experiences in the contexts of reception.

B) Immigrant groups situated in specific contexts choose to engage in politics in response to perceived (collectively defined) threats, perceived political opportunities, or both. To engage in collective mobilization, immigrant groups need to have some conventional resources and a minimal organizational infrastructure through which to mobilize these resources. But mobilizing

conventional resources is not always enough, especially against state disincorporation processes. Immigrant groups also need to be able to counter dominant discourses through strategic framing of their grievances. To increase the likelihood that ameliorative action may occur on their grievances, interest/pressure groups need to engage in the difficult tasks of framing/constructing a social problem and seeking legitimacy for such social problem.

C) Depending on the outcome of the interaction between collective mobilization (by challengers) and counter-mobilization (by opponents or the state), a degree of political incorporation or disincorporation could result. The outcome—a degree of political incorporation or disincorporation—could, in turn, affect immigrant communities' types and levels of resources and political narratives.

Each of these sets of processes (A, B, C) takes place within and is shaped by nested political contexts. Political contexts are nested in the sense that the contexts of the host society (national, state, local) overlap with the international or homeland-affiliated contexts. By political contexts, I mean primarily state policies and bilateral or multilateral policies.

Methodology and Data

The empirical chapters are intended to be self-contained manuscripts to be revised and submitted to academic journals later on. As such, for each case study, I have tried to describe the methodology as well as data sources in the body of the individual chapters. Still, a description of the more general aspects of my methodology and data sources is in order.

Throughout the chapters, I have tried to analyze the *discourses* that social actors produced, whether through spoken or written activities. Individuals, through their communications and interactions with one another, produce discourses. Discourses are any form of communication that can be interpreted in order to try to understand social actors' meanings or

the interpretations that they give to their and other people's social reality. I have tried to gather data on discourses through interviews, surveys, and written sources (personal accounts, media accounts, official documents). Discourse analysis can help us better understand social actors' meanings of social reality or their 'underlying' assumptions about the world, so that we can better understand the motivations behind their actions (or inactions). In my reading of written/transcribed texts, I have tried to identify the (historical) social contexts in which social interactions occurred, so that I can better understand the meanings that individuals give to their actions. I have also tried to identify, as best as I can from the data, where social actors are positioned vis-à-vis one another in order so that I can better understand how actors' relative positions might have affected their interpretations of events or interactions. In short, I have tried to read and study the available qualitative data in order to try to understand how social actors engage in collective meaning-making processes or framing (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986).

I have tried to address my central research questions through a number of historical analyses and in-depth case studies. In each of these case studies, I draw on a variety of primary and secondary data as evidence. The type of data I used corresponds with the unit of analysis I was most interested in. These units of analysis included individuals such as leaders of organizations and groups such as local organizations or ethnic interest groups. In my historical analysis of protest events, for instance, because I was interested in group behavior over a long period of time (20-30 years), I relied primarily on newspaper articles and conducted discourse and content analysis on newspaper accounts of protest events. I did not actually interview protesters about past protest events, but instead I relied on newspapers' accounts of what protesters said or did. In reading the newspaper accounts, I was interested, for instance, in

identifying the historical contexts in which a protest took place, which individuals were involved, and what interactions occurred between individuals or groups. But I was also interested in counting the things that could be counted. So I counted and compiled a data chart with information about the number of participants in a protest event, the locations of protests, the duration of protests, etc. Combining these data, I was able to describe the components of protests (place, timing, participants, etc.), and gain some understanding of the issues that concerned protesters.

To provide broader contexts to many of the issues I was studying and to supplement my interview, survey, and newspaper data, I relied on existing nationally representative datasets. Primary among these are the data from the U.S. Census Bureau, such as the decennial censuses and the American Community Survey (ACS). Through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, I have been able to access datasets such as the Census 1990 5-percent public use microdata samples (PUMS) data files (U.S. Department of Commerce 1995) and the ACS 2005-2009 multi-year PUMS data files (U.S. Department of Commerce 2009). In my chapter on Hmong's ethnic community formation in the contexts of reception and their naturalization, for instance, I performed both descriptive and inferential statistics using the ACS 2005-2009 PUMS. I also used the U.S. Census' Current Population Survey 2008 Voting and Registration dataset (U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Labor 2011) in my chapter on electoral participation.

Besides the above data sources, I also relied on various archival materials, which ranged from newspaper articles to personal biographies and accounts of historical events to declassified U.S. government documents. More specifically, I used and benefited from the extensive materials under "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976," and "Volume E-12,

Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976” from the U.S. State Department’s Office of the Historian website.¹⁰ I also made use of archival materials from the Vietnam Center at the Texas Tech University—specifically, the Virtual Vietnam Archive—which keeps a wealth of digital materials on the history and social actors of the American-Vietnam war.¹¹

During the past six years, I observed, photographed and took written notes on various aspects of Hmong American society. For instance, to better understand how social relations work in Hmong American communities, I attended over a dozen gatherings where Hmong social actors came together to participate in family and inter-family cultural/religious ceremonies—birth, marriage and funeral rituals—in Marysville, Sacramento, Fresno, and Santa Ana. Following some of these events, I contacted Hmong participants and/or elders to set up informal one-on-one meetings where I could ask questions about other aspects of Hmong cultural and social life (see, for example, my notes in Appendix A). But because a large part of my study was focused on understanding collective political action, I also participated in and took photographs of Hmong-organized demonstrations, such as the massive protests at the California State Capitol and the federal courthouse against the arrest of former General Vang Pao (2007-2010). Besides learning about key events in Hmong social actors’ lives, I also tried to gain a better understanding of Hmong’s everyday life and their living conditions. I physically visited Hmong people in their homes and neighborhoods, spending time with the young people and adults to familiarize myself with their work and recreational activities (music, movies, sports tournaments, picnics, hunting, etc.). Besides talking with people, I also took photographs of neighborhoods, parks, businesses, gardens, etc. In the interest of space, I have decided to not include any

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>

¹¹ Online Access: <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/>

photographs (Hmong marches and rallies, sports tournaments, vegetable gardens, storefronts, New Year celebrations, meetings, etc.), in this dissertation.

Being a native Hmong speaker and researcher has afforded me with some privileged access to events, gatherings, people, and documents in Hmong American communities. For example, several Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War showed me original documents and photographs that detailed their military service during the secret war in Laos. Many research participants, including some who are related to my family, also shared with me their refugee camp processing documents and identification pictures. Nevertheless, as most ‘native’ researchers know, simply being an educated member of the ethnic group does not ensure access to all—not even most—segments of the ethnic society.

My level of access to Hmong informants was influenced by my prior social contacts and initial rapport as much as by my social standing as a researcher and the topic of my research. My research on dialect conflicts (the topic of chapters 6 & 7) within the Hmong American community was made both more interesting and more difficult because not everyone that I came into contact with wanted to discuss the topic, at least not in face-to-face interviews. For all persons whom I interviewed in person on this topic, I had to ensure them that I would use only pseudonyms and not their real names when attributing quotes. Between June 2009 and June 2011, I interviewed 45 Hmong men and women for this particular research; most resided in California’s Central Valley, but eight lived in the Midwestern U.S. To supplement the interview data, I relied on other less obtrusive means to obtain the perspectives of some former participants and bystander observers. For example, I relied on individuals’ writings, available through public e-mail list servers, and on individuals’ comments or writings that have been published years after the controversial event. But besides these things, I also compiled a list of translated materials

and their distributors (see Appendix C), in order to get a better sense of the issue of material disparity with respect to Mong Leng and Hmong Der dialects.

Although situated in communities with existing Hmong populations, my research recognizes that Hmong Americans have never been social isolates. Rather than simply study Hmong individuals or groups, I have tried to investigate, describe and analyze how Hmong social actors interact and sometimes forge coalitions with other individuals, organizations and ethnic/racial communities around them before, during, and after episodes of collective action. Indeed, immigrants of various ethnic backgrounds also live in the same communities that Hmong Americans live in. The political processes that operate to exclude Hmong American communities probably also exclude other immigrant communities.

Synopses of the Chapters

Chapter 1 reviews the relevant literature on immigrant political incorporation. I draw on the sociological literature on segmented assimilation, social problems, and social movements and the political science on immigrant political incorporation to provide a conceptual framework for understanding immigrant political mobilization and incorporation. Beginning with Chapter 2, each of the subsequent chapters focuses on one or more components of my analytical model.

Chapter 2 provides a background of Hmong's social structure and their political organization and describes their contexts of exit. More specifically, I describe Hmong's pre-migration experiences with war, violence and dislocation in the 1960s and identify their relationship with the U.S. government prior to 1975. These pre-migration experiences and Hmong's collective memories of them, I suggest, are the raw materials out of which Hmong social actors construct political narratives to meet the needs of the present. Chapter 3 describes Hmong Americans' contexts of reception and analyzes a resource relevant to political

participation: naturalization rates among the Hmong foreign-born population. I also describe my main fieldwork site, Fresno, California, in some detail.

Chapters 4 through 8 present and analyze empirical data on substantive aspects of Hmong Americans' political participation or incorporation. Chapter 4 examines Hmong American protest events between 1980 and 2011. I compare two types of organized protests: domestic-oriented and foreign-oriented protests. I find evidence that although domestic-oriented protests have outpaced foreign-oriented protests, the latter have *not* declined in the last 20 years. I consider the impact that policy-oriented protests have had on state policies and how protests have served as a resource in terms of developing Hmong Americans' organizational capacity.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are in-depth case studies of Hmong American political mobilization, albeit mobilization that is targeted at different levels of the political system. In chapter 5, I show how Hmong American groups, in response to perceived threats created by Welfare Reform, mobilized and formulated a strategic collective action frame—the military service frame—in order to challenge the state's new rules of reward distribution. Using the military service frame, Hmong American mobilizers and their institutional/state allies were able to have Hmong's grievances heard. Hmong eventually won ineligibility exceptions under Welfare Reform and English language accommodations under existing naturalization laws for Hmong war veterans.

In chapter 6, I examine how Hmong American groups, in response to perceived cultural opportunities created by the media coverage of teenage suicides in Fresno, defined a social problem and extended the military service frame in order to pursue the formal recognition of Hmong history in California's public schools (Assembly Bill 78). These mobilizers, however, encountered unexpected, significant challenges from another social movement organization within the Hmong community. In chapter 7, I examine this social movement organization and its

opposition to Assembly Bill 78. I focus on the contentious, interactive processes through which the Mong Federation constructed a social problem and the vulnerabilities that they faced while trying to mobilize collective consensus (legitimacy) around the social problem.

Finally, in chapter 8, I examine Hmong Americans' engagement in electoral politics across three different socio-political contexts: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Drawing on lessons from previous chapters, I analyze the key resources and contextual factors that have enabled some Hmong persons and communities to win political offices in particular contexts. I also consider how descriptive representation in some contexts has enabled Hmong Americans to further engage in both domestic and foreign politics.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

I have just presented my analytical model of immigrant political incorporation in the U.S. context. In this chapter, I shall try to show how I arrived at this analytical model. I will do this by reviewing and synthesizing the relevant research on political incorporation. I begin by introducing the concept of political incorporation. Next, I review and critique two main perspectives to the study of political incorporation: one focused on European immigrant groups (the pluralist model) and the other focused on post-1965 immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries (the immigrant group model). I suggest how existing models of immigrant political incorporation can be further improved. Finally, I come back to the theoretical model of immigrant collective mobilization and political incorporation.

As part of the synthesizing work, I draw on the sociological literature on segmented assimilation and social movements to help clarify the linkages between some crucial processes of political incorporation: 1) how an immigrant group's contexts of exit shape their political narrative;¹² 2) how institutions and mobilization structures in the contexts of reception impact that group's access to and mobilization of new politically-relevant resources; and 3) how developments or changes in "political contexts" (policies of the homeland, domestic policies, and/or inter-country policies), create political opportunities and constraints for immigrant groups as they engage in collective claims-making activities.

¹² Hmong's political narrative derives from themes found in oral storytelling and themes found in written texts that tell about Hmong's struggles as a people during particular historical periods. Both oral storytelling and written works strongly emphasize Hmong's "allied" relationship with the United States government during the American-Vietnam war. It is out of political narratives that collective action frames and/or counter-discourses can be formulated. Shenhav (2005:78, 87) argues that a political narrative should contain a time-sequence ("at least two real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence" (citing Prince 1982:4), but does not necessarily need to contain other elements of a narrative, such as "causality" or "structure of unity" (beginning, middle, end). Furthermore, "the relation between a political narrative and its context is of special importance for evaluating the fidelity of representation in political narratives. "[A] political narrative addresses a context shared by both speakers and addressees" (Shenhav 2006:249).

Political Incorporation and Why Does It Matter?

Taeku Lee, Karthick Ramakrishnan, and Ricardo Ramirez (2006:14) point out that no widely accepted definition of political incorporation exists in the scholarly literature. This is not surprising given that debates over the two concepts which make up “political incorporation” are far from settled—and I am not sure it will ever be settled. Yet, how broadly or narrowly we define these concepts has direct implications for the class of objects that we analytically isolate and study as (instances of) political phenomena. As Michael Jones-Correa (2005:75) explains,

How expansive a definition of ‘politics’ we choose shapes, of course, the extent to which we can say that immigrants are politically incorporated. The broader the definition, presumably the more likely we are to find immigrants involved in political life (2005:76).

Jones-Correa recognizes that engagements in politics can range from participation in the formal electoral forms of politics to participation in the less formal, non-electoral forms of politics.

Those who study electoral forms of politics usually emphasize activities such as naturalizing, registering, voting or running for elected office. On the other hand, those who study non-electoral forms of politics usually study social actors’ participation in organized protests, churches or ethnic organizations. “If there is more to participation than simply formal politics,”

Jones-Correa suggests, “then perhaps the definition of political incorporation should be expanded to include both participation in electoral and nonelectoral forms of politics, and indeed the forms of organizational life that might not be overtly considered political at all” (2005:75-76). In one of the few places that Jones-Correa defines “politics,” he does so with a hint of caution:

Once in their new countries of residence, immigrants engage, albeit inconsistently in politics—if by politics we mean collective mobilization around strategic interests, which might range from group identities to tangible assets” (Jones-Correa 2004:n.p.).

To be clear, conceptualizing politics helps us to delineate forms of political participation, but political participation is not the same thing as political *incorporation*.¹³ Equally important is how we define “incorporation” or, as some prefer, the broader concept of “democratic inclusion” (Andersen and Cohen 2005; Wolbrecht and Hero 2005).

Students of political incorporation face the same types of analytical questions that students of assimilation face: Who has power to incorporate (assimilate) whom during a certain historical period? Into what are communities or “groups” incorporated (assimilated) during a certain historical period? Where, when and how are groups incorporated? The study of the processes of incorporation, as much as the study of the processes of assimilation, has been concerned with the study of power relations¹⁴ within American society.¹⁵ As such, researchers’ answers to the questions above depend largely on their responses to or implicit assumptions about another set of questions: Who governs the political system in America *during a certain historical period*?¹⁶ (Who forms the America ‘core group’ or ‘mainstream’ during a certain historical period?) Do all or most groups *want* to become a part of the governing system (the ‘mainstream’)? *Can* all or most groups be included into this system and if not, why not? Not coincidentally, since at least the mid-1940s,¹⁷ sociologists and political scientists have tried to

¹³ As we shall soon see, the study of political incorporation requires us to also clarify the meanings of political *contexts*, political *resources*, political *narratives*, etc.

¹⁴ In Dahl’s (1957:202-203) formulation of power, “[Person] A has power over [person] B to the extent that he can get B to do something that he would not otherwise do. Dahl points out that power is a “relation among people” or actors, but that in order to be useful as a concept, it is important not only to identify the actors involved in power, but also the base, means, amount, and scope of power (1957:203). Dahl’s definition of power appears consistent with Weber’s definition of power, which is that “within a social relationship, power means any chance, (no matter whereon this chance is based) to carry through one’s own will (even against resistance)” (Wallimann, Tatsis, and Zito 1977:234).

¹⁵ And until recently, the focus has been on American society conceived as a more or less isolated state. As such, questions like How do political contexts outside of American society affect domestic political incorporation? were not raised.

¹⁶ Part of the difficulty in predicting immigrant political incorporation is that the political system is subject to both gradual and dramatic changes; however, we cannot foretell when, how, or how much it will change.

¹⁷ I am thinking here of Warner and Srole’s *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (1945) and Gordon’s *Assimilation in American Life* (1964).

address variants of these questions. In the next section, I review select literature on European and racial minority immigrant incorporation and then proceed to the state-of-the-art on immigrant political incorporation.

Two Perspectives to Studying Political Incorporation

The work by Robert Dahl (1961) has often been regarded as the seed of the ‘pluralist model’ on ethnic political incorporation. This seed, of course, has grown over the decades, giving life to “neo-pluralist” perspectives; however, in the interest of time and space, I shall focus my review on the original perspective. In *Who Governs?*, Robert Dahl (1961:1), poses the question, “In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?” To investigate this question, Dahl undertook a study of the city of New Haven, Connecticut and its peoples—the “social notables” (upper class), the “economic notables” (business class), government officials, and “ethnics” (European immigrants and blacks)—in the 1950s. He wanted to study, among other things, whether the social notables and the economic notables formed a ruling class or a loose coalition, and how, given the local political system’s unequal distribution of political resources, ethnic immigrant groups were able to participate and have influence in New Haven’s politics.

Based on his finding that on any single community policy issue (specifically, nominations for public office, public education, and urban renewal), only a small number of people were actively involved as decision makers and that the same people were not always involved across issues, Dahl concluded that New Haven lacks a cohesive ruling class, let alone a power elite. Rather, its political system has become “a system dominated by many different sets of leaders, each having access to a different combination of political resources” (1961:86).

Secondly, according to Dahl, it was the political leaders of the two major political parties in New Haven who drew ethnics—but he means mainly European immigrants—into the political process by “play[ing] the game of ethnic politics” (1961:44).¹⁸ For instance, democratic leaders recruited Irish immigrants while Republicans recruited Italian immigrants. “Since political leaders hoped to expand their own influence with the votes of ethnic groups, they helped the immigrant overcome his initial political powerlessness by engaging him in politics” (Dahl 1961:34). Ethnic group politics entailed the combined efforts of mobilized ethnic groups and political leaders (of local parties) to try to win descriptive representation while strengthening particular ethnic groups’ bonds to particular political parties. Through ethnic politics, European immigrant groups such as the Irish, German-Jews and Italians were able to elect some among their own into public municipal offices.

Nevertheless, Dahl contended, “ethnic politics...is clearly a transitional phenomenon” (1961:34). As ethnic groups became more assimilated and more politically incorporated (as indicated by upward social mobility, greater descriptive representation, etc.), ethnic loyalties gradually faded. The fading of ethnic group loyalty led to changes in political ideologies and behaviors such that immigrants became less radical in their demands, and voted increasingly along class rather than ethnic lines (Dahl 1961:33-59). Rather than demand redistribution, they presumably demanded allocation and symbolic recognition. For, as Dahl claimed, ethnic politics “was a politics of assimilation rather than a politics of reform, a politics that simultaneously emphasized the divisive rather than the unifying characteristics of voters and yet played upon the yearnings for assimilation and acceptance” (Dahl 1961:33).

¹⁸ Ethnic politics, according to Dahl, gained popularity in the early 1900s. Dahl (1961:51) points out that “by the end of the 1950s, ethnic politics was on the decline in New Haven.”

Dahl's model is "pluralist" to the extent that he believed that power in New Haven's political system has evolved from being more centralized to being more decentralized and that most ethnic groups, including immigrants, could access these multiple centers of power in the political system through multiple access points. In Dahl's own words, "a political system dominated by one cohesive set of leaders had given way to a system dominated by different sets of leaders, each having access to a different combination of political resources" (1961:86). These sets of leaders refer to "an aristocratic set of patricians, ex-plebes and entrepreneurs" that Dahl believed had been replaced by "a 'pluralistic political system' cued by an 'executive centered order'" (Hunter 1962:517). This belief is based on two of Dahl's key claims. First, immigrant groups, despite their lesser resources, have had "relatively 'easy' ways to 'penetrate' the 'political stratum,' defined as the small number of citizens who are highly active in politics" (Domhoff 2005:n.p., citing Dahl 1961:91-93). Second, although forms of inequality in New Haven persisted, these inequalities are "dispersed inequalities," meaning that no one group had all of the different types of resources such as social standing, legitimacy, wealth, knowledge, and public office, that could be utilized to exercise power" (Domhoff 2005:n.p.). The combination of dispersed or noncumulative¹⁹ inequalities and the availability of multiple access points, according to Dahl, meant that most ethnic groups had more or less equal access to the political system—a system governed not by a power elite but by multiple centers of power.

In claiming that the American political system has multiple centers of power, Dahl's answer to the question, Who governs?, is almost the exact opposite of that given by C. Wright Mills (1956). Mills' (1958) perspective is that within the American society of the mid-

¹⁹ Dahl (1961:85) makes a distinction between cumulative and noncumulative (or dispersed) inequalities. In cumulative inequality, "when one individual was much better off than another in one resource, such as wealth, he was usually better off in almost every other resource—social standing, legitimacy, control over religious and educational institutions, knowledge, office." Dahl argues, however, that "[in] the political system of today, inequalities in political resources remain, but they tend to be noncumulative."

nineteenth century the “power to make decisions” rests in the “power elite.” This power elite is comprised of the intricately linked, like-minded top leaders of the military, business corporations, and the government who, through manipulation, make political decisions and maintain power above and beyond the ordinary party politician and the rest of the population (Mills 1958). However, I want to point out that how we conceptualize the “real” governance structure²⁰ of America’s political system(s) (at the national, state, and local levels) will affect our answers to the inter-related questions: Who incorporates whom during a particular historical period? Can most or all groups be incorporated? Into what are groups incorporated and how?

Dahl’s answer to both the questions, Do all ethnic groups, including immigrant groups, want to be incorporated? And can they all do so?, seems to be a yes. This is not surprising given Dahl’s linked claims that ethnic members yearn for acceptance and assimilation, that resource-poor ethnic groups have multiple access points to the political system, and that economic and political assimilation is inevitable. In ways consistent with Park’s (1950) race relations cycle and Gordon’s (1964) stages of assimilation, Dahl envisioned that each “ethnic group [immigrant group] passes through three-stages on the way to political assimilation” (1961:34-35). Essentially, in the first stage, members of an ethnic group, because they “are almost exclusively proletarian,” tend to also be highly politically homogeneous. In the second stage, the ethnic group becomes more socioeconomically heterogeneous and this erodes their political unity. In the third stage, the group becomes even more socioeconomically diverse as “large segments are assimilated into the middling and upper strata”; these segments adopt not only middle-class jobs, but also middle-class ideas, lifestyles, neighborhoods, and social and marriage networks (Dahl 1961:35). According to Dahl, “To these people, ethnic politics is often embarrassing or

²⁰ Kendra King (2010:14) presents four “models of governance” in America as a) pluralism; b) elitism; c) colonialism; and d) coalitions.

meaningless” (1961:35). Instead of voting or campaigning along ethnic lines, “[p]olitical attitudes and loyalties...become a function of socioeconomic characteristics” (1961:35). As Reuel Rogers (2006:21) sums it, “Dahl believed all groups ultimately would follow [the] path to full political incorporation in a continuing and relatively seamless saga of urban ethnic and racial succession.”

Critiques of the Pluralist Perspective

Several scholars have directly or indirectly criticized a number of conclusions that Dahl made (Hunter 1962; Domhoff 1967).²¹ Although critics do not all hold the same positions on things, their perspectives can be grouped into two central areas of concern: 1) concerns related to the decline or continuing significance of ethnic politics; and 2) concerns related to the inevitability or uniformity of assimilation or its opposite, the uncertainty of and unevenness in assimilation. I review these two groups of concerns next.

A set of critics in the first group shares the central concern that ethnic identities and ethnic politics, rather than disappearing with modernization, actually persist. Against Dahl’s view that ethnic politics will disappear over time as ethnic groups achieve middle class status, Raymond Wolfinger (1965) argues that ethnic politics did not disappear in despite of fading ethnic consciousness and improvements in groups’ socioeconomic status. In his study of Irish’s and Italians’ voting patterns between the first and third generations in New Haven, CT, Wolfinger found that “ethnicity is still an important factor in voting behavior and is not

²¹ In his review of Dahl’s work, Floyd Hunter (1962:517) points out, what Dahl refers to as a pluralism of leaders actually “consists of a very small portion of the electorate which Dahl divides for purposes of analysis into categories of patricians, entrepreneurs, social notables, economic notables, ex-plebes, and subleaders.” Hunter contends that Dahl’s “democratic pluralism” only applies to this very small portion of people and that Dahl has not shown empirically that it applies to “the rest of the population” (1962:518-19). For this reason, Hunter, suggests, it is not surprising that “Dahl finds no connection between this narrow band of civic democrats and the large body politic” (1962:518). Furthermore, Hunter suggests that, contrary to what Dahl claims, business and political elites overlapped and controlled power in New Haven. For, in Dahl’s study, the executive centered order refers mainly to the New Haven mayor, a businessman politician, who, more than others, acted directly on policy issues, appointed other businessmen to political boards, and was “closely related to...the local party boss” (Hunter 1962:518).

eliminated by changes in the economic characteristics of the individuals affected” (Wolfinger 1965:908). Joining the critique against Dahl, Michael Parenti (1967) argues that acculturation,²² which is “far from complete,” does not necessarily diminish ethnic consciousness or formal and informal ethnic institutions. Rather, things such as increases in a minority’s educational level could heighten rather than reduce ethnic consciousness; adaptation into the middle class maintains rather than diminishes the number of ethnic associations (1967:724). Furthermore, political organizations or leaders who are “in need of a ready-made formal and informal network of relational sub-structures within his constituency” (1967:725) are likely to continue to construct ethnic group identities “in order to [make] his constituencies accessible to him in the most economical way” (1967:725). Basically, political leaders continue to court ethnic groups because they know that ethnic groups will be responsive when courted. All of these factors, in turn, maintain ethnic politics.

Other critics in the first group highlight the fact that the historical “problem of the color-line”—that is, the problem of racial prejudice and the problem of discrimination against darker skin peoples (Du Bois and Edwards 2007:xv)—persists in America’s political economy. Studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s consistently show that race intersects with class in important ways. Even among non-white Americans of relatively high socioeconomic status, race or racial categorization remains an important determinant of opportunities and experiences with discrimination. Interpersonal and institutional racism, far from having declined in significance, continues to determine or strongly shape African Americans’ place of residence (Massey and Denton 1993), their access to certain job industries (Waldinger and Bailey 1991), and their everyday experiences in public places of accommodation (Feagin 1991). In fact, studies on

²² Parenti (1967:724) suggests that “minority groups are not assimilating” as Dahl claims but that they are merely acculturating into society.

blacks, Latinos, and Asians in the U.S. find “large and statistically significant earnings differences between highly educated men from minority groups, as compared with whites” (Tienda and Lii 1987:162). In sum, among non-white Americans, socioeconomic mobility often accompanies rather than reduces racial (indeed also gender) discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere.²³

The persistence of a racialized economic and political hierarchy in the United States has led Rodney Hero (1992) to characterize the U.S. political system as practicing “two-tier pluralism.” America’s political system is a two-tier pluralism system, Hero contends, because Latinos and other ethnic minority groups “have largely been relegated to a lower social and political tier or arena. Despite the equal legal and political status of Latinos formally, distinct factors and processes have led to systematically lower political and social status” (Hero 1992:29). Although given some decision-making opportunity in some areas of the political system, Latinos and racial minority groups lack “‘systemic power,’ [have] very little say in developmental policy, and [are] largely left out of agenda setting” (Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Martinez-Ebers, and Segura 2006:516). Hero’s point about immigrant social actors having some decision making opportunity—perhaps as they acquire elected positions—but quite limited systemic power is one that I will try to investigate in my chapter on Hmong Americans’ electoral politics.

Critics in the second group implicitly or explicitly take as a given that assimilation occurred for earlier European immigrants and their second and third generation descendants. However, these critics express strong doubt that the assimilation experiences of earlier European immigrants can be generalized to those of new, post-1965 immigrants or their descendants.

²³ Not all non-whites experience discrimination or are affected by it in the same way, and recent work reminds us to take skin color as a key part of our analyses when studying immigrant political incorporation (Hochschild 2005).

Many point out that post-1965 immigrants differ from earlier European immigrants in at least three significant ways: 1) most post-1965 immigrants are non-white and/or darker skin peoples who come mainly from countries of Asia and Latin America, including the Caribbean; 2) they are socioeconomically diverse across groups and within groups; and 3) the structural conditions that they encounter in the post-deindustrialization era are significantly different from those found during earlier periods. Because these differences are important for understanding immigrant political incorporation, let us discuss them before turning to contemporary models of immigrant incorporation.

The fact that post-1965 immigrants are non-white and/or have darker skin affects their and their descendants' life chances and acceptance in America. As Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou explain,

Descendants of European immigrants who confronted the dilemmas of conflicting cultures were uniformly white. Even if of a somewhat darker hue than the natives, their skin color reduced a major barrier to entry into the American mainstream. For this reason, the process of assimilation depended largely on individual decisions to leave the immigrant culture behind and embrace American ways. Such an advantage obviously does not exist for the black, Asian, and mestizo children of today's immigrants (1993:76).

Although Asians have sometimes been called "honorary whites" as part of the mass media-inspired myth of their culturally linked socioeconomic success, and although Latinos technically can identify themselves as white on official race questions, neither group has the racial privileges that whites have. With respect to immigrant political incorporation, however, I think the important thing is not simply that immigrants are largely non-white and that natives—I prefer the term established residents—are largely whites. As my study will show, the established residents of most cities—social actors or interest groups who on the basis of their longevity in or affiliation with the people of a geographic area claim to have legitimate right to exclude newcomers—have seldom been racially homogeneous. Ethnic/racial minorities (that is, non-

whites) also make up established residents, and they, alongside whites, actively participate in the practices of selective inclusion and exclusion. It would be important then to investigate how relatively recent immigrant groups such as Hmong interact with groups such as blacks and Hispanics in different contexts of reception, and how these interactions could facilitate or hinder Hmong's political participation and incorporation. (In Chapters 5, 6, and 8, I claim that, in Fresno, Hmong communities benefited from the presence and political efforts of Latino leaders and community groups but that their inter-ethnic alliance formed recently rather than early on in Hmong's resettlement. In the 1990s, some Hmong groups perceived the actions/views of at least one Latino in the Fresno welfare bureaucracy as racially prejudicial toward Hmong.)

But racial identity and skin color are not the only important 'variables' that distinguish the new immigration from the old. Asian and Latino immigrants to the U.S. also represent an extraordinarily diverse set of national origins and with it, an even more diverse set of ethnic histories and languages (Zhou 1997; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Some point out that Dahl's pluralist perspective on ethnic political incorporation "does not give enough analytic weight to the immigrant status and home country ties of foreign-born groups during their political adjustment to the United States" (Rogers 2006:32). Yet, as Reuel Rogers points out, "[h]ome country attachments and experiences are...likely to have a cognitive effect on immigrants' political attitudes and behavior" (2006:33). Many immigrants maintain meaningful, regular social ties and networks that span the former homeland and the new homeland. These social ties, as I show in Chapter 4, affect the interests and actions of co-ethnic immigrants in the U.S. Even though Hmong's protests against foreign issues have been outpaced by domestic-oriented protests, foreign-oriented protests occur frequently and have not declined.

Moreover, the state (U.S. Congress, the State Department, etc.) is aware of immigrants' ties to their homeland countries and regularly enters into inter-state contracts or implements foreign policies that directly affect this relationship. As I try to show in subsequent chapters, the state's treatment of Hmong former refugees has fluctuated between relatively positive or neutral treatment to treatment that expresses indifference or very negative disregard (e.g., supporting repatriation against Thailand-Hmong and labeling Hmong refugees terrorists in the post-9/11 era), depending on its changing trade and political relationships with the war-torn countries of Southeast Asia. In other words, given the state's embeddedness in (rather than its isolation from) the larger international contexts, broader political contexts can have direct implications on the political participation and political incorporation of immigrant groups.

Furthermore, whereas European immigrants tended to be largely of poor or working class background, Asian and Latin American immigrants of the post-1965 era are immensely diverse in terms of social class background (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Immigrant groups' initial social class has direct implications for the kinds and amounts of discretionary resources (e.g., skills, money, time, knowledge, and sense of efficacy),²⁴ that they can mobilize toward collective political action. Moreover, immigrant families' social class background affects where they can initially settle in the United States. For instance, whereas migrants of affluent or middle class background have the option of settling in suburbs upon arrival, migrants of poor or working class often must settle in the inner cities where the bulk of the working class, including working class whites, also reside (Waldinger and Tseng 1992; Halle, Gedeon, and Beveridge 2003; Zhou and Kim 2003). Place of settlement, in turn, determines the availability of (though not necessarily automatic access to) a host of other benefits and resources.

²⁴ I am drawing this description/breakdown of resources from Rosenstone and Hansen (1993:12).

But if social scientists have given plenty of attention to social class differences between immigrant groups, they have paid less attention to differences within groups. Nevertheless, as Wolbrecht and Hero (2005:9) point out, “an important first step to understanding the politics of democratic inclusion is to think theoretically and critically about diversity both within and between excluded groups.” Robert Dahl (1961) and his critics generally recognized that immigrant groups start off as mostly working class but that over time they become more socioeconomically heterogeneous. What this increasing internal socioeconomic heterogeneity means for interest groups within immigrant ethnic communities in terms of their goals and in terms of their possible alliances with other excluded groups remains an understudied issue. But I want to suggest that as segments of immigrant communities become more socioeconomically integrated—that is, become integrated professionals in various work and public institutions, etc.—it is the members of these segments who will lead various kinds of “ethnic” and pan-ethnic movements. Some of these professionally-led social movements will likely seek to obtain greater rights for or protection of historically stigmatized or under-represented categories (e.g., women, poor, ethnic minorities, etc.). It is immigrant professionals/leaders who will probably be the most active in forging political alliances and engaging in conventional political activities (organizing protests, donating to campaigns, lobbying legislatures, writing to officials, filing lawsuits, etc.).

But how about the rest of the non-professional, less socially integrated immigrant community? When might they take part in politics or allow themselves to be mobilized by political actors? What kinds of existing informal networks could leaders use to directly or indirectly mobilize the less politically active? What kinds of political narratives could they draw on to create collective consensus and motivate them to engage in collective political action? I

will try to address some of these questions in the chapters on ethnic mobilization and counter mobilization.

Finally, the third set of concerns focuses less on the factors or resources endogenous to national origin groups but more on the structural conditions or institutional arrangements found in particular places of reception; these institutional arrangements affect immigrant persons' and groups' assimilation and political incorporation independent of persons' or groups' characteristics. Researchers who share this concern recognize that post-1965 immigrants face structural economic conditions in the places of reception that are significantly different from those that earlier waves of European immigrants encountered. As Portes and Zhou (1993:76) point out, the "structure of economic opportunities has also changed" for new immigrants. The processes of "rapid...national deindustrialization and global industrial restructuring" (1993:76) eliminated the diverse industrial job opportunities at the intermediate rung of the labor market. This created a bifurcated, hourglass-shaped labor market in which "entrants to the American labor force [confronted] a widening gap between the minimally paid menial jobs that immigrants commonly accept and the high-tech and professional occupations requiring college degrees that native elites occupy" (1993:76). These significantly different structural conditions in the contexts of reception coupled with immigrant groups' immensely diverse social class backgrounds ensure that assimilation can be neither a uniform nor linear process for immigrant groups or group segments. As I return to below, labor market conditions in the contexts of reception could determine the immigrant communities' access to certain job industries that, in turn, affect their level of concrete resources especially income.

Furthermore, researchers point out that local political parties, whose power to mobilize immigrants was evident in New Haven, have declined in importance in America in since the

presidential election of 1964 (Everson 1982). According to David Everson (1982:52), “the decline of parties results from the loss of their near monopoly over several significant tasks that must be performed in a democratic society.” These tasks include such things as “[nominating] candidates for political office, organiz[ing], financ[ing] and conduct[ing] campaigns for office, and ‘mobiliz[ing] the electorate on election day, [which] served as a powerful cue for voters in making decisions, and played a major role in organizing the government” (1982:52). The implementation of direct primaries in the early 1900s has made it more possible for voters to nominate presidential candidates directly and more likely that candidates reach out to their constituents through more direct means—that is, without going through the parties. Instead of relying on political parties, Everson (1982) argues, candidates such as presidents and their campaigns now use “techniques of mass persuasion” such as television or direct mail to court voters and contributions. The “decline in parties has been paralleled by a growth in the activities of a variety of interest groups”—what Everson calls, “single-issue groups, ideological groups, and public interest groups” (1982:54). But in spite of all of this, as Everson recognized, parties have taken steps to curtail their erosion. “Parties will continue to be one of many influences on the electorate, but intense issues and candidate characteristics will supplant party identification as major factors in presidential voting” (1982:59). To be sure, there is no guarantee that political parties will mobilize new immigrants (Wong 2006:Ch. 3). However, as I will try to show in the chapter on electoral participation, in certain contexts where there has been a long history of political party activism, political parties continue to play crucial roles in the mobilization of new immigrant groups (i.e., the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party in St. Paul, Minnesota).

To summarize, critics of Dahl’s perspective on ethnic group political incorporation suggest that the pluralist perspective makes unwarranted assumptions about the inevitability of

assimilation or its supposed corollary, the inevitable decline of ethnic politics in American society, pays too little attention to the significant role of race in structuring the political economy, and ignores the changing structural economic and political contexts in which new, non-white immigrants find themselves. How then do recent scholars define, investigate and try to explain immigrant political incorporation?

Recent Models of Immigrant Political Incorporation

Rufus Browning, Dale Marshall, and David Tabb (1984:25) define political incorporation as “the extent to which group interests are effectively represented in policy making.” At the empirical level, the authors measure incorporation by looking at “the extent to which they [blacks and Hispanics] were represented in coalitions that dominated city policy making on minority-related issues” (1984:25). In their study of Hispanics’ and blacks’ political incorporation across 10 city governments, Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984:240-1; 1986:577) propose a model that contains the following causal sequence: mobilization → incorporation → responsiveness. Furthermore, the authors identify two strategies of local mobilization: demand-protest and electoral strategy.²⁵ These mobilization strategies, in turn, are shaped by a “structure of resources” which includes resources inside and outside of the group itself. Specifically, these political resources²⁶ are 1) “the size of the minority population; socioeconomic resources of the minority population”; 2) the “political resources outside the group” (1984:81) such as “the amount of support for minority interests among the rest of the electorate (among whites or, for Hispanics, among blacks)” (1984:240); and 3) “the

²⁵ “Demand-protest covers a wide range of activity including violent and nonviolent protest (sit-ins, boycotts, pickets, demonstrations, riots) and more traditional demand articulation tactics such as mass turnout at city meetings, press conferences, neighborhood meetings, petitions, and formal and informal exchanges with city officials. (...) Minority electoral mobilization consists of efforts to elect minority candidates to city council and mayoral positions” (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984:280-1).

²⁶ Here and in the rest of this paper, I try to keep political (or politically relevant) resources and political actors as distinct analytical categories. Political actors and population, of course, serve as important political resources. My task is to clarify what kinds of resources have what kinds of effect on social actors and their political activities.

organizational development and political experience of the group” which develop through demand-protests (1984:240). But ethnic group population size is a central component in their model of political incorporation.

Browning and his associates posit that “[a] group that is large in number is more likely to engage in demand-protest [while] a group large in percentage terms is more likely to mobilize strongly in the electoral arena” (1984:240-1). They produce two sets of findings that support their hypotheses. Specifically, they find that “for both blacks and Hispanics, demand-protest was very closely related to the absolute size of the minority group. (...) For both blacks and Hispanics, electoral mobilization was related to the relative size of the minority population rather than absolute size” (1984:245). Moreover, “Black electoral mobilization was also closely related to white support. Hispanic mobilization was *most closely associated with prior levels of Hispanic demand-protest*” (1984:245, emphasis added).

Browning and his associates conclude that “overall, demand-protests and electoral strategies did not interfere with each other and were used effectively together” (1984:246) to produce incorporation. However, “demand-protest strategies by themselves produced limited results in most cities; when combined with electoral strategies, the results were much better in the long run” (1984:246). Furthermore, they observe, the “local strength of the [incorporation] movement depended mainly on the political resources available in the cities. Where the resources were present, mobilization was vigorous; where they were not, it was weak” (1984:245). But beyond political resources, the authors also “emphasize the relevance of ideology.” Ideology²⁷ is crucial, they note, because “conservative and liberal coalitions responded very differently to minority mobilization and demands” (1984:241).

²⁷ Browning and his associates measure ideology and interests based on political actors’ level/scale of support for distributing advantages to disadvantaged minority groups (1984:276-8). “The top position on the scale, orthodox

In their recent work on political incorporation of immigrants, Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009:16) define incorporation broadly “as a process for individuals or groups, encompassing views as well as interests, involving various forms of political activity, and including changes caused by as well as changes to immigrant’ political activity.” They present a theoretical model of immigrant political incorporation that includes the following sequential components:

Immigrant(s)’ entry into host country → Entry into political arena → Involvement in political arena → Responsiveness of and to political system (Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009:17).

Hochschild and Mollenkopf are cognizant of the role that “context, feedback, incorporative failure, nonlinearities, or exclusion” (2009:16), along with political institutions, could play in the model and take those into account. In their full model, for instance, they include the element of context and the polity. By context, they mean the local, national, or international contexts in which local and national laws, practices, transportation and communication channels, the treatment of immigrants, inter-country alliances, treaties, international trade, etc. operate (2009:27). By polity, they mean political parties in the government.

Crucially, Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009:25) point out that “immigrant incorporation can be curtailed at any point along the model’s pathway.” As they explain,

[B]asically, the absence of any of the key features that foster incorporation can be said to discourage it. Thus, immigrants may enter a host country but not be mobilized into political engagement, a group may become politically engaged but be too small to attain representation, or sets of immigrants may be politically represented but have none of their interests met or norms validated. In addition, it is at least theoretically possible that the political system is responsive to some group interests or values but that the group is not changed at all by this connection to politics (2009:25).

liberal, refers to an ideology in which the highest commitment is given to the redistribution of advantages to disadvantaged minority groups. The bottom position on the scale, orthodox conservative, is characterized by opposition to government action to redistribute benefits to minorities” (1984:276). They also include three middle positions on the scale: liberal pragmatist, administrative liberal, and economic development conservative.

Given these possible contingencies, Hochschild and Mollenkopf predict that two outcomes could occur: 1) successful political incorporation or 2) failed political incorporation or “nonincorporation.” Nonincorporation, which “can happen at any stage of the model of immigrant political incorporation,” may be due to deliberate exclusion (blockage to immigration, deportation; racism; etc.) or voluntary nonparticipation in incorporation (2009:25-6).

The two models of political incorporation presented here have more in common than may appear. Both make explicit references to the crucial roles that resources, collective mobilization, and broader institutional contexts play in the incorporation process. To get from the input (emergence of group identity) to the outcome (government responsiveness), both models emphasize social actors’ engagement in political mobilization, usually with the help of other social actors. Hochschild and Mollenkopf, for instance, point out that “for newcomers to a political system,” political actors, parties, etc. who serve as “mobilizers are especially important. Mobilizers may affect how as well as whether immigrants join the political process” (2009:20). In making this claim, Hochschild and Mollenkopf are reiterating the argument that Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) made about the crucial role of political actors as mobilizers. That is, “through direct mobilization, political leaders provide opportunities for political action that citizens would not have otherwise” (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993:26).

I agree with Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009) and others that several individual, group, and institutional factors interact and play crucial roles in the political incorporation (or disincorporation) of immigrant communities. In this dissertation, I wish to put emphasis on a key process: collective mobilization. I tentatively accept the definition of political incorporation proposed by N.-N.T. Ong and Meyer (2004:4) as “the development of the capacity to mobilize effective political action in response to perceived political opportunities in a host country.” In

my view, this definition is broad enough without being too broad such that we can still investigate mobilization as a dynamic process involving social actors, their recognition and framing of political opportunities, and their collective actions performed under political constraints. Furthermore, we can examine a range of possible political activities and outcomes and the potential impact that these could have for a group's capacity to engage in future political action. In this way, political incorporation processes are not merely one-time occurrences but are ongoing developments. In the following section, I draw on social movement and segmented assimilation theories to discuss what mobilization could entail in terms of powerless groups' efforts to become politically incorporated. I hope to arrive at an explanatory model of collective mobilization and political incorporation.²⁸

Collective Mobilization and Political Incorporation

Blumer's (1951) concepts of general and specific social movements may be helpful for delineating political incorporation. According to Blumer, "gradual and pervasive changes in the values of a people" can give rise to general social movements; these are generally uncoordinated diffused efforts toward vague goals and lack group organization and leadership (Blumer 1951, cited in Mauss 1975:45). Over time, however, as groups form around specific interests and articulate goals, general social movements can give rise to a specific social movement.

We can think of political incorporation as a *general* social movement. We shall call it the incorporation movement, for now. Secondly, we can think of the specific political incorporation processes—i.e., group efforts to naturalize, to win public office, to change public policy, etc.—as *specific* social movements. Although definitions of social movement vary, let us tentatively

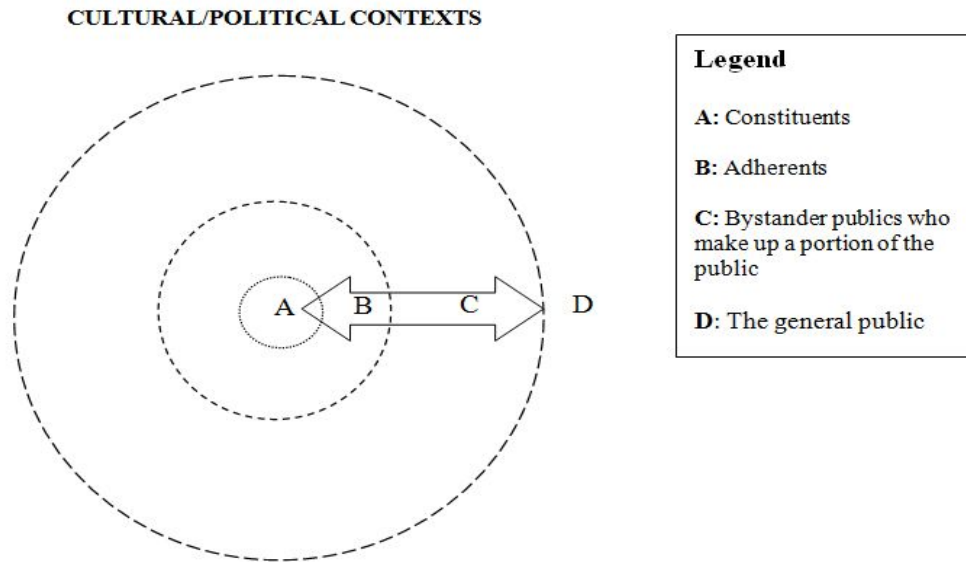
²⁸ Following Klandermans (1984), I define mobilization as a process encompassing two interrelated processes: the mobilization of collective consensus and the mobilization of collective action. In each process, social actors mobilize when they accumulate, prepare, and invest or designate resources (people and money/time) toward achieving the group goals of collective consensus and collective action.

accept the one offered by McCarthy and Zald (1977:1217-8): “a *social movement* is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.” From this definition, a group’s political incorporation movement refers to its members’ desire for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of U.S. society. But like all social movements, political incorporation movements require collective mobilization. Hereinafter, I use “collective mobilization” to refer to a process in which people or social actors situated in a field of actors interact to try to bring about collective consensus as well as collective action on some socially defined social problem. Let us discuss the field of social actors before proceeding to discuss their collective mobilization tasks.

The Field of Social Actors in a Social Movement

The social actors in a social movement (or counter-movement) are situated in a field of actors. Borrowing from McCarthy and Zald (1977) and Turner (1970), I distinguish between four categories of actors: *constituents* or those individuals or organization(s) that actively participate and invest resources in support of the social movement (as challengers) or counter-movement (as antagonists); *adherents* or those individuals or organizations that believe in the goals of the social movement as can be seen from their occasional expressions but are not (yet) actively involved; *bystander publics* or those who do not oppose the social movement but their participation is limited to observing the movement; and finally, those who make up the general public who may be oblivious to the emergent social movement. In Diagram 1, these categories of social actors are respectively in the A, B, C, and D rings.

Diagram 1. The Field of Actors in a Social Movement



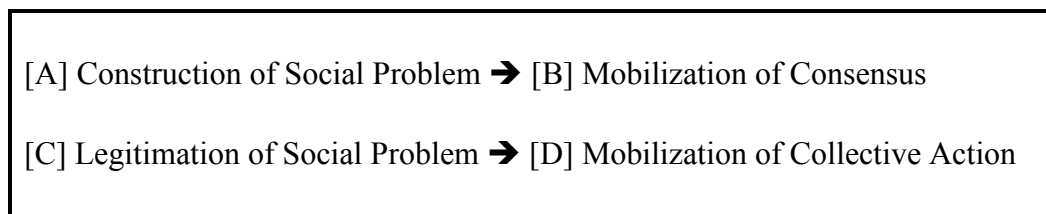
All actors are embedded in nested cultural and political contexts. In this dissertation, I privilege the existing state policies and the mass media as two key components of the political and cultural contexts (more below). Amenta, Bonastia, Fetner, and Young (2002:67) define state policies as the “authoritative and consistent lines of action undertaken by states, backed by laws and the legitimacy of states.” I hold that state policies and the mass media express the prevailing political-cultural ideology of a particular historical period. An ideology refers to “the set of beliefs that are used to *justify* or *challenge* a given social-political order and are used to interpret the political world” (Zald 1996:262, emphasis added). Compatible with Mayer Zald’s definition of ideology here, Mansoor Moaddel (1992:359) defines ideology as an “episodic discourse” which is “a *discourse* consisting of a set of general principles, concepts, symbols, and rituals used by actors to address problems in a particular historical episode. Discourse is the method by which people construct their strategies of action.” Hereinafter, I shall use episodic discourse interchangeably with ideology, keeping in mind the meanings offered by Zald (1996) and

Moaddel (1992). Moaddel's definition has a slight edge over Zald's in that, while both emphasize the context-dependency of ideology, Moaddel's is not limited to beliefs. With respect to social movements, ideology serves "as a cultural resource for framing activities" but they can also "constrain the production of meaning and thus can affect the mobilizing potency of framings" (Snow and Benford 2000:56-58).

Neither collective consensus nor collective action can spring out of thin air. Except during violent, coercive, or extraordinary circumstances, each of these outcomes normally must be achieved through the construction of a social problem and the mobilization of resources. Next, I discuss the framing of social problem and the mobilization of resources. Then I specify some of the sources of political resources before presenting my integrated model of immigrant political incorporation.

From Constructing a Social Problem to Mobilizing Action

Just as the mobilization of consensus and the mobilization of collective action are two analytically distinct processes (Klandermans 1984), so are the process of constructing a social problem and the process of obtaining legitimacy for it (Blumer 1971). More importantly, these processes are interactively accomplished and interrelated. Social actors' potential to garner consensus depends on their ability to convince others about the credibility of their social problem claims. Their potential to motivate collective action depends on their ability to obtain endorsement for the social problem from influential third parties (e.g., actors or organizations outside of the social movement). These processes can be represented schematically, as follows:



Each of these four analytically distinct processes, in turn, is a product of the dynamic, contentious interactions among various sets of actors situated in a social field. In terms of their functions, the three core “framing tasks” that Snow and Benford (1988) conceptualize do pretty much the same work as the processes of [A] and [C]. Specifically, challengers use “diagnostic framing” and “prognostic framing” to try to bring about consensus on the social causes and consequences of the social problem, while they use “motivational framing” to try to motivate those in positions of power to endorse the challengers’ call for action and/or to take corrective action themselves (Snow and Benford 1988).

In order for a social problem to emerge or gain initial recognition, challengers must engage in a number of interrelated tasks: a) the identification or definition of some putative condition as problematic and the attribution of blame; b) the interpretation of these putative conditions as harmful to some victimized group(s); and c) the call for the target(s) to take specific actions to ameliorate or change these conditions (Blumer 1971; Kitsuse and Spector 1973; Mauss 1975; Loseke 2003; Rubington and Weinberg 2003). To the extent that the social interaction among challengers, antagonists, and targets produces consensus about a social problem—that is, when social actors reach some level of agreement about the “real” causes and consequences of and about the “proper” or actionable remedies for the conditions—the probability that some type of collective action will occur becomes greater. Conversely, if challengers fail to construct a social problem or construct one but fail to obtain legitimacy for it, the lesser the chance that collective and corrective action will occur. The underlying assumption I am making here is that some consensus about a specific problem *and* about the need to take action on that problem is required for collective action to actually occur. There is no way to know in advance which specific type of action plan will result from collective action or whether

the implementation of such plan will actually correct the problematic conditions (Blumer 1971:304-5).

Collective action on social problems depends crucially on claims makers' ability to aggregate resources. As McCarthy and Zald (1977:1216) point out, "Because *resources* are necessary for engagement in social conflict, *they must be aggregated* for collective purposes" (emphasis added). What do McCarthy and Zald (1977) mean by resources? They mean primarily money, facilities, and people's time and labor (1977:1216). McCarthy and Zald claim that "mass" and "elites" control different amounts of resources or resource pools. As they state,

Mass constituents, adherents, bystander publics, and opponents are those individuals and groups controlling very limited resource pools. The most limited resource pool which individuals can control is their own time and labor. Elites are those who control larger resource pools (1977:1221).

Given their primary interest in explaining how resource mobilization affects the success/failure of social movements, McCarthy and Zald take the primary task of resource mobilization to be (1) "that of converting adherents²⁹ to constituents and maintaining constituent involvement" and (2) that of "turning nonadherents into adherents" of the social movement (1977:1221). However, they recognize that "resource aggregation requires some minimal form of *organization*" (1977:1216, emphasis added). But, as Gamson and Schmeidler (1984:569) argue, organization does not refer to any "particular form of organization," since collective action still requires social actors' "skills and routines for carrying it out." Rather, organization is

²⁹ "Adherents are those individuals and organizations that believe in the goals of the movement. The *constituents* of a SMO [social movement organization] are those providing resources for it" (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1221). The authors further distinguish between persons who are beneficiaries and those who are non-beneficiaries but still support the social movement. "*Conscience adherents* [who] are individuals and groups who are part of the appropriate SM [social movement] but do not stand to benefit directly from SMO goal accomplishment" and "*conscience constituents* [who] are direct supporters of a SMO who do not stand to benefit directly from its success in goal accomplishment" (1977:1222). They further distinguish among adherents; constituents; bystander publics ("nonadherents are not supporters of the SM and its SMO but who merely witness social movement activity"); opponents; and potential beneficiaries ("those who would benefit directly from SMO goal accomplishment") (1977:1221-2).

“more [about]...the presence of an *infrastructure* (...) particularly structures of *solidarity and communication*. [It is this infrastructure], *generally maintained by an array of organizations*, [that] makes it easier to aggregate resources and to use them in collective action” (Gamson and Schmeidler 1984:569, emphasis added).

In short, to gauge a group’s capacity to engage in collective action, we need to take account of its resources; and to gauge their capacity to mobilize resources, we need to take account of its community infrastructure. But we know that not all immigrant groups arrive in the U.S. with the same amount or kinds of resources. To better understand an immigrant group’s level of resources and infrastructure, we turn to segmented assimilation theory.

The Contexts of Exit and Contexts of Reception

Some have observed that the literature on new immigrant assimilation has paid less attention to the civic and political participation of immigrants than to immigrants’ socioeconomic adaption and outcomes (Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Waters 2008). Nevertheless, I want to suggest that segmented assimilation theory provides crucial concepts and ways for understanding how immigrant groups can become politically incorporated. Most relevant for the purpose at hand is segmented assimilation theory’s attention to *contexts*, *race* and *class*, *institutions*, and *group-based resources*, and its attention to multiple social mobility outcomes.³⁰

Recognizing the limits of the classic assimilation perspective to explain the outcomes of the new waves of post-1965 immigrant groups, segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1996) offers an alternative perspective for understanding the social and economic outcomes of this new wave of immigrants and their children. Rejecting the classical assimilation perspective which predicts that immigrants will follow a single path to full

³⁰ Social mobility (socioeconomic assimilation) is but one type of outcome of assimilation. Other types of assimilation outcomes include spatial/residential assimilation, cultural (attitudinal; identity), and linguistic assimilation. Intermarriage is also another type of assimilation outcome.

assimilation in their host societies, segmented assimilation theory recognizes that immigrant groups can experience multiple social mobility outcomes—upward, downward, or lateral mobility (Zhou and Xiong 2005). To survive and advance in society, immigrants, who come from various ethnic and class backgrounds, must successfully adapt in an American host society that is shaped historically by systems of class and racial stratification. Segmented assimilation theory emphasizes the set of contexts of exit and contexts of reception that are unique to national-origin groups.

In segmented assimilation theory, the *contexts of exit* refer to the political conditions under which an immigrant group exited their previous country and the sets of social class standing as well as human capital, such as language, job skills and education that immigrants bring along with them. For instance, whether an immigrant group arrives as political refugees, temporary labor migrants, sponsored immigrants, or as undocumented immigrants will have a direct impact on their ability or eligibility to acquire formal U.S. citizenship—one of the most important credentials in American society. It is also obvious to students of immigration that the kinds and amounts of valued or devalued skills and resources which immigrant individuals and families arrive have direct implications for their ability to make a living in the United States.

What is less obvious and understudied, however, is how contexts of exit shape national origin groups' political narrative or "ideology." If we accept that "ideology" serves as a resource for the construction of collective action frames (Snow and Benford 1988), then an immigrant group's emergent³¹ and developed political narrative seems an important factor to take into account in the study of social movements for political incorporation. What some immigrant groups have in common—whether or not they have been formally classified or admitted as

³¹ At any point in time, political narratives may be emergent rather than fully formed or solidified. Pre-migration experiences give rise to semi-organized narratives that immigrant groups, after arriving, can draw on to forge new narratives or frames to meet the needs of their present political circumstances.

refugees—is their experiences with war, violence, and forced displacement. These tragic but transformative events could powerfully shape a national origin group’s political narrative.

Political narratives, in turn, could affect the types of political identities and claims that immigrant social actors construct and pursue in the face of new circumstances and opportunities in the U.S. Interest groups may be able to draw on their nation origin group-specific political narratives to construct effective counter-discourses (i.e., strategic collective action frames).

Furthermore, although the events of exit are a one-time occurrence, the *contexts of the homeland* continue to affect immigrants long after they arrive in the United States. Homeland contexts not only change over time, but such changes could directly impact nation origin groups’ “homeland” political activities in the United States. Moreover, changes in bilateral trade relations and/or political relations between countries—even former enemy states—could have immediate impact on how the host state treats its “former allies.” In subsequent chapters, I investigate how the changing trade and political relations between the United States and Hmong’s former homeland (Laos) directly affect the United States government’s treatment of Thailand-based Hmong refugees and how Hmong in the U.S. have responded to this treatment.

The *contexts of reception* entail a number of factors: a) the policies of the receiving government, whether exclusive, passive acceptance, or active encouragement; b) the manner of reception by the public, whether prejudiced, indifferent, or supportive; c) the existence and type of co-ethnic networks at the destination, whether poor, entrepreneurial or professional; cohesive or not, etc.; and d) the conditions of the labor market (the extent of its bifurcation) (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2001). Besides a more general “public,” segmented assimilation theory identifies three key institutional contexts: government policy, labor market conditions, and ethnic institutions or businesses.

The theory posits that an immigrant group's chance of successful adaptation in their new destination depends on how effectively its racial and class background characteristics interact with the combination of these institutional contexts to promote positive outcomes for the group. In general, the fewer resources that an immigrant group arrives with and the fewer institutional support (exclusive government reception, highly bifurcated labor market, absence of cohesive ethnic communities), that it receives following arrival, the more likely that a group will experience downward mobility as opposed to upward mobility. Conversely, the greater resources that a group arrives with and the greater institutional support (positive government reception, less bifurcated labor market, presence of cohesive, resourceful ethnic communities), that they find in the place of reception, the more likely that a group will experience upward mobility.

I agree that institutional contexts in the place of reception matter a great deal in determining or strongly shaping immigrant communities' access to politically relevant resources (skills, money, knowledge, efficacy, etc.). Access to these resources, as many researchers have shown, affects individuals' and group's ability to engage in individual or collective political action (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wong, Lien, and Conway 2005). For this reason, my study investigates how different state and local contexts could impact Hmong American communities' access to different kinds of economic and political resources. While Hmong American leaders often emphasize a national Hmong American unity, different Hmong communities in different urban areas—such as St. Paul, Minnesota, Wausau, Wisconsin, and Fresno, California—have participated differently in politics.

The government's reception policy, rather than constitute a one-time event (e.g., affecting immigrants only in the immediate aftermath of their arrival), continues to develop over time and

have long-term impact on immigrant communities' resources and chances of incorporation. In the case of Southeast Asian refugees, government or state policies not only determined their initial places of settlement but continued to monitor and control their access to public benefits. Here, it seems useful to broaden the concept of "government reception" to state policies. As I alluded to above, state policies constitute a key component in the *political contexts* (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Amenta et al. 2002).

State policies powerfully shape the goals, interests and interest of challengers as well as the contingent opportunities and constraints that they encounter as they struggle for greater political incorporation in the U.S. As Amenta et al. (2002:67) point out,

[S]tate policies can encourage, discourage, shape, or transform challengers because policies influence the flow of collective benefits to identifiable groups. In addition, by designating officially sanctioned and legitimated beneficiaries and by power of categorization, policies also help to define and redefine social groups (2002:67).

Furthermore, "specific state policies may frame a debate such that social movement actors are forced to fight over the implementation of a specific policy" (Amenta et al. 2002:68). Immigrant groups, if they want to achieve real voice in the political system—that is, representation and decision making power beyond the symbolic or token "voice" that the system offers or defines for them—have to overcome not only physical and material barriers to incorporation but also discursive/ideological barriers to incorporation.

Operating alongside or in conjunction with state policies, the mass media and their framing of issues constitute a major part of the *cultural contexts* (Gamson and Meyer 1996). At any given time and place, the mass media may produce or reproduce a particular "episodic discourse" (Moaddel 1992) that either legitimizes or delegitimizes the social problem claims of specific interest groups and challengers. The social identities of interest groups/challengers could also affect the legitimacy of their claims.

Given that many (not all) immigrant groups, especially refugees, arrive with relatively low financial capital, what types of group-based resources could they access or develop? In response to disadvantages, discrimination or exclusion, immigrant groups may form and turn to co-ethnic communities for linguistic, social and economic support (Portes and Zhou 1992, 1993). Depending on how developed they are, ethnic communities could provide various forms of capital that, in turn, support immigrant group adaptation and advancement. For instance, formal organizations may emerge and some may provide important economic/welfare, linguistic, religious, and potentially political support for immigrants (Breton 1964). In her work on contemporary Chinese American communities, Min Zhou (2009:10) draws on Breton's (1964) concept of "institutional completeness"³² and refines it to include the following additional aspects: 1. "the density and diversity of local institutions"; 2. "coethnicity" or "the ethnic dominance of an institution's ownership, leadership, and/or membership"; and 3. "the class composition of an institution's membership" (2009:11). Zhou argues that "an ethnic enclave's institutional completeness, along with a significant presence of the coethnic middle class, positively influences immigrant adaptation *through tangible resources provided by ethnic institutions and intangible resources, such as social capital, formed by institutional involvement*" (2009:11, emphasis added).

Formal organizations can be thought of as an important component of the *infrastructure* of an ethnic community. But two other crucial factors comprise this infrastructure: the ethnic

³² Breton (1964) does not provide a formal definition for institutional completeness, but uses the term to refer to the number and diversity of ethnic-specific organizations that service an ethnic community's various secular and nonsecular needs (welfare, health, education, language, consumption, etc.). Breton interviewed 350 male adult immigrants representing 30 ethnic immigrant communities (mostly European, but also American Indian and South African; no Asian), in order to try to determine whether *the presence and number of formal organizations* affected immigrants' tendency to affiliate with the ethnic or 'native' group. He focused on three types of formal organizations: religious, publications, and social welfare organizations. One of Breton's conclusions is that "what most differentiates one community from another in its capacity to control social integration of its members is not so much its having many formal organizations as having some as opposed to none at all" (1964:201).

social structure and ethnic leaders. The specific relationships between persons embedded within the network of social relations or social structure may undergo changes, but the structural form of this network of relations is likely to remain relatively stable over time (Radcliffe-Brown 1940) and in the case of Hmong, even after several international migrations. It is the ethnic group's social structure that sustains and is sustained by intense, regular co-ethnic interactions and their sense of trust, mutual obligation and ethnic solidarity. Moreover, it is the norms of mutual obligations within the social structure that can give rise to and sustain various forms of traditional kinship networks within an ethnic community. For instance, networks comprised of inter-personal, person-to-lineage ties, person-to-maternal or paternal clan ties, etc. Furthermore, ethnic leaders, especially if they already possess legitimate authority,³³ may be able to utilize and recruit members from traditional kinship networks to organize issue- or interest-specific groups. Ethnic members need not be the only members of such groups, but they can make up the core. Taken together, formal organizations, ethnic social structure, and ethnic leaders constitute what I shall refer to as the *ethnic infrastructure* of an identifiable ethnic community.

To be more clear about what politically relevant resources entail, we should distinguish between endogenous and exogenous resources. *Endogenous* resources refer to an ethnic group's internally derived forms of material resources (aka human and financial capital), social and demographic resources (social capital), and discursive resources (cultural-symbolic capital). Whereas the sociological literature on immigrant assimilation has tended to emphasize the material resources and more recently, the social resources that an immigrant group brings with it to the host society, the same body of literature has paid much less attention to a group's internally derived discursive resources. In this dissertation, I take Hmong's political narratives

³³ I am using the phrase "legitimate authority" to mean what Max Weber (1978) means by "legitimate domination." Weber explains that individuals legitimize domination over others (in order to remain in power), through three types of authority: rational-legal; traditional; or charismatic authority.

to be a crucial source of their discursive resources. Political narratives are crucial because they are the raw materials from which collective action frames can be formulated. *Exogenous* resources refer to the resources that exist outside of the ethnic community. These resources include the mass media, political parties, formal civic or legal organizations, state representatives, businesses, etc. An immigrant group's access to endogenous and exogenous resources is shaped by their contexts of exit and reception.

Immigrant or national origin groups differ from one another primarily in terms of their contexts of exit and contexts of reception (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The task of coming up with a singular theoretical model that can account for various forms of “immigrant” political incorporation is made extremely difficult, if not impossible, largely because immigrant groups differ significantly from each other with respect to their contexts of exit and contexts of reception. A comparison between two immigrant groups—former Southeast Asian and Cuban refugees—will help to clarify this.

The Cuban refugees of the 1960s are especially unique, not only among refugees but also as among post-1965 Latin American immigrants (Torres 1999:74-75),³⁴ in terms of the educational and occupational skills that Cuban refugees brought with them and in terms of their reception by the U.S. government and public. As Alejandro Portes explains,

Together with a strong attachment to their past identities and values, most Cubans brought qualities that have proven useful in their adaptation to U.S. society—among them a high level of educational attainment, occupational skills in demand in this country, and a ‘middle-class’ ethic and style of life generally similar to that shared by the established sectors of American society. The skills and qualities that this formerly powerful group had to offer in the U.S. and the host society's receptivity to them combined to produce a fast process of structural assimilation and a rapid movement in the American socioeconomic hierarchy (1969:507-508).

³⁴ In many ways, the Cuban American community of Miami has been unlike any other immigrant community, not even other Cuban American communities in the U.S.

The Cuban refugees of the 1960s were so economically successful that by the 1970s many became the owners of firms that provided jobs to later waves of Cuban refugees (K.L. Wilson and Portes 1980). Whereas Cuban refugees of the early 1960s were well received by both the U.S. government and to some extent, the American public (Zucker and Zucker 1996; Skop 2008), Southeast Asian refugees of the infamous Vietnam War encountered early opposition from U.S. Congressional officials (amidst White House support for their admission) and even stronger nativist sentiments from American residents (Schaefer and Schaefer 1975; Hein 1993).

But besides their extraordinary class background³⁵ and generally positive reception, Cuban refugees had another major advantage over Southeast Asian refugees. Because Cuba is 90 miles south of Florida's shores and significant Cuban immigration to the U.S. had begun in the mid-1800s, by 1959, there were already close to 70,000 Cubans living in the U.S. (Perez 1986:127). The presence of U.S. Cuban communities³⁶ meant that many of the post-1960 Cuban refugees destined for the U.S. did not have to compete with established residents for physical and social spaces to carve out ethnic communities from scratch.³⁷ In sharp contrast, there was virtually no preexisting Southeast Asian community to provide assistance to the first wave of Vietnamese, Cambodian, or Laotian refugees.

Finally, Cuban Americans' high concentration of co-ethnics and Cuban-owned business firms in Miami, which characterizes the Cuban "ethnic enclave,"³⁸ sets them apart from most

³⁵ As Perez (1986:129) notes, "It has been estimated that among Cubans arriving in this country from 1960 to 1962, up to 37 percent of household heads were proprietors, managers, or professionals."

³⁶ Perez (1992:84) writes: "In the nineteenth century, sizable Cuban communities thrived in New York, Key West, New Orleans, and in Ybor City on the outskirts of Tampa. New York, which contained one of the earliest Cuban-American communities in the nineteenth century, was still the premier destination for migrants from the island in the period between World War II and the rise of the Castro government"

³⁷ Not all Cuban refugees settled in Miami but a majority did.

³⁸ Sociologists have not always used/defined the term "ethnic enclave" consistently, but they usually mean to refer to "ethnic economy." Waldinger (1993:447) points out that prior to the appearance of the term "ethnic enclave" in 1980, some scholars were using the terms "immigrant enclave economy" and "ethnic enclave economy"; however,

other Asian and Latin immigrant groups of the 1980s that have tended to be more geographically dispersed. Many of the 805,000 Cubans who immigrated to the U.S. between 1959 and 1983 settled in Miami, Florida (Perez 1986:131). And despite the efforts of the Cuban Refugee Program to disperse Cuban refugees, many relocated to southern Florida from other northern U.S. cities, usually after having accumulated enough capital to start their own small businesses (Perez 1992). By 1980, Wilson and Portes observed, “Numerical concentration and diversity of economic activities allow many [Cuban] immigrants to lead lives restricted almost completely to the enclave” (1980:304). The economically and politically influential Cuban community in Miami became defined by whites as a threat to their cultural, economic and political position, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s many non-Hispanic whites responded by moving out of Miami-Dade County (Grenier and Stepick 1992). The black community also felt threatened and many blacks “resented that the federal Cuban Refugee Program afforded the newcomers greater help than state and local relief programs” (Zucker and Zucker 1996:33). Despite the new racial and economic inequalities that emerged in the Miami area, by the early 1990s, “economic globalization [had] brought with it a corporate elite of firms that operate on a vast, worldwide scale,” turning Miami into a “global city” (Sassen and Portes 1993).

The Miami Cubans’ extraordinary level of concentrated political resources facilitated their engagements in electoral politics in the U.S. As Maria de los Angeles Torres (1999:123) points out, “By 1992 there were eight Cuban state legislators, two state senators, and one congressional representative from South Florida in office. All were Republican.” In 1989, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), whom the *New York Times* described as a “Cuban-born Republican”

prior to that, sociologists had used “ethnic economy.” According to Wilson and Portes (1980:302), “[a] necessary condition for the emergence of an economic enclave is the presence of immigrants with sufficient capital.”

ran a “bitter” race against Gerald Richman (D), a “Brooklyn-born Jew.”³⁹ In the end, Ros-Lehtinen won and become the first Hispanic woman and the first Cuban American to be elected to the U.S. Congress as the U.S. Representative from Florida’s 27th district. What is also remarkable about Ros-Lehtinen’s win is that it came 166 years after the first Hispanic was elected to the U.S. Congress (Joseph Marion Hernandez was elected from the then-Florida Territory and served as U.S. Representative from 1822-1823). Ros-Lehtinen’s win indicated the unique political power that the Cuban communities of Florida have wielded since the 1980s.

Moreover, since 1985 Cuban Americans have maintained an almost uninterrupted hold on the mayorship of the city of Miami, Florida.⁴⁰ Between 1996 and 2012, three Cuban Americans served as county mayors of Miami-Dade County. Since 1981, Miami’s two neighboring cities, Hialeah and Hialeah Gardens, have elected no less than four Cuban Americans as their mayors.⁴¹ According to Susan Eckstein (2009:94), “As of 2000, Cuban Americans held one-third of the top appointed positions in the county, more than any other ethnic group.” If we count all Cuban Americans elected to local, state, and federal offices outside of Miami-Dade County, the list of Cuban elected officials would be a substantial one.⁴² In contrast to the Cuban Americans in Miami, few Asian American or non-Cuban Latino communities have achieved the level of electoral success that Cubans of Miami have.

The political experiences of Cubans lend support to the claim that groups with more political resources are more likely to be outreached to and mobilized by established political actors than groups with fewer political resources, because political actors need valued resources

³⁹ New York Times, "First Cuban-American Elected to Congress," *New York Times*, August 30, 1989.

⁴⁰ Between 1985 and 2012, four Cuban immigrants served as mayors of Miami. The first Cuban-born person to become mayor of Miami was Xavier L. Suarez (Republican, served 1985-1993, 1997-1998). The current mayor of Miami is Tomas Pedro Regalado (Republican, 2009-Present), who was born in Havana, Cuba.

⁴¹ These include Mayors Raul Martinez (served 1981-2005 in Hialeah), Julio Robaina (served 2005-2011 in Hialeah), Carlos Hernandez (2011-Present in Hialeah); and Yioiset De La Cruz (2000-Present in Hialeah Gardens).

⁴² The author does not know of any publicly available exhaustive list of Cuban American elected officials.

with which to compete in the political system (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Torres (1999:115) points out that “key Republicans had been eyeing the Cuban-American community as early as 1980. This was especially the case among members of the New Right, whose ideology coincided with the conservatism many Cuban-Americans had shown in their past political involvement on foreign policy issues.” During the 1992 presidential campaigns, for instance, both George W. Bush and Bill Clinton actively sought out Cuban Americans in Florida, for their votes as well as their contributions (Torres 1999). Politically influential organizations such as the Cuban American National Foundation, for their part, took advantage of the opportunity to lobby the presidential candidates to support the passage of the Cuban Democracy Act (which passed in 1992). The Cuban-American National Foundation “had made the legislation its top priority and contributed \$500,000 to key congressional representatives and candidates” (Torres 1999:146). “Bush, facing a close election, signed the bill in the hope of improving his chances in Florida....[and] Clinton...endorsed the legislation prior to its signing” (Torres 1999:146).

The Cubans of Miami are unique from other immigrant communities in yet another important way. Cuban refugees’ mode of insertion into the U.S. differed from that of many other post-1965 immigrants. As Carlos Forment (1989:50) argues, “the [Cuban] emigres entered the United States through political channels.” This “[distinct] mode of insertion,”⁴³ Forment suggests, came to have important consequences on “Cuban-American group and identity

⁴³ Forment is not absolutely clear on what he means by political insertion, but he seems to be referring generally to the convergence of interests between anti-Castro Cuban immigrants and the U.S. government, with respect to the overthrow of Cuba. In his article, Forment contends that it was the U.S. state-sponsored movements to overthrow Cuba that unintentionally “laid the foundations” for the “[transformation of] the émigré community into a ‘moral community’ in which political convictions would play as large a role as market mechanisms in the daily affairs of its residents” (1989:59-60). By foundations, Forment was referring to the material and ideological resources Cubans were able to amass: “If the emigres were able to exchange their elite backgrounds for entrepreneurial currency in the United States, it was because of their political insertion into their new country” (1989:62). He claims that anti-revolutionary Cubans immigrants’ misappropriated U.S. CIA equipment and funds in order to accumulate “entrepreneurial capital” (1989:63), that promoted the growth of the Cuban economy in Miami.

formation” (1989:50). By implication, Cuban refugees’ unique relationship with the United States government also came to influence their political orientation and political influence.

According to a group of Cuban American scholars,

On matters of foreign policy regarding Cuba, the Miami-Dade city-state has enjoyed the equivalent of power sharing with the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government. Consequently, the overall power of the Cuban-American enclave resembles the political, economic, social and cultural resources of what is effectively a separate nation-state that shapes, influences and ultimately controls public opinion within it.⁴⁴

The evidence to date suggests that Southeast Asian American communities do not have the same kind of political influence that Cuban American communities such as the one in Miami have.

Even in cities were particular Southeast Asian subgroups—Vietnamese in Westminster, California—have achieved several elected offices, their influence at the state and federal levels remains much more limited compared to the influence that Cuban Americans wield.

Owing largely to their contexts of exit and to conditions in their underdeveloped countries, Southeast Asian former refugees came to the United States with a lot less resources than Cuban refugees of the 1960s did. But even among Southeast Asian refugees, ethnic groups differ in terms of the levels of resources (especially in terms of educational and occupational skills) that they arrived with. Vietnamese refugees, on the average, were the most economically resourceful group among post-1975 Southeast Asian refugees.⁴⁵ On the other hand, Cambodian and Laotian refugees (of which Hmong are a part), on average, were the least economically

⁴⁴ Brief of Nelson P. Valdes, Guillermo Grenier, Felix Masud-Piloto, Jose A. Cobas, Lourdes Arguelles, Ruben Rumbaut, and Louis Perez as Amicus Curiae, *Ruben Campa, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Gerardo Hernandez, and Luis Medina v. United States of America*, No. 08-987, p. 6. Retrieved December 20, 2012 from: <http://www.freethethefive.org/legalFront/amicuscuban-american-scholars.pdf>

⁴⁵ Earlier ‘waves’ of Southeast Asian refugees were generally more economically resourceful than later waves of refugees, largely because they were the military or political elites and middle-class or educated multilingual professionals who worked most closely with the U.S. covert or overt armies in their former homelands (for a government assessment of early Vietnamese refugees’ educational and occupational background, see Marsh 1980). However, within each Southeast Asian refugee category (Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian), there are internal differences not only in terms of socioeconomic resources, but also in terms of ethnicity, language, generation, religion, regional origin, etc.

resourceful. Secondly, the Vietnamese refugee population was and remains several times larger than that of Cambodian and Laotian refugees. Given Hmong Americans' relatively small population size and low average socioeconomic standing, it seems reasonable to expect that they will have to use a combination of endogenous and exogenous resources in order to effectively engage in collective political action.

Analytical Model of Immigrant Political Incorporation and Assumptions

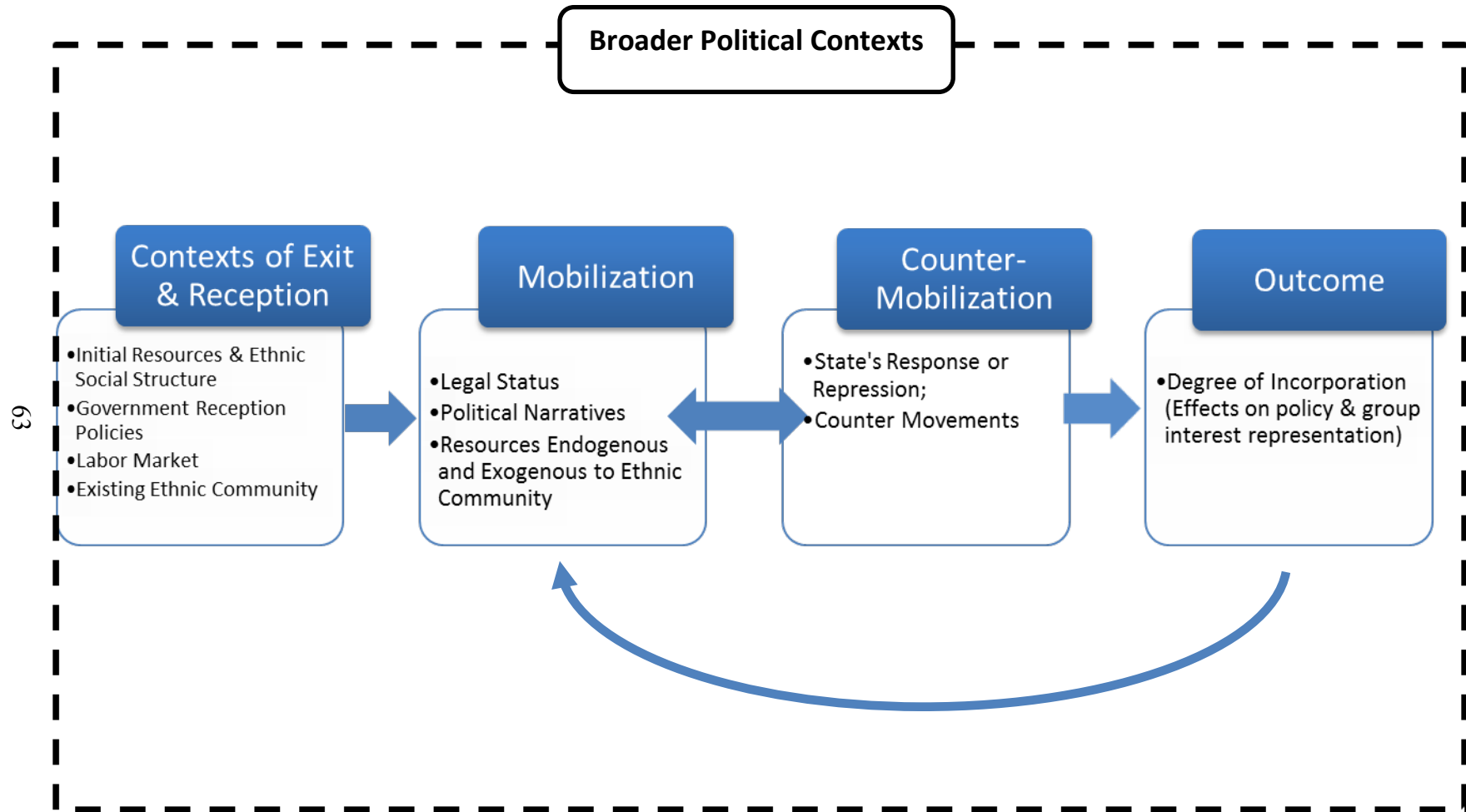
I am now ready to present my model of collective mobilization and political incorporation (please refer to the diagram on the next page). I argue that a large part of an immigrant group's ability to participate and become more politically incorporated in the political system of the host society has to do with an immigrant group's level of **politically relevant resources** (electorate*, time, money, civic skills, especially organizational capacity, sense of efficacy, etc.). It is worth emphasizing that, in order for resources to be politically relevant, they usually must be considered by dominant political actors in the host society to be valuable--that is, deemed as things worth competing for. Groups with *discretionary* resources are more likely to be outreached to and mobilized by more established political actors (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), because political actors need valued resources especially when confronting the much more resourceful state. An immigrant group's **contexts of exit** and the **contexts of reception** affect its access to socioeconomic resources, as Portes, Zhou, and Rumbaut have theorized and as many empirical studies have affirmed.

However, socially valued resources are not the only things that matter for political participation and political incorporation. Beyond resources, **political contexts** and **episodic discourses** also matter a great deal. Political contexts matter because the processes (there are multiple, interconnected processes) of immigrant political incorporation in the United States are

often shaped or affected by both domestic and foreign policies. The U.S. government is concerned as much about ‘controlling’ the composition of immigrants through selective immigration policies as it is concerned about managing its national security and *image* in the ‘international community.’ The state may prioritize domestic and/or foreign policies (bi- and multilateral policies) that it thinks will serve to improve its impression, even when these policies are harmful to certain immigrant groups already inside its borders.

Episodic discourses matter for political incorporation for at least two reasons: 1) Dominant discourses often dismiss or ignore the structural/systemic sources of social problems, furthering marginalizing minority groups and causing minorities to engage in collective political action. 2) To challenge the status quo and request that ameliorative action be taken, challengers engage simultaneously in counter-discourses and social problem construction. Discourses, a product of the interaction between dominant and counter-narratives, matter because the processes of immigrant political incorporation in the U.S. are highly selective and racially biased.

Conceptual Model of Immigrant Political Incorporation



What makes political incorporation a highly selective process is not just the fact that most immigrants need to possess the right combination of valued resources in order to immigrate to the U.S. or be recruited to participate in its political institutions. Rather, political incorporation is highly selective in the sense that only certain discourses or claims will ever be heard by the state. And of those claims that the state decides to hear, only some will be taken seriously and possibly acted upon. To be heard by the state, an immigrant group (whether refugees or non-refugees) usually has to invoke a discourse that the state deems important enough to its contemporary politics *not* to be ignored—whatever these politics may be in a given historical period. Being heard (listened to) by the state is one of the first conditions for an immigrant group’s contingent political incorporation into the nation. But being heard does not ensure that a group or its concerns will automatically be taken seriously or be acted upon.

If and when the state decides to take action on a challenger’s social problem, the result of that action could have no or little effect, mixed effect, or some positive effect on state policies. Whether the effect on state policy is negative or positive, it could have some **feedback effects** on an immigrant group’s legal status, their socioeconomic resources, or their organizational infrastructure. Changes to state policies may, for example, make it easier or harder to become naturalized, to find and keep stable jobs, or to obtain funding for existing community-based organizations.

Having stated how the model of immigrant political incorporation might work, I wish now to make more explicit some of my normative assumptions. I assume that most Hmong former refugees and their U.S.-born children want to be included—that is, have their grievances heard and interests represented—in the United States political system. Secondly, I assume that

some degree of incorporation into the political system is possible, however limited or selective such incorporation may be.

However, I do not assume that the United States, or any state for that matter, has its own model of political incorporation. Rather, as Jan Willem Duyvendak points out, “Countries don’t have models but messy combinations of pragmatic policies, some ideological notions, imitation and copying behavior, et cetera” (cited in Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009:30)). Just as it is not analytically useful to speak of a monolithic “ethnic group,” it is not appropriate to assume a homogeneous “state” or “political system” that ‘acts’ or responds to challengers. In the subsequent chapters, I try to be specific about which segment or segments of the political system is (are) doing what to which set of social actors or groups, and what outcome(s) result from their social interactions.

Finally, I assume that an ethnic immigrant group’s degree of political inclusion in (segments of) the political system is not simply the result of its own efforts but rather the outcome of the interactions between supportive and antagonistic groups or organizations involved in contentious politics. Political participation as much as political incorporation are social processes (Hochschild and Mollenkopf 2009). They shape and are shaped by the interactions of human actors who are embedded in what Bert Klandermans (1992) calls “multi-organizational fields.” The chapters of my dissertation seek to describe and analyze the complex social processes through which a group becomes more politically incorporated in the face of the state’s practices of indifference and disincorporation. In order to be “heard” by the political system, social actors and groups must enter into relationships with the state and its institutions.

Chapter 2: History and Exile

This chapter provides background information on Hmong society with a focus on their social structure, political organization, and their contexts of exit. Three questions guide this chapter:

1) What are the basic groupings or networks of social relations that make up Hmong's segmentary social structure? 2) When did Laotian Hmong leaders and factions emerge as political actors in Laos and how did this development affect Hmong's political organization during the latter half of the 20th century? 3) What kind of relationship did a major segment of the Laotian Hmong society have with the United States military during the Second Indochina War?

The answers to these questions may help to dispel the myth of ethnic homogeneity while also helping us make sense of the political claims that social actors engage in as members of an 'ethnic group.' This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I describe Hmong's multi-generational community, their view of ethnicity, and their social structure. Then to set the stage for a discussion of their political organization, I describe Hmong's migration to and reception in Laos. I consider how Hmong's political organization changed over time as segments of Hmong society became entangled in opposing sides of the multiple wars in Laos. Finally, I describe Laotian Hmong's unique relationship with the United States during the Second Indochina War and explain what happened to the Hmong on the U.S. side in the aftermath of that war.

Society and Social Structure

Because my dissertation aims to study some complex social phenomena from the standpoint of Hmong American society, I will try to provide a concise description of the general form of Hmong's social structure as it is found both in Laos and in the U.S. But before doing so, I wish to make more explicit how I am using the concepts of "society" and "social structure." By society, I mean something akin to what Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1940) means by it: a human

community with an observable social structure. But what does Radcliffe-Brown mean by social structure? Addressing an audience of anthropologists, Radcliffe-Brown observes,

Let us consider what are the concrete, observable facts with which the social anthropologist is concerned. If we set out to study, for example, the aboriginal inhabitants of a part of Australia, we find a certain number of individual human beings in a certain natural environment. We can observe the acts of behaviour of these individuals, including, of course, their acts of speech, and the material products of past actions. We do not observe a “culture,” since that word denotes, not any concrete reality, but an abstraction, and as is commonly used a vague abstraction. But direct observation does reveal to us that these *human beings are connected by a complex network of social relations* (1940:2, emphasis added).

Radcliffe-Brown makes clear that “[he] use[s] the term ‘social structure’ to denote this network of actually existing relations” (1940:2). Radcliffe-Brown makes a further distinction between “[social] structure as an actually existing concrete reality” and the “structural form” of a social community. The key difference between them is that whereas the former is something that changes over time, the latter (the form of the structure) is something that has “a continuity which is not static like that of a building, but a dynamic continuity like that of the organic structure of a living body” (1940:4). But he does not stop here.

Recognizing that “one exceedingly important aspect of structure” refers to “persistent social groups, such as nations, tribes and clans, which retain their continuity, their identity as individual groups, in spite of changes in their membership,” Radcliffe-Brown suggests that the term social structure includes “a good deal more than this” (1940:3). He states:

In the first place, I regard as a part of the social structure *all social relations of person to person*. For example, the kinship structure of any society consists of a number of such dyadic relations, as between a father and son, or a mother’s brother and his sister’s son. (...) Secondly, I include under social structure *the differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role*. The differential social positions of men and women, of chiefs and commoners, of employers and employees, are just as much determinants of social structure as belonging to different clans or different nations (1940:3, emphasis added).

Accordingly, I take social structure to include both the set of actually existing networks of relations and the differentiation of individuals and classes of individuals by their social role.

When I speak of “Hmong society” in the general sense I am referring to the overlapping, intertwined social networks or communities that have branched out from Laos to various states outside of Laos and stretch from the 1900s through the present.⁴⁶ A majority of the foreign-born Hmong refugees in western countries originated from Laos; however, Hmong’s international migration since the late 1970s has involved permanent and temporary movements to and from a host of states besides Laos. I understand Hmong society to be a multi-generational human community⁴⁷ with an observable social structure whose members generally identify themselves and those in the community as sharing a common ethnicity. Before describing the networks of social relations that make up Hmong’s social structure, let me try to clarify what I mean by a multi-generational community and by ethnicity.

Hmong society is multi-generational in at least two ways. First, within a typical Hmong community, whether in Laos or in the U.S., families and households are comprised of persons of different generations. These usually include grandparents (sometimes great-grandparents), parents (or, for married women, parents-in-law), children, and grandchildren. Second, Hmong communities but especially diaspora communities—i.e., communities displaced from Laos to the U.S., France, French Guyana, Australia, Canada, etc.—are made up of different generational cohorts. For instance, some persons are part of the larger cohort of Hmong who were born, raised and married in Laos but immigrated with their adult and/or young children. Others were born in Laos but immigrated as young children. Other persons are part of the cohort who were

⁴⁶ I will specify the time and place when it is necessary to distinguish one society from another.

⁴⁷ I will use “society” to refer to social life and organization at the more national or international level. I use “community” to refer to social life and organization at the more local level. Within communities, there are smaller groupings of people such as interest groups or stakeholders, leaders, bystanders, etc.

born and raised in the refugee camps of Thailand but immigrated as adults. Still, others are part of the cohort of Thailand-born Hmong who immigrated at a young age. Finally, not all generational cohorts immigrated to the U.S. during the same decade.

Within Hmong's multi-generational community, individuals and classes of individuals (social categories) are differentiated based on their social roles. Social categories, the product of social categorization, are abstract or analytical groupings that do not necessarily correspond to actual social groups. That is, the individuals so categorized do not necessarily interact with each other or identify themselves as belonging to the same group. Nevertheless, social categorization, especially when imposed by a more powerful class of people on a less powerful class of people, can function to organize or determine individual behavior, relationships and access to opportunities. Social categories vary in terms of their degree of ranked/unranked ordering; they may or may not overlap with other social categories, and they may function as more or less definitive organizers of behavior in society.

Within Hmong society, relatively ranked social categories include social class (formally educated class vs. non-educated, officials vs. commoners, rich vs. poor, etc.), cultural class (i.e., cultural specialists vs. non-specialists), gender (men vs. women), and age (seniors, adults, children). But relatively unranked social categories also pervade the society. These include cultural-linguistic categories (Mong Leng or Hmong Der), cultural-religious categories (traditional religion or adopted religion), kinship categories (kins or affines), and clans (Her, Lee, Moua, Thao, Yang, etc.). Hmong speakers use specific terms to refer to these categorical identities.⁴⁸ Of the above categories, class, gender, age, and clan organize social behavior to a

⁴⁸ Native speakers commonly refer to followers of traditional religion as *cov coj kev cai dab qhua* (literally, practitioners of spirits-guests) and to adopted religion such as Christianity as *cov coj kev cai tshiab* (practitioners of new religion). Within traditional religion, Hmong make further distinctions between *Hmoob laug* ('ancient Hmong') and *Hmoob tshiab* ('new Hmong').

greater extent than other categories do. But the important thing is that a complex combination of social categorical identities constitutes an individual's situational identity.

Ethnicity

The first part of Max Weber's definition of ethnicity fits quite well with most Hmong adults' emic perspective of their ethnic origin. Specifically, Weber defines ethnic groups as "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation" (1978:389). Most Hmong adults share the belief that they are a group of people who descended from an ancient female and male ancestor (*ib tug pog yawg*). Hmong do not have a name for this ancient couple; however, cultural specialists do make reference to the mythical first couple during wedding ceremonial songs: *Niam Laj Sab* and *Txiv Sab Sua*.⁴⁹ According to Hmong wedding songs of re-creation, it was this mythical ancestor who gave birth to the parents (*Niam Puj Txig* and *Txij Yawm*) of the first incestuous couple, *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus*. Variants of Hmong myths of re-creation tell about how *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus*, in turn, gave birth to an egg-shaped living flesh (*Tub Liaj lwg Qhwv mwg*). According to this myth, the individual Hmong clans eventually emerged from the dismembered flesh of *Tub Liaj lwg Qhwv mwg* in order to populate the earth (See Appendix A for one version of the Hmong myth of re-creation).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ N. P. Xiong, personal communication, February 15, 2010, Marysville, California. Xiong is a 66-year old cultural specialist and teacher of *zaj tshoob*, *txiv xaiv*, and *qeej* who was born in Luang Prabang province, Laos. According to Xiong, the names of the original female-male ancestor couples are identified in one of the Hmong wedding songs, which is still sung by specialists (*mej koob*) during traditional Hmong weddings. Many of these specialists are Hmong former refugees who now reside in the U.S. Xiong points out that in one of traditional wedding songs, *Zaj Tsim Noob Neej* (re-creation of humans), the identification of these original ancestors' names forms part of the riddles that a *mej koob* may be asked to solve. This song normally follows *Zaj Tsim Ntuj Tsim Teb* (creation of the earth) song. Based on N. P. Xiong's own experiences and his discussions with other senior specialists, these female-male ancestor couples are as follows: *Nkauj Mim thiab Nraug Nus*, whose parents were *Niam Puj Txig thiab Txij Yawm*; the parents of *Niam Puj Txig thiab Txij Yawm* were *Niam Laj Sab thiab Txiv Sab Sua*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

However, the second part of Weber’s definition, which is that “it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists” (1978:389) does not fit with foreign-born Hmong adults’ emic perspective of how a person comes to be and remain Hmong. In the Hmong context, blood ties matter. This is the case because Hmong trace ethnicity patrilineally—that is, through the male line (Leepreecha 2001). Specifically, a person inherits his/her ethnicity from his/her biological father, who, in turn, inherits his ethnicity from his biological father, and so on. This blood relationship also applies to clan membership: a person inherits his or her clan name from his/her biological father and even in the rare event that he/she later changes clan membership, he/she is still strictly prohibited from marrying anybody from his/her natal clan.

Interestingly, although Hmong myths articulate the belief in common descent, they do not articulate a belief in shared language. As far as I can tell and based on my conversations with Hmong cultural specialists, Hmong myths and oral traditions⁵¹ do not make any reference to the origin of Hmong language. Nor do these myths make reference to the origin of human languages in general. Given this, it seems that Hmong simply take language (or speech), along with cultural custom (*kab lis kev cai*), to be one of the ‘assumed givens’ of ethnicity. That Hmong have never articulated the belief in a shared language has not stopped contemporary researchers or activists from *using* language as a key marker of Hmong ethnicity or a delimiter of Hmong ethnic boundary, however. The anthropologist Jacques Lemoine (2008), for instance, argues that tracing Hmong populations and migrations by their language is necessary in order to objectively study Hmong history. And as my case study on the Mong Federation’s social movement (Chapter 7) will show, since 2002, at least one Hmong American group in the United States has invoked dialect as an ethnic marker and mobilized collective action around dialect inequality.

⁵¹ Following Lemoine (2008:14), I include as part of Hmong oral traditions their poetry, music, and prose.

From the standpoint of many in the present era, Hmong persons' connectedness or groupness as an *ethnic* group would seem to stretch indefinitely into the past. After all, 'Hmong' have been through one of the most tumultuous struggles as a 'group' in Laos and they have shared the experience of being a refugee people in Thailand. Now that hundreds of thousands of Hmong live in modern western states, many of which make belonging to an *ethnic* group a political necessity, the belief that Hmong have always had a coherent ethnic identity might appear incontestable to some. Specific events of the past half century, however, suggest that Hmong ethnicity has hardly stood still for very long. As the development of Hmong ethnicity is important for understanding their contemporary ethnic politics, I discuss it next.

Hmong ethnicity has been the product of both external categorization and internal identification. Contemporary observers believe, based on their reading of Chinese and/or Western written records, that the Hmong ethnic group historically was and still is subsumed under a generic Chinese category: Miao (Enwall 1994; Diamond 1995; Nicholas 2002; Culas and Michaud 2004; Tapp, Michaud, Culas, and Lee 2004). Native and non-native scholars alike debate the meanings of "Miao." Some suggest that the term carries negative denotations such as barbarians, savages, uncivilized people, etc. Others suggest that Miao lacks negative denotations but could have neutral (e.g., "sons of the soil") or negative connotations ('cat') depending on the social contexts (Enwall 1994). Most seem to agree that Miao, a label whose prefixes and suffixes have varied over time, refers to "a culturally and linguistically diverse category of non-Han peoples" (Diamond 1995:99). According to Norma Diamond (1995:108), after 1949, "Miao was defined as a single entity," lumping together various disparate minority groups within China.

Since Hmong's first documented migration from China to Southeast Asia in about 1860, the dominant ethnic groups there (French, Tai, Vietnamese, Lao) have labeled Hmong, "Meo."

Hmong native speakers, however, call themselves “*Hmoob*” or “*Moob*”—the former term is used by speakers of Hmong Der dialect while the latter is used by speakers of Mong Leng dialect. Laotian-born Hmong adults who find the term Meo offensive point out that the dominant Lao had generally looked down on Hmong and that the Lao word for cat, ຄູ່ (‘meow’), is pronounced “the same as” Meo.⁵² This “Meo straightjacket,” as Jacques Lemoine (2008:8) calls it, was not stripped off of Hmong until the 1970s.

Although neither Lemoine (2008) nor anyone else has tried to chart how the shift from Meo to Hmong occurred, I want to suggest that the Laotian nationalist movement of the 1950s - 1970s created the conditions that enabled this shift to occur. Beginning in the 1950s, the Pathet Lao (‘The Land of the Lao’) nationalists,⁵³ as part of their efforts to mobilize popular support for the revolutionary movement and war effort, adopted⁵⁴ and popularized a tri-partite categorization system: Lao Loum (meaning “lowland Lao”), Lao Theung (“midland Lao”), and Lao Soung (“highland Lao”) (G.Y. Lee 1982). These nationality categories lumped together Laotian ethnic groups believed to have similar topographical residence (Noonan 2011) or, as Pholsena (2002) suggests was the rationale, groups believed to have a similar level of civilization. Ethnic Lao and Tai groups were grouped in the Lao Loum category. Khmou were categorized in the Lao Theung category. Finally, ethnic Hmong, Yao, and other “hilltribes” were put in the Lao Soung category.

⁵² As M.N.M. Lee (1998:17) explains, “There are conflicting opinions as to whether ‘Meo’ means cat in Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese. In the written form, ‘Meo’ most probably is not the same word as cat in these languages. However, with the slightest variation in pronunciation, when spoken the word ‘Meo’ can be easily exploited to be the same word as cat, and can conveniently serve the purpose of belittling Hmong people -- thus the aversion of the Hmong to the term ‘Meo.’ ...[T]his is similar to how the word ‘negro’ functions in American society.”

⁵³ The Pathet Lao was made up of various ethnic peoples—Lao, Hmong, Khmou, and Tai—in Laos and Vietnam who fought against the U.S.-backed Royal Lao Government (see Stuart-Fox 1997:109).

⁵⁴ According to G. Y. Lee (1982), “Toulia [Lyfoung] was responsible for getting the [Royal Lao Government] to adopt the terms ‘Lao Soung’ to refer to Hmong and Yao hill-top dwellers, ‘Lao Theung’ for those inhabiting the lower slopes and ‘Lao Loum’ for the Lao of lowlands. These official designations, however, have become popular only with the Pathet Lao.”

But this categorization system did more than over simplify the complex ethno-linguistic diversity and stratification in Laos. First, by emphasizing the prefix term “Lao” in these categories rather than their hyphen or suffix, this system emphasized Lao national unity and shared struggle (Trankell 1998:47). As Richard Noonan (2011:2) points out, “This classification was originally adopted partly for political purposes, to show that all ethnic groups were part of the Lao nation.” Secondly, the terms Lao Soung and Lao Theung served as euphemisms for the pejorative labels, Meo and Khaa⁵⁵ that were imposed on the Hmong and Khmou, respectively (Zuckerman 2012:15). The new categories—Lao Loum, Lao Theung and Lao Soung—were more in line with the prevailing political thought and policy at the time. The Lao PDR used this classification system from the late 1950s until the early 1990s when “it was abandoned in the 1991 [Lao PDR] constitution, and the 1992 Central Party Resolution on Ethnic Minorities recommended that these topographical categories should no longer be used” (Noonan 2011:2). Despite its official erasure, many Laotians still use it informally.

Beginning in the late 1950s, Laotian Hmong but especially those influenced by the armed Laotian revolutionary/nationalist movement of that period began to protest the use of the Meo label and demanded that they be called “Lao Soung.” Through my interview with a Hmong veteran of the Laotian civil war who, prior to serving close to 10 years in the U.S. CIA’s Secret Army under General Vang Pao’s command, lived in a village⁵⁶ controlled by the communist side, I learned that the promotion of the new social categories was part of Pathet Lao nationalists’ mobilization efforts. According to my informant, in about 1961 (when the U.S. CIA became increasingly involved in the Laotian Civil War), Hmong recruiters from the communist side visited their village. In their propaganda speeches to villagers, recruiters condemned the

⁵⁵ The label “Khaa” is considered by many to mean ‘slave’ (see Pholsena 2006:89).

⁵⁶ The village was “*pam meeb*” (Ban Pangmeng), which was located in the Muang Xay district (now Udomxai district) within Oudomxai Province, Laos. Khmou comprised the major ethnic group in Oudomxai Province.

dominant Lao's use of the terms Meo and Kha (or *phub qham*) to refer to Hmong and Khmou respectively. The recruiters, who insisted that Lao Soung and Lao Theung be used instead, called upon Hmong and other ethnic minorities to stand up for their rights (*vaj huam*), and threatened that any Laotian who continued to use such derogatory labels would be shot or killed. To be sure, the Pathet Lao nationalist movement replaced Meo with only "Lao Soung," not the Romanized "Hmong." Nevertheless, the politically sanctioned replacement of Meo with Lao Soung created the crucial condition for Hmong to emerge in the 1970s. As the Pathet Lao gained greater military and political control over Laos in the late 1960s, the intentional use of the Meo or Khaa labels became not only unpopular but dangerous. According to my informant, after "Lao Soung" gained prominence, Lao villagers began greeting Hmong visitors with a new phrase, "*aim nooj mas*" (*brother comes*), instead of the previous, "Meo mas" (*Meo comes*).

But other social forces besides the nationalist movement in Laos were crucial to the gradual emergence of "Hmong" as an ethnic label. Just as vernacular language and print capitalism helped give rise to the idea of the imagined community (Anderson 1983), the Hmong ethnic label grew gradually out of the combined influence of Christian missionary work especially literacy and of Hmong's movements for political visibility during and after the Laotian civil war. Although the Latinized term "Hmong" first appeared in 1924 with the French Catholic missionary François Savina's (1924) *Histoire Des Miao*, it was not until the mid-1960s that the same term became used consistently to refer to the ethnic group. About a decade before the mid-1960s, French and American missionaries had already created and begun using a Hmong writing system based on Roman alphabets to teach the Bible to Hmong for the main purpose of proselytizing them (Duffy 2007:111-112). Yves Bertrais, one of the inventors of the Hmong Roman Popular Alphabets (Hmong RPA), was one of the first to point out that "*les Méos*

préfèrent s'entendre appeler 'Hmong'” (Bertrais and Charrier 1964:77). It was not a coincidence then that from 1964 through the 1990s, Bertrais and his collaborators consistently used the term “Hmong” as the equivalent to the Hmong RPA term, *Hmoob*, to refer to the ethnic group (Bertrais and Charrier 1964; Bertrais 1978; Bertrais and Association communauté Hmong 1986; Bertrais, Ya Nzong, and Association Communauté Hmong 1992). Equally important, the Hmong RPA, in the decades following 1975, became the most popular means of long-distance communication among Hmong letter writers, regardless of their religious background.⁵⁷ This occurred despite the availability of another major indigenous writing system, *Ntawv Phaj Hauj* (Pahawh) (Smalley, Vang, and Yang 1990). Ethnic members’ wide acceptance and use of the Hmong RPA served as internal legitimacy for the Latinized “Hmong” ethnic label.

Furthermore, the mid-1960s coincided with the period of Laotian Hmong’s increased visibility as an ethnic group as a major segment of their population fought on the U.S.-supported Royal Lao Government side of the Laotian civil war. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a few researchers studying Laotian Hmong society (Lemoine 1972; D. Yang 1975) and journalists (Garrett 1974) who were sympathetic to Hmong’s struggles in Laos perceived and took the opportunity to forego the previously imposed categories and self-consciously used Hmong’s preferred autonym, “Hmong.” Since the period of William Geddes’ (1976) *Migrants of the Mountains* and Jean Mottin’s (1980) *History of the Hmong*, most French and English-language research has made a conscious decision to use “Hmong.” Today, “Hmong” is the most common term for the ethnic group judging by its prevalence in informal writing, media and research publications and official documents such as the U.S. Census.

⁵⁷ John Duffy points out that “Instruction in the new [Hmong RPA] script emphasized reading over writing, a practice consistent with missionary literacy campaigns elsewhere.” Writing was deemphasized out of fear that writing “may lead to forms of thought and action counter to those of the official or dominant rhetoric” (2007:112).

Social Structure

According to Jacques Lemoine (2008:11-2), Hmong are traditionally a tribal as opposed to a peasant society, “characterized by the prevalence of kinship ties, social equality, and an absence of hereditary leadership.” The social structure of Hmong society is made up of persons who are part of nuclear or extended family units that, in turn, comprise lineages. Multiple lineages, in turn, comprise sub-clans and clans (Lemoine 2008:11).⁵⁸ The major clans and their English equivalent terms include *Ham* (Hang), *Hawj* (Her or Herr), *Kwm* (Kue), *Lauj* (Lao, Lo, or Lor), *Lis* (Ly or Lee), *Muas* (Moua), *Tsab* (Cha), *Thoj* (Thao or Thor), *Vaj* (Va or Vang), *Vwj* (Vue or Vu), *Xyooj* (Xiong), and *Yaj* (Yang or Ya). However, the exact total number of clans in traditional Hmong society is unknown (Kaoly Yang 2004).

Hmong clans are traditionally unranked, relatively egalitarian, and autonomous from each other. Membership in one clan or another does not automatically afford a person with greater or lesser social status as a Hmong person. This, of course, does not mean that all clan groups enjoy equal numerical strength or political influence within Hmong or Laotian society. Although most Hmong households regardless of clan in Laos were relatively equal in terms of culture, lifestyle and materials possessions, some clans have traditionally been more numerous than other clans (Kaoly Yang 2004). Figure 2-1 is a simplified illustration of the basic social groupings present in the Hmong social structure. The triangles represent individual household units, which are “the basic socioeconomic and religious units” in Hmong society (Geddes 1976:73). A typical household unit is made up of parents and their unmarried children (a family) and/or parents, their unmarried children, and married sons and their wives and children (extended family). Several

⁵⁸ Scholars who study Hmong have not consistently used the terms lineage and clan or their variants, such as sub-clan or sublineage.

household units who practice the same religious rituals comprise a ritual lineage, represented by the circle enclosed by the household units.

Beyond the ritual lineage is the sub-clan. The sub-clan is made up of multiple lineages of the same clan whose members consider each other as more closely related than others with the same clan surname usually because of their social interdependency. The broken lines representing the boundaries of the sub-clan and clan are used to suggest that the ties of sub-clan and clan members usually stretch across multiple local communities. There are multiple *interacting* clan segments within Hmong society; each clan segment encompasses the same basic social groupings (sub-clan, ritual lineage, families, etc.) represented in the figure. Finally, beyond the clan is the boundary of Hmong society or the Hmong ethnic group within a country.

[Figure 2-1 about here]

Figure 2-2 provides an overhead view of a hypothetical small Hmong American community. Represented in the figure are seven different clans (shown as colored circles of teal, yellow, green, orange, purple, red, and blue). Similar internal texture patterns, such as lines or checkered dots represent lineages that are related to one another through inter-clan marriages (shown by arrows). In Laos, small Hmong villages typically contain fewer than five clans or, more accurately, clan segments. Given the mountainous terrain, given Hmong families' dependency on sufficient plots of land for farming, and given their traditional social norms regarding housing location,⁵⁹ a single village traditionally contained no more than a handful of lineages or sub-clans.

⁵⁹ In traditional Laotian and Hmong societies, there was no formal right to land ownership, much less the right to permanent land ownership. Typically, Hmong lineages or families that, after surveying and deciding that a plot of land is sufficient and suitable for farming, settle in an area claim informal right to build houses and use the land for farming. Hmong lineages usually build houses on the slope of a single mountain with each house and yard occupying about a third of an acre of land. Once houses have been built, it is normally considered a violation of customs for any newly arrived family or lineage to build their houses on higher ground or elevation relative to the

[Figure 2-2 about here]

However, Hmong's forced displacement and dislocation throughout the 1960s and 1970s resulted in significant changes to their residential patterns. The most visible change was the concentration of hundreds of displaced Hmong families from various parts of Laos into semi-permanent "conglomerations" (Smalley 1986:10). These conglomerations "[were] characterized by the intermingling of Hmong groups who themselves did not know each other, in the same community with still other different ethnic groups (Khmu', Mien, Thai Dam, Lao)" (Smalley 1986:10). The size and location of these war-time conglomerations would change according to new military circumstances. Subsequently, they would be dwarfed by the post-1975 conglomerations formed by the Hmong refugee settlements in Thailand.

During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Hmong from entire villages fled to Thailand. There, in refugee camps such as Sop Tuang and Ban Vinai, Hmong of virtually all clan groups lived in compacted housing quarters (Long 1993). Similarly, in the U.S., it is not uncommon to find Hmong from a dozen or more clan groups living together in the same city or county. For instance, Orange County, California is home to Hmong from at least 13 different clan groups.⁶⁰ Larger Hmong communities such as those of Fresno, California contain at least 19 different clan groups.⁶¹ Hmong's political organization shapes and is shaped by historical circumstances and political environments; let us turn to this next.

top of occupied mountain. (The same rule applies in the case of burial locations). As such, a plot of land can only support a limited number of houses.

⁶⁰ The four largest clan groups in Orange County are the Lee, Moua, Vang, and Yang clans. Most Hmong families reside in four cities of the county: Anaheim, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Westminster. Source: Community contact list.

⁶¹ Determined from surnames using the *White Pages* phonebook (Fresno, California).

Hmong's Migration from China to Vietnam and Laos

Written historical records show that a minor segment of the Hmong population migrated in successive waves from Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan, China into the Southeast Asian Massif beginning in the mid-1800s (Culas and Michaud 2004).⁶² According to Christen Culas and Jean Michaud (2004:72), “the first concrete Western record of a Hmong presence in the Indochinese Peninsula dates from 1860, when several thousand Hei Miao (or Black Miao)... ‘soldiers’ were seen entering North Vietnam from Yunnan.” Hmong’s migration from China was primarily to escape conflicts with and oppression (tax extortion, corvée labor, forced assimilation) by the Qing state (Jenks 1994; Diamond 1995; M.N.M. Lee 1998; Ovesen 2004). After reaching northern Vietnam, many Hmong settled permanently. Others, however, engaged in a southeastern-ward migration into the northern parts of Laos and of Thailand; they did so for different social, economic and political reasons (Culas and Michaud 2004).

In retrospect, Hmong escaped from Qing state oppression only to find themselves, in relatively short order, under French colonial exploitation. For, during about the same time that Hmong began migrating from southern China to northern Vietnam, the French had just built its first colonial outposts in Tourane (Da Nang) and Saigon, in 1858 and 1859 respectively (M.H. Nguyen and Haines 1997:58). As some have pointed out, Hmong groups in northern Vietnam and northeastern Laos rebelled against the French and Thai lords throughout the late 1800s (1862 – 1896), between 1910-12, and between 1918-1921 (M.N.M. Lee 2005).⁶³ As I shall return to, after these rebellions were brutally suppressed (with the help of Laotian ethnic minorities, including Hmong), the French assigned select Hmong “clan” leaders the role of middleman tax

⁶² The Southeast Asian Massif refers to the countries of Burma, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

⁶³ Hmong, of course, were not the only group in Indochina who rebelled against the French. Within Laos, one of the first Lao rebellions against the French took place between 1901 and 1903, led by Lao of southern Laos. The “Kha” (a pejorative term for Lao Theung) rebelled against the French from 1901 to 1937. See, for instance, Keyes (1992).

collector and gave them authority over the Hmong of Xieng Khouang province, home to a majority of the Laotian Hmong population (Dunnigan, Olney, McNall, and Spring 1996; M.N.M. Lee 1998). Although this did not incorporate Laotian Hmong society into the French colonial system by any stretch of the imagination, this set the stage for significant changes in Laotian Hmong's political organization and for the limited political incorporation of a very small segment of Hmong society into the colonial state during the mid-1940s.

Sometime in the mid-1800s, *Kaitong Ly Nhia Vu (Lis Nyiaj Vws)* and his clansmen arrived in what is now northeastern Laos from Tonkin (Vietnam); they were one of the first Hmong immigrants to Laos (M.N.M. Lee 2005:146-47). Vu and his group settled in Nong Het, a district within Xieng Khouang or Tran Ninh. At the time, Tran Ninh was “a semiautonomous Buddhist state, under the suzerainty of Annam (Vietnam) rather than of Luang Prabang (Laos), and homeland of the Thai speaking Phuan” (Ovesen 2004:220). Jan Ovesen describes Hmong's initial reception in Laos as follows:

Although the lowlanders regarded the Hmong as primitive savages, the Phuan ruler acceded to their presence as long as they stayed in the mountains and paid taxes. The same kind of relationship obtained as some of the Hmong moved into Luang Prabang in the mid-nineteenth century (2004:220).

Vatthana Pholsena (2006:21) adds that “the ethnic Lao, although they controlled the government, had little interest in assimilating the upland population during the pre-colonial period.” Isolation temporarily protected Hmong from direct French interference in their way of life.

Before the various wars between empires and nation-states that caused decades of great destruction and mass displacement of Southeast Asian peoples, Hmong typically lived in the highest elevations of Laos' lush mountain rainforests. Located away from the lowlands and centers of business and government, Hmong villages were spread out across several northern provinces of Laos. A typical Hmong village contained several to a dozen household units which

make up a handful of lineages (see social structure below). The lack of roads and transportation in most parts of Laos' mountainous terrain made contact between ordinary persons of different provinces rare.⁶⁴ The lack of transportation and communication technology made it so that Hmong persons' day-to-day activities revolved around their families, extended families, and co-ethnics within the same village or cluster of villages. Like most non-propertied Laotians, Hmong villagers sustained themselves through rice, fruit and vegetable farming, hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, and local trade with Chinese merchants (Barney 1961). Hmong also grew and traded opium as their main cash crop;⁶⁵ those who could not afford to pay colonial taxes with *Indo-chine Française piastres* often submitted hand-harvested opium in lieu of coins.

During this earlier period, Hmong's relations with major Laotian groups (Lao, Tai and Khmou)⁶⁶ generally fit what Ronald Cohen (1978:390) calls "fragmented relations" between ethnic groups. That is, there were little or no necessary reasons for Hmong and other ethnic groups to interact given the low population density of Laos, ethnic groups' self-sufficiency and their relative topographical isolation from each other. The more "balanced relations"⁶⁷ that Hmong had were with Chinese small merchants who traded mostly fabric for Hmong's opium.⁶⁸

Under French colonialism (1893–1952), Hmong's relations with the dominant Lao ethnic group and with other major Laotian ethnic groups were often mediated directly or indirectly by

⁶⁴ Until the 1990s, very few Hmong villages possessed personal telephones or vehicles.

⁶⁵ Opium was the main cash crop in Southeast Asia. Indeed, opium was traded and monopolized in much of the eastern and western world during that historical period.

⁶⁶ Laotian Hmong call the country of Laos, "*tebchaws Los Tsuas*." They call Laotians, "*neeg Los Tsuas*"; Lao, "*Nplog*," Khmou, "*Mab*," and Mien, "*Co*." Hmong use the term "*mab sua*" to refer to all non-Hmong.

⁶⁷ According to Cohen (1978:390), "Indirect relations occur when groups are unequal and contacts between them are infrequent. In such instances, the groups live in clearly separate and mutually isolated contexts relating to one another through special institutions or functionaries that allow for peaceful interchange." "Balanced relations between ethnic groups" occur when "groups involved live near each other or share the same territory" and trading occurs and the groups involved mutually benefit from it (1978:390-391). Stratified relations between ethnic groups occur when the groups involved possess differential power and "membership helps significantly to determine access to scarce resources" (1978:391).

⁶⁸ C. Vang, personal communication, May 16, 2009, Fresno, California. Vang, 64, was born in Luang Prabang, Laos. Vang recalled what his father had told him about the Chinese merchants who traded with Hmong and other Laotians throughout Laos.

the French colonial administration. For instance, inter-ethnic relations between Hmong and the White Tai land lords and tax collectors of northeastern Laos and northwestern Vietnam were highly stratified (M.N.M. Lee 2005). In the late-1890s and late-1910s, a segment of the Hmong population led a series of rebellions against the White Thai and the French (M.N.M. Lee 2005). Except for the very few Hmong who were appointed to positions as middleman tax collectors and those few villages exposed to French Catholic missionaries, the rest of Laotian Hmong society had little or no direct contact with the French. This remained the norm until the Japanese occupation of Laos in the early 1940s and the First Indochina War (a war between the French and the Viet Minh nationalists) that followed the Japanese's surrender. In 1941-1945, when Japanese occupied Laos, the outnumbered French were compelled to seek out segments of the Laotian Hmong population as allies. From 1946-1954, segments of the Laotian Hmong population fought on opposite sides of the French-Viet Minh war.

In Laos, Hmong have always been an ethnic minority both in terms of their population size and their political standing. According to French colonial records, in 1911, the population of Hmong and Mien was 15,205 or two percent of the 618,500 Laotian population.⁶⁹ By 1942, this figure increased to 49,240 or five percent of the Laotian population (Pholsena 2002:178). More recent censuses show that the Hmong population was 231,168 in 1985; 315,465 in 1995 (Lemoine 2005:3); and 451,946 in 2005 (Government of Lao PDR 2006). In a country of about 5.6 million (as of 2005), Hmong constituted eight percent of the Laotian population. This made Hmong the third largest ethnic group of 49 recognized ethnic groups in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (formerly Laos), after the Khmou (11 percent) and the dominant Lao ethnic group (55 percent) (Government of Lao PDR 2006).

⁶⁹ Population censuses before the 1960s lumped together Hmong and Mien (historically categorized as Meo and Yao respectively).

During the mid-1950s, about 71 percent of the country's Hmong and Mien population lived in Xieng Khouang province while the rest were scattered across four provinces: Nam Tha (5 percent), Luang Prabang (13 percent), Sayaboury (7 percent), and Vientiane (4 percent). Within Xieng Khouang, Hmong and Mien made up about 40 percent of the ethnic population (Pholsena 2002:179). It was no coincidence that throughout the early to mid-20th century, nearly all of the most well-known and influential Laotian Hmong leaders emerged in Xieng Khouang.⁷⁰ It is also significant that during the Laotian civil war, the U.S. CIA's secret airbase was headquartered in the Long Cheng (also written as Long Tieng) and Sam Thong valleys of Xieng Khouang province.

Political Organization

According to anthropologist Nicholas Tapp (1996), "there is no political organization above the village level in traditional Hmong society. An assembly of male lineage elders makes local decisions and discusses problems or arbitrates disputes. At these assemblies women also take informal part." Although Tapp does not define what he means by "traditional Hmong society," his description of Hmong organizational pattern is probably accurate only for the Hmong society of Laos between the mid-1800s and early-1900s.⁷¹ It is probably more accurate to say that Laotian Hmong society consists of both traditional and legal forms of authority. More importantly, as Hmong came to have greater contacts with the dominant society, their authority systems not only became more similar to those of the dominant society but were less autonomous from them.

⁷⁰ These leaders include Lo Bli Yao, Ly (Xia) Foung, Touby Lyfoung, Fay Dang Lobliayao, and Vang Pao—all of whom were born in the Nong Het district of Xieng Khouang. Also Shong Lue Yang, the inventor of the Hmong Pahawh writing system, was born, in 1929, in the Nong Het district.

⁷¹ In a more recent work, Gary Yia Lee and Nicholas Tapp (2010) point out that, within Hmong society, "[t]hose with authority may include the male head of the family, the household head, elders in the community, the village chief, and people who occupy government positions at various levels."

Traditionally, it was lineage leaders who organized the members of Hmong society and directed collective behavior. However, beginning in the late 1920s, political authority within Laotian Hmong society became broader and more centralized after the French colonial authorities appointed Lo Bliayao as a paramount Hmong leader. Then, during the 1960s and 70s when Hmong became entangled in the Laotian civil war, military organization determined the overarching structure of Hmong's political organization (even as the lineage authority structure still operated at the lower level). Hmong kept aspects of this military-political organization when they became refugees in the late 1970s. Below, I discuss how Hmong's political organization evolved as Hmong came into contact with new political and military circumstances.

Between the period of Hmong's arrival in Laos during the early to mid-1800s and the period of the early 1900s, Hmong held no official political office in Laos. Nor did any Hmong person or cultural class⁷² have any formal ownership over land or significant amounts of property. But in spite of this, Hmong (and other Laotians) enjoyed a period of relative peace.⁷³ Hmong's lack of political authority and autonomy within Laos combined with their life as self-sufficient farmers during this period of relative peace neither permitted nor demanded that they have a political leaders beyond the village level.

Traditionally, each Hmong lineage was led by three types of *lineage* leaders: 1) a leader in charge of religious matters (*tus coj dab coj qhua*), 2) a leader in charge of marriage matters (*tus coj tshoob coj kos*), and 3) a leader in charge of legal matters (*tus coj plaub tsaws ntug*).⁷⁴ Lineage leaders typically but do not necessarily live in the same village as their followers. In

⁷² I wish to distinguish cultural class from social classes. I am using the term cultural class to refer to a class of people within Hmong society who, as a result of their position as lineage leaders, cultural specialists, herbalists, etc. hold greater authority than ordinary Hmong persons but do not necessarily possess more financial capital than ordinary persons. Laotian Hmong society traditionally lacked social classes.

⁷³ Mottin (1980:47) mentions Hmong's "first clashes" "with the mountain races [Khmou]" at the "beginning of the 19th century," but does not specify when or where exactly these clashes occurred.

⁷⁴ N. Xiong, personal communication, February 15, 2010, Marysville, California.

large ritual lineages, there is normally a division of labor in which three different persons of the same lineage—who are almost always men—are given the authority by the heads of household to take on these leadership roles.⁷⁵ In smaller lineages, the three leadership roles are divided between two men: one takes the religious role; the other takes both the marriage and legal roles. The lineage leader in charge of legal/marriage matters (LLM) is the public representative and defender of the lineage. He is in the position to call meetings with the male heads of households and has significant influence over them. His role includes resolving serious disputes between husbands and wives in his lineage, between lineage members and between members of different lineages. When disputes occur between members of different lineages, the LLM of the parties involved arrange meetings with one another and with the parties to try to resolve them.

Besides their system of lineage authority, the Hmong (of China) carried over leadership titles such as *kaitong* (chief of a canton or autonomous region),⁷⁶ and used them when they resettled in Laos. As Mai Na Lee (2005:30) points out, “Before the period of French colonialism [1893 forward], there [already] were *kaitongs* from the Lo, Ly, and Moua clans, the [Hmong clan] groups with the largest population and the first arrivals to Nong Het.”⁷⁷ Rather than completely disregard this system, the Lao dominant group added to it. According to one Lao historical account (Lyfoung 1996:3), the Xieng Khouang-based Laotian nobility assigned additional honorary titles, such as *Xophia*, *Txookav*, *Thoolis*, *Phutoom*, etc. to Hmong leaders

⁷⁵ Persons become lineage leaders through social consensus. Leaders in charge of religious or marriage matters are usually also seasoned specialists in one or more areas of cultural custom (e.g., a shaman, a funeral specialist, a marriage specialist, etc.). Although no formal election takes place, male heads of household appoint lineage leaders based on their knowledge, experience and conduct.

⁷⁶ Following historians such as Mai Na Lee (2005), I use the word the term “*kaitong*,” which is a derivative of the Chinese “canton.” However, I am aware that Hmong speakers pronounce this term “*kiab toom*”—a term that many nowadays use as a shorthand for *Kiab Toom Lauj Npliaj Yob* (Kaitong Lo Bli Yao), the person. This variation in pronunciation probably explains why some scholars have used “*kiatong*.”

⁷⁷ According to Pao Saykao (n.d.) “Although it was suggested that there were *kiatong* for the Lo, Lee, Yang, Vang and Moua clans, there are only five (5) identifiable *Kiatong* - two *kiatong* for the Lo (Paj Txhim and Bli Yao), two for the Yang (Tsav Laum Ya and Zam Yias Yaj) and one for the Moua clan (Muas Nom Tub).” See Pao Saykao’s unpublished manuscript, “From Mountaintops to Cyberspace.”

based on the size of their individual clans, presumably as a way to resolve competition for status between Hmong clans. Given the lack of written records, however, it is not known what specific authority *kaitongs* had over their followers. Nevertheless, historical accounts suggest that *kaitongs* were capable of mobilizing collective political action. For instance, in response to tax extortion by lowland Lao, “three Kiatong Hmong in the Nong Het areas organised an ambush against tax collectors and the few guards who accompanied them in 1896 at Ban Khang Phanieng [a village] in Muang Kham, Xieng Khouang province” (D. Yang (1975:46) cited in G.Y. Lee (1986)).

Unfortunately, peace in Laos lasted only until the late 1910s. From about 1918 to 1921, a war broke out between a segment of Laotian Hmong society and the French colonial authorities over the exploitation and tax extortion against Laotian Hmong. This war, which remains in Hmong Americans’ collective memory, is known to Hmong as “*Rog Paj Cai*” (the Pa Chay War), following the name of the prophetic Hmong leader, *Paj Cai* of the Vue clan, who led the anti-colonial rebellion (M.N.M. Lee 2005).⁷⁸ This rebellion began in Tonkin, specifically Dien Bien Phu of Lai Chau province, against the corrupt White Tai feudal lords. But it quickly escalated to full scale rebellion against the French and by 1920 had spilled over to Xieng Khouang province Laos (2005). In 1920, a Hmong rebel group led by Shong Ger Lo attacked the village of the wealthy but corrupt *kaitong* Lo Bliia Yao, an ethnic Hmong who helped supervise Hmong laborers during the construction of Colonial Route 7 (2005:165-85).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ The French labeled this war as “*La Guerre du Fou*” (Madman’s War or War of the Insane). Such negative label is, in retrospect, consistent with the French’s labeling and treatment of Hmong and other hilltribe populations in Southeast Asia as “savages.”

⁷⁹ M. N. M. Lee (2005:176) states that “Bliia Yao was personally charged with the task of disseminating corvee labor orders to the Hmong leaders. Each village in the region of Nong Het was responsible for a certain section of the [CR 7] road.”

Although the Pa Chay rebellion was brutally suppressed by the French army, it “was notably the largest, most expansive anti-colonial struggle in Indochina” (M.N.M. Lee 2005:77). As Lee suggests, this rebellion “forced the colonial rulers to redefine the Hmong’s position in the ethnic hierarchy” within Laotian society (2005:260). As the French had done in 1896, they once again saw a need to appoint Hmong to leadership positions in order to administer their tax system and control the ethnic population. For his help in putting down the Pa Chay rebellion, the French made Lo Blia Yao the “paramount Hmong leader” (2005:175). As Mai Na Lee (2005:30) points out in her historical study of Hmong political brokers in Laos,

The authority of clan leaders over their clans declined after 1910 [sic] with the appointment of [Lo] Blia Yao, the son of [Lo] Pa Tsee, as paramount Hmong leader by the French. *While clan leaders still exercised social and cultural influence over their clans, Blia Yao had legal authority over them.* As a result, the Hmong could bypass clan leaders and bring an individual directly to Blia Yao in cases of dispute. Blia Yao then could deal with the perpetrator in any manner he wanted, including handling him to the colonial authorities, which often translates into imprisonment or execution—extremely harsh punishments by Hmong standards (emphasis added).

In spite or because of Lo Blia Yao’s collaboration with the French, his appointment and relationship with French authorities led the way for some of his sons and closest associates to obtain leadership positions above the village level.

The Chinese-origin *kaitong* system of administration was later replaced by a Lao-origin *tasseng* (*toj xeeem*) system of administration in 1921 (G.Y. Lee 1982). The French colonial authorities appropriated this pre-modern Lao political system in order to administer Laos cheaply and collect taxes effectively (Pholsena 2006:32-33).⁸⁰ During much of the French colonial era (1893 - 1947) and for quite some time after Laos’ formal independence from France in 1953, the Laotians followed the *tasseng* system of administration (Westermeyer 1971; Lyfoung 1996).

⁸⁰ According to Martin Stuart-Fox (1997:32), “prior to 1893, both Lao Lum and Lao Thoeng in southern Laos paid a head tax to the Siamese Commissioner at Champasak, either in cash or in kind. This was collected by the local Lao nobility...”

Under this system, villages were headed by village leaders known in Lao as *nai ban*. When Hmong lineage leaders were unable to resolve a serious matter they were permitted to refer the case to the village leader. From there, if the matter was still unresolved, it was sent to the town/subdistrict leader or *tasseng*. From there it could proceed to the district leader or *chao muang*, and then to the provincial governor/court or *chao khoueng* (Lyfoung 1996).⁸¹ Prior to 1975, the court of last resort was based in the national capitol Vientiane, Laos; however, it was rare for Hmong ethnic matters to reach the capital court.⁸²

In 1924, following the completion of colonial route 7, Lo Blia Yao appointed his eldest son, Tsong Tou Lo, as *tasseng* of Keng Khoai, one of the two subdistricts of Nong Het (M.N.M. Lee 2005:248). Tsong Tou held on to this position until his resignation in 1936 (2005:276). Ly Foung, who was Lo Blia Yao's son-in-law and former secretary, eventually obtained the *tasseng* office in 1929. He later assigned the office to his eldest son, Nao Chao Ly (2005:249).

According to M. N. M. Lee, "Before World War II, there were 17 Hmong *tasseng* in Laos" (2005:329).⁸³ But by the late 1940s, the number of Hmong *tasseng* rose to 24 (2005:329).

Hmong's political organization continued to evolve with new political circumstances. In 1946, the Hmong of Xieng Khouang were rewarded for their assistance to the French army during the Japanese occupation. Upon the French's request, the Lao king appointed Touby Lyfoung (one of a handful of educated, multi-lingual Hmong at the time), to two prestigious offices: *Chaomuong* of all Hmong in Laos and deputy governor of Xieng Khouang (M.N.M. Lee 2005:326). Touby's appointment as governor "gave the Hmong direct representation at the national level *for the first time*" (2005:326, emphasis added). At the same time, the Lao nobility

⁸¹ The present day Lao PDR state is divided into 16 provinces or *khoueng*.

⁸² The present day Lao PDR supreme court is the People's Supreme Court, based in Vientiane.

⁸³ Although Lee does not provide a reference, her claim appears consistent with Jean Mottin's observation that "by 1945 the Hmong already had seventeen Chiefs of Cantons recruited among themselves" (1980:47).

created two new Hmong sub-districts and “forced” the “Court in Luang Prabang...to recognize the titles of Hmong functionaries below Touby” (2005:320). Furthermore, in 1947, “[w]hen the first election for a Constitutional and National Assembly was held, Toulia [the half-brother of Touby Lyfoung], representing the Hmong, was elected as one of the two deputies from Xieng Khouang” (2005:329). This was how Hmong’s political leadership in Laos stood prior to the Second Indochina War.

The Laotian Civil War

From the 1940s to the mid-1970s, the whole of Laos was a constant battleground for the destructive wars between powerful nation-states and empires. These wars included the Franco-Thai war (1940-41), the First and Second French Indochina Campaigns (1940-1945), and the First Indochina War (1946-1954). But the longest and probably most well-known war was the Laotian Civil War, which overlapped with the Second Indochina War (1955 – 1975).

Fractionalization was both a cause and a consequence of the Laotian Civil War. At the government level, three factions vied for political power: the rightist faction (led by the Royal Lao Government), the neutralist faction (Prince Souvanna Phouma), and the leftist faction (Pathet Lao nationalists) (Chan 1994:Ch 1). However, on the ground, what was most immediately consequential to the lives of ordinary civilians was the struggle between anti-communists and communists. The civil war forced segments of the Laotian, including Hmong population into polarized factions.⁸⁴ As Culas and Michaud (2004:84) point out,

Told to take sides or else suffer serious reprisals, Hmong mountain dwellers chose one side or the other according to the area where they resided at the time, the amount of pressure put on them, and their own estimation of what was best calculated to ensure their liberty in the long run.

⁸⁴ It is unknowable how many Hmong sided with the Americans, how many went to the Pathet Lao, and how many held or tried to hold a “neutral” position (not to be confused with the formal Neutralist position). Depending on writers’ reconstructions of history, the population that sided with the Americans could range from most Hmong to a majority of Hmong.

For some Hmong groups, affiliation with different Hmong leaders also shaped which side they ended up in. For instance, during the Japanese occupation of Laos in the 1940s, Hmong led by Touby Lyfoung became allies of the French while Hmong led by Fay Dang Lo became allies of the Japanese. Later, during the civil war, Hmong led by Touby Lyfoung and Vang Pao became allies of the Royal Lao and the United States governments while those led by Fay Dang Lo became allies of the Pathet Lao. Next, I will describe the experiences of the Hmong who sided with the Royal Lao Government and the United States during this 15 year-long war.

Taking advantage of the bitter factional conflicts in Laos to further its Cold War policy of containing communism in Southeast Asia by “not let[ting] Laos fall to the Communists,” (Greenstein and Immerman 1992:578),⁸⁵ the U.S. Executive Branch approved a secret military plan to be carried out by its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) on Laotian soil without appearing to violate the neutrality of Laos as stipulated in the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962 (Goldstein 1973:171; Leary 1995). This secret plan was that the U.S. military would create radar and air bases in northeastern Laos, train a Hmong irregular army to defend these bases, and order them to fight the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese military forces that were occupying that crucial region of Laos. At the time and for much of the American-Vietnam War, the war in Laos was unknown to the U.S. general public and the U.S. Congress until the publication of the Pentagon Papers in January 1969.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Greenstein and Immerman (1992:577-8) write that “three weeks before his January meeting with Kennedy” and during his meeting “with a group of his top foreign policy advisers,” President Eisenhower made the following remarks: “We cannot let Laos fall to the Communists even if we have to fight – with our allies or without them.” Furthermore, Eisenhower expressed his willingness to use force in Laos in the statement: “we cannot stand by and allow Laos to fall to the Communists. The time may soon come when we should employ the Seventh Fleet, with its force of marines” (1992:578).

⁸⁶ The Pentagon Papers were recently released publically in 2011. See United States Dept. of Defense. Office of the Secretary of Defense. Vietnam Task Force and United States National Archives and Records Administration, "Pentagon Papers," Washington, D.C.: National Archives,, 2011.

In late 1955, a U.S. military mission disguised as a humanitarian aid mission to Laos called the Programs Evaluation Office (PEO) was underway (Lecker 2010a). In late-1960, James W. (Bill) Lair, the U.S. CIA military specialist who drafted the plan for recruiting and supplying the Vang Pao-led “Meo hilltribe irregular army,” received approval from Admiral Harry D. Felt (then the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet), the U.S. State Department, and President Eisenhower (Leary 1999).⁸⁷ As William Leary (1995:506-7) points out, it was the U.S. President who “assigned the task [of creating the Secret Army] to the CIA.” Leary adds,

Although critics of U.S. policy later would portray the CIA as responsible for the ‘secret’ war in Laos, they failed to take into account the circumstances surrounding the employment of the intelligence agency. Given the nature of the Geneva Agreements, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson once explained to a congressional committee, the CIA “is really the only other instrumentality that we have.” G. McMurtrie Godley, U.S. ambassador to Laos, 1969-73, agreed. “These operations that the CIA are conducting in Laos,” he testified in 1971, “were not initiated by them.” The task, he emphasized, had been assigned by the President (1995:506-507).

Declassified U.S. State Department documents affirm Leary’s observation that the CIA’s Secret Army was approved by the highest level of the U.S. government. In a January 17, 1964 “Memorandum from the Deputy Director for Coordination, Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Scott) to the Special Group,” Joseph Scott states,

The U.S. is engaged in overt and covert support to paramilitary forces in Laos but in large part the elements being aided are remote from the centers of power and unlikely to be involved in any future power struggle. (...) The genesis of this program stems from high level U.S. Government approval in late 1960 and early 1961 in response to a recommendation by the U.S. Ambassador in Laos that CIA enlist tribal support to fight communism. The main effort in this program has been development of the Meo, the largest non-Lao ethnic group in Laos, as an effective guerrilla force and the provision of plausibly deniable U.S. air support for the program. Since the program’s inception CIA has worked with the two key Meo leaders, Touby Lyfong and Vang Pao (U.S. Department of State 1998c:2-3).

⁸⁷ Based on Leary’s (1999) account, the CIA’s plan for the creation of the ‘Secret Army’ was approved during President Eisenhower’s term in office (1953-1961), prior to President Kennedy’s term in office (1961-1963).

Contained in the above quote is the U.S. State Department's main reason for choosing Hmong as the CIA's covert paramilitary force in Laos. As the same Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) memorandum elaborates,

The danger of an attempt to gain power by the principal paramilitary group, the Meo, is more remote. The Meo, as all tribal groups in Laos, *are isolated from the country's political arena and are not integrated into Lao society*. They are located away from the main centers of the country, living in scattered villages at the higher elevations (the Yao and Kha tribal groups are even more isolated and too few in number to pose a threat). Moreover, the Meo are *subject to U.S. guidance and direction*. The development of the Meo as a rival center of armed power with political objectives in a national Lao context *does not* seem to be a realistic possibility (U.S. Department of State 1998c:5, emphasis added).

Clearly, Hmong were chosen because the U.S. saw them as an exploitable group within Laos.

But Hmong were also chosen for another reason: their geographic location.

The bulk of the Laotian Hmong population lived in Xieng Khouang, a 6,000 square mile heart-shaped region in northeastern Laos that directly bordered North Vietnam. In 1962, Xieng Khouang and Sam Neua (modern-day Houaphan) provinces were conjoined into Military Region 2 (MR 2), one of five military regions in Laos at the time. Taking advantage of the MR 2's border with North Vietnam, the U.S. CIA built its most important radar site, code named Lima Site 85, atop Phou Pha Thi, a mountain in Sam Neua with cliffs so imposing that CIA forces thought, incorrectly, would be impossible for the enemy to surmount (Castle 1999). From the 1960s through the early 1970s, top U.S. military and government officials considered MR 2 as the most crucial buffer region between North Vietnam and the rest of the Lao Mekong delta and Thailand (U.S. Department of State 1998g:693-700). So much so that U.S. officials completely ignored Gen. Vang Pao's request to relocate the Hmong of Xieng Khouang to Sayaburi Province during the late 1960s; instead, U.S. officials suggested that displaced Hmong be resettled in the Plain of Jars plateau (U.S. Department of State 1998b:930). In the late 1960s and early 1970s,

the Plain of Jars plateau and the skyline ridge of Long Cheng—both located in MR 2—became infamous as the sites of the most bombarded, bloodiest battles of the Laotian war (Zasloff 1973; Leary 1995).

In January 1961, the CIA paramilitary specialist James W. (Bill) Lair and his training officers armed and trained about 1,000 Hmong (Leary 1999). When the Laotian civil war escalated, widespread conscription into the CIA-backed Secret Army occurred. As a Laotian Hmong veteran succinctly describes it, “Every male between 15 and 65 years of age was conscripted. There was no choice.”⁸⁸ By the end of June 1961, Walter McConaughy, the Assistant Secretary of State for the Far Eastern Affairs reported to Chester Bowles, the Under Secretary of State that,

We have been providing arms, ammunition, and other support to about 7,700 Meo tribesmen in Laos who are members of the Auto-Defense Corps of the Lao Army. Most of these are situated in Northern Laos back of the enemy lines. Owing to the hostilities, a large number of Meo and their dependents have lost their usual means of livelihood. (...) Because of the destruction of their crops and their failure to plant, relief may be required over the next 18 months, at least, and may cost between \$3 and \$5 million (U.S. Department of State 1998b:263).

The CIA ‘Secret Army’ would grow to 19,000 Hmong soldiers (with 23,000 authorized) by June 1963 (U.S. Department of State 1998c:1). It would eventually grow to over 30,000 Hmong, Lao, Mien, and Khmou soldiers, all placed under the command of Major General Vang Pao and his sub-commanders. As U.S. federal officials were well aware, the Secret Army was only “technically” operating under the Royal Lao Armed Forces (FAR, and the predecessor to the Royal Lao Army) (U.S. Department of State 1998c:1). In reality, throughout the civil war in Laos, the CIA’s Secret Army was “organizationally separate” from the Royal Lao Army (Stuart-Fox 1997:145), even though both were on the side of the U.S. In addition to supplying Vang

⁸⁸ Translated from: “*Txhua tug txiv neej 15 txog 65 xyoos ces luag yeej kom mus [ua tub rog] tib si. Luag tsis nug tias puas kam li.*” N. Xiong, personal communication, February 15, 2010, Marysville, California.

Pao's predominantly Hmong army with weapons, ammunitions, and planes, the U.S. military also sent into Laos several hundred U.S. Air Force pilots and personnel disguised as civilians or trainers (C. Robbins 1987; Leary 1995; Leeker 2010b).⁸⁹

Whereas U.S. army privates of the American-Vietnam War were paid between \$7 and \$11 a day, Hmong army privates were paid only 2,000 Lao kips (\$3) *per month* or less than 10 cents per person per day (Hwang 2002). Hmong battalion commanders (*nai koos phaas*) were paid about \$60 - \$75 a month, an amount four to five times less than what a U.S. army private made in a month.⁹⁰ The U.S. government at that time clearly was more concerned about getting the most for its money than about sparing non-American lives. This mindset can be seen in the following declassified "memorandum of conversation" between the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, the U.S. Secretary of State, and a Staff Member of the Far East of the National Security Council:

One other point which Ambassador Godley wanted to raise in connection with the U.S. operations in Laos, as distinct from the Steel Tiger strikes, was that the total cost was less than \$500 million per year, including AID, MASF, CAS, and the bombing. In all this, we were not losing a single American, and we were killing over 30 North Vietnamese a day. \$500 million was what one U.S. division cost us in South Vietnam. In Laos, this same sum enabled us to tie down two North Vietnamese divisions, numerous Binh Tram, plus many trucks and antiaircraft artillery sites. We were getting a bigger bang for a buck [sic] in Laos than anywhere else (U.S. Department of State 1998f:8).⁹¹

The War's Aftermath

By the official end of the Laotian civil war in 1975, about 350,000 or a tenth of the Laotian population had perished (Herman and Chomsky 2002:260). Between 1975 and 1977,

⁸⁹ From the late-1950s to the 1970s, U.S. forces working with the Secret Army in Laos included U.S. AID officials, U.S. CIA military advisers (reserve and retired military officers), a U.S. Special Forces Group (12 mobile training teams under the command of Lt. Col. Author "Bull Simons"), and over 300 U.S. Air Force pilots (Ravens) and maintenance personnel of the CIA's secretly owned Air America. See William M. Leary, "CIA Air Operations in Laos, 1955-1974: Supporting the 'Secret War'," U.S. Central Intelligence Agency: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Xiong recalls clearly that, in his group, Hmong army privates were paid 2,700 kips (\$4) per month while sergeants were paid 3,000 kips (\$4.5) per month. Higher ranking officers were paid more. Hmong battalion commanders (*nai koos phas*) were paid about 40,000 – 50,000 kips (\$60-\$75) per month.

⁹¹ In this passage, the acronym AID refers to the U.S. Agency for International Development, MASF refers to Military Assistance Service Funded, and CAS refers to controlled American source.

104,000 Laotians became political refugees in Thailand (Tapp 2005:108). Much of Laos' valleys and rainforests, but especially those of northern Laos, became dangerous wastelands. Today, the most visible remnants of the so-called Secret War are the innumerable bomb shells, bomb craters and tens of millions of unexploded ordnances that still litter Laos and maim or kill indiscriminately (Herman and Chomsky 2002:Ch. 6). Besides causing the death of countless⁹² Laotians on both sides of the war, the Laotian civil war had other far-reaching consequences on Laotian society. Next, I discuss Hmong's forced displacement and dislocation, their statelessness in Thailand, and their international migration to western countries.

The most obvious consequences of the Laotian civil war were the massive destruction of human lives and the violent displacement and dislocation of people. Describing the Hmong tragedy, Jeff Lindsay (2002:15) writes,

The loss of 60,000 American lives for a no-win war in Vietnam was a tragedy to the huge nation of America, but it was a relatively small percentage of the nation compared to the loss the Hmong people suffered. In 1969, at the time when Congress first learned of our secret war in Laos, about 18,000 Hmong soldiers had already been killed in battle, and many women and children had died as well.

For Laotian civilian and veterans alike, the official end to the war in 1975 did not result in immediate peace. Many were forcibly relocated and/or sent to "re-education" camps—often a euphemism for forced labor, imprisonment or other forms of punishment. Persecution or the threat of persecution forced hundreds of thousands of Laotians, but especially those on the losing side, to flee their homeland. Except for General Vang Pao's family and about 2,500 Hmong (military officers, soldiers and civilians), who were airlifted to Namphong, Thailand during the chaotic evacuation from Long Cheng in May 1975 (Morrison 1999:10), the rest of the 100,000 plus Laotian Hmong refugees had to flee on foot.

⁹² It is unknown how many died on either side of the war or its aftermath. Some have estimated the number of CIA-backed Hmong soldiers (not counting civilians) who died during the war to range from 18,000 to 35,000.

Hmong's escape to Thailand was dangerously difficult. Most Hmong of northeastern Laos had to trek for weeks across 100 to 200 miles of jungles while avoiding being captured or killed by the enemy. As Lee Lescaze, then a journalist in Nongkhai, Thailand, recounts,

For some of the refugees, particularly Lao from the capital, Vientiane, escape is not difficult. Patrols are lax. Boatmen can be paid to cross the Mekong. But for most Hmong, against whom the Communist government is carrying on a campaign, there is a long and difficult walk followed by a likely encounter with Communist troops on the riverbank.⁹³

Some have estimated that about 15,000 Hmong refugees lost their lives while trying to escape to Thailand (Wain 1981). The accounts of Hmong former refugees reveal that chaos, misery and death were common during the arduous escape to Thailand. Countless young people and adults alike died from injuries, gunshots, starvation, and/or illnesses. Many small children died from opium poisoning, which was sometimes used in desperation to dampen children's cries in order to try to avoid the capture of entire groups by the enemy. Those who survived the trek must cross the wide, dangerous Mekong River and possibly other smaller rivers in order to get to Thailand. Thousands of people drowned while trying to cross the Mekong River by swimming or using makeshift floating devices (bamboo or wooden rafts, floating tubes, poles or logs, etc.). Among survivors, thousands more died from starvation, malnutrition, diseases, illnesses, and other unknown causes (Kundstadter 1985; Munger 1987).

Those who were fortunate enough to escape to Thailand refugee camps with their lives faced a new kind of struggle. They were rounded up and placed with tens of thousands of other Hmong and Laotian refugees in the secluded, total institutions of the refugee camps. For instance, Ban Vinai was a refugee camp near the Lao and Thai border⁹⁴ in north-central Thailand

⁹³ Lee Lescaze, "Laotians Waiting in Thai Camps for Chance to Fight Again," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1979.

⁹⁴ Ban Vinai was not unique in being located near the Thai border. Most other refugee camps for Burmese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees were also located near the Thai border with Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Camp locations were probably chosen out of convenience, for example, to enable new refugees to reach the camps without too much

that in the mid-1980s held 43,000 to 45,000 Hmong and Laotian refugees inside an area of 400 acres or six-tenths of a square mile (Long 1993:62). Barred from going anywhere outside the camps without official permission, Hmong refugees depended entirely on the Thai government and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for shelter, food, medicine, formal information and protection. Violation of camp rules, such as the night curfew or going outside camp to collect firewood often resulted in physical punishment or imprisonment by Thai security guards. Hmong refugees not only had no right to become Thai citizens but they were also subject to whatever regulations Thai authorities imposed. At some camp sites, such as Ban Vinai, Thai authorities assigned Hmong refugees to live in areas designated as ‘centers’ that sat on top of newly flattened cemeteries—the worst possible treatment of human beings who had barely escaped death or were still mourning the loss of loved ones left behind.⁹⁵ Subjugation and miserable camp conditions perpetuated Hmong refugees’ condition as a stateless people.

But one other aspect of Hmong’s participation in the Laotian civil war needs to be considered in order to better understand Laotian Hmong’s statelessness, both as a political condition and as a collective representation in the Durkheimian sense.⁹⁶ From about 1962 to 1975, former Major General Vang Pao was unquestionably the most important charismatic leader of the Hmong segment that sided with the Royal Lao Government and American forces. Working under Vang Pao were over two dozen Hmong colonels, and under them hundreds of lower ranking military commanders. Operating alongside this military system was a provincial administration manned by Lao and Hmong officials, including a governor and deputy governor.

travel. But being near the border probably also facilitated, intentionally or unintentionally, a number of activities such as resistance movement activities.

⁹⁵ Particular sections (e.g., Center 9) of Ban Vinai were built on top of a cemetery. Hmong eye witnesses attest that some of the graves contained the remains of deceased Hmong, and that a few Hmong made the difficult decision to relocate the remains of their relatives.

⁹⁶ Collective representations are the collective historical experiences, sentiments, or ideas of a group of people that serve to create a sense of solidarity among members of that group.

This provincial administration consisted of several departments such as the Departments of Public Health, Primary School, Justice, and Police that oversaw five districts within Xieng Khouang Province.⁹⁷ This military and administrative system functioned as the political system for the Hmong of Xieng Khouang.

As the commander of MR 2, General Vang Pao and his lieutenants came the closest that any Laotian Hmong had ever come to having and operating a state-like political system within Laos. Vang Pao and his top military commanders possessed monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force—the crucial function of a state (Weber 1946:78).⁹⁸ As Kenneth Conboy (1989:12) points out, the “Military Region commanders effectively wielded more power than the ANL [French National Liberation Army] General Headquarters in Vientiane.” Bill Lair, the U.S. CIA official who worked most closely with Vang Pao, explains Vang’s authority as follows:

[O]nce we started arming the Hmong he [Vang Pao] got the force. [Vang Pao] became very quickly a major player because he had a force, and it was probably better than the regular Lao Army. Now, it was more confined to an area, but ... once [General] Phoumi [Nosavan] needed him then he began to get promoted and all sorts of things (Maxner 2001).

To be sure, Hmong’s relationship with the United States government during the Secret War was never an equal relationship.⁹⁹ But, in spite of this, it was this relationship that gave Hmong military commanders the most significant power and autonomy they had ever had during any period of Laotian history. The defeat of the Royal Lao Government and of the CIA’s Secret Army in 1975 meant that Hmong lost both a homeland land and state-like power.

⁹⁷ Geu Vang, “Governing System in MR II,” *Unforgettable Laos*, 2002. Available online at: <http://www.unforgettable-laos.com/>

⁹⁸ I draw on Max Weber’s definition of the state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory” (1946:78).

⁹⁹ It was the U.S. government that recruited Hmong into the Secret Army, rather than the reverse. This Secret Army depended on the U.S. government for guns and ammunitions, food drops, money, etc. Working as subordinates to Americans, Hmong lives were deemed not as important as American lives; Hmong were expected to sacrifice dozens of their own men to save one or two American lives (especially pilots). Moreover, the U.S. had the power to negotiate official cease-fires between countries; Hmong never had such power.

To make matters worse for Hmong refugees, in late 1975, the U.S. government had no desire or plan to admit them for resettlement in the United States. Declassified U.S. documents reveal that, in September 1975, President Gerald Ford approved a secret U.S. State Department plan to resettle Hmong permanently in Thailand under a program called “Meo Refugee Relief and Assistance Program” (U.S. Department of State 1998e:1-3). In an August 5, 1975 “Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, Deputy Secretary of State Ingersoll, and Director of Central Intelligence Colby,” Kissinger writes, in part,

Spokesmen for the Royal Thai Government have indicated Thai willingness in principle to permit the Meo [Hmong] to remain in Thailand if adequate financial assistance is provided by the United States. It is requested that a working group comprising representatives of the addressees, and under the chairmanship of the representative of the Department of State, on a priority basis *develop a plan for the permanent resettlement of the Meo refugees in Thailand. Knowledge of this plan should be limited to a strictly need-to-know basis*. This plan should be forwarded for the President’s review no later than August 15, 1975 (U.S. Department of State 1998d:1, emphasis added).

Although we do not know the exact motives behind this plan, it is clear that the U.S. government and more precisely, the Executive Branch, having just lost the military and political wars in Vietnam, felt no serious obligation to its former Laotian Hmong allies in the aftermath of the war. The U.S. government’s failure to evacuate the vast majority of its Hmong allies from Laos and its secret plan to keep Hmong refugees permanently in Thailand would seem to contradict any claim that the U.S. in 1975 saw itself as having the moral responsibility to rescue their “allied aliens” (Hein 1993:24).

In retrospect, the United States’ plan to permanently resettle Hmong refugees in Thailand may have been done to further the interests of both the U.S. and the Thai governments, who were allies throughout the secret war in Laos. As I suggested above, before the end of the war, the U.S. government saw and used the Vang Pao-led Hmong army in Military Region 2 as a buffer

against the advance of the North Vietnamese into the Mekong delta, which joined southern Laos and northern Thailand. Following the war, the remnants of the Secret Army, by then based in Laos and Thailand but taking orders from exiled Laotian leaders in France and the U.S., were involved in an armed resistance movement that lasted throughout the 1990s (G.Y. Lee 2004). According to some Hmong veterans' accounts, although Thai soldiers were not overtly involved in the resistance movement, Thai officials accepted bribes and allowed members of the resistance to carry on resistance work, including crossing the border to Laos and reentering Thailand without penalty. Denying Hmong refugees the possibility of exit, other than exit to Laos, would probably compel even more of them to engage in the underground resistance movement, no matter how futile such movement would become. For its part, the U.S. government generally turned a blind eye to the Laotian-Hmong resistance movement until the 1990s when the U.S.' market and political relations with Vietnam and Laos began to shift and improve largely in response to China's increasing influence (real and perceived) in that region of the world.

If foreign policy interest was the most crucial factor in the U.S. desire to keep Hmong in Thailand, then xenophobia probably played the most important role in the U.S. desire to keep Hmong out of the U.S. The recent work of historian Paul Hillmer (2010) is especially revealing. In his research on Hmong refugees, Hillmer (2010) finds that, in the mid-1970s, primitivism was used as an excuse by U.S. officials to deny the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the U.S. As Hillmer points out, "according to a former refugee worker, a 'senior USAID management-type' issued a cable stating 'that [Hmong] were far too primitive to ever be considered for settlement in the U.S. because they were straight out of the trees'" (2010:198). Except for a group of 500 Hmong refugees (most had direct ties to the U.S. CIA) that was admitted to the U.S. in October of 1975, the U.S. had no "separate track" or plan to resettle additional Hmong refugees (Hillmer

2010:201). The claim of Hmong's primitiveness, besides serving as a convenient excuse for barring Hmong refugees from the U.S., was consistent with the negative opinions and nativist sentiments that segments of the American public and many in the U.S. House of Representatives held against Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants more generally (Hein 1993:39-40).

It was only through the combined strategic efforts of a number of well-positioned U.S. institutional actors sympathetic to Hmong refugees' plight that the first large group of about 11,000 Hmong refugees was able to immigrate to the United States in the spring of 1976 under the Expanded Parole Program (Hillmer 2010:198-206). However, 60,000 to 80,000 dislocated Hmong refugees still remained inside and outside of Thai refugee camps by the late 1970s. Most of these refugees would eventually find their way to western countries over the next 20 years. However, many Hmong families, out of fear and uncertainty or because of the mediated desire (of which more below) to return to Laos, chose not to apply for resettlement in third world countries (Hafner 1985). Beginning in the early 1990s, the Thai government began closing refugee camps and forcing Hmong refugees to relocate from one camp site to another (Tapp 2005:107). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the Thai government repatriated Hmong individuals and families that it deemed illegal immigrants and placed those unwilling to return 'voluntarily' in detention camps (Jacobs 1996; Médecins Sans Frontières 2009).¹⁰⁰

Between 1989 and 1996, tens of thousands of Laotian refugees were repatriated under a multilateral policy known as the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese Refugees (Robinson 2004). Established in June 1989 with the blessing of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and 70 governments, including the U.S. government (Robinson 2004:320), the CPA was essentially a refugee screening program plus a repatriation

¹⁰⁰ As late as 2009, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières report that forced repatriation was occurring against 5,000 Hmong in the Huai Nam Khao camp in northern Thailand.

program designed to rid Southeast Asian first-asylum countries such as Thailand of refugees by the end of 1995. According to the UNHCR (1996:n.p.), between 1989 and 1996,

The CPA facilitated the recognition and subsequent resettlement of over 74,000 Vietnamese refugees, and supported the repatriation to their country of origin and subsequent reintegration of over 88,000 Vietnamese who did not fulfill internationally recognized refugee criteria. The CPA also facilitated the resettlement of some 51,000 Lao and supported the voluntary repatriation and reintegration in their country of origin of some 22,400 Lao, most of whom were recognized as *prima facie* refugees.

Between 1989 and 1994, the U.S. government, under the Bush and the Clinton administrations, contributed about \$18 million to support a more specific repatriation program between Thailand, Laos, and the UNHCR known as the Luang Prabang Tripartite Agreement (Quincy 2000:469). In effect, the Tripartite Agreement and the CPA functioned to regulate international migration, including immigration to the U.S. These multilateral policies effectively prevented the immigration of at least 110,400 Southeast Asians who fled their former countries but were denied refugee status and subsequently deported. Hmong refugees in Thailand and their Hmong American allies could do little to stop the forced repatriation, because, as Jacobs (1996) points out, the UNHCR, United States, Thai, and Laos jointly supported the repatriation program.

Despite the various overt and covert political obstacles to international migration, at least 1.75 million Cambodians, Laotians, and Vietnamese refugees managed to gain entry to other eastern and western countries between 1975 and 1989. More than three-fourths of the 1.75 million immigrated to the U.S., Canada, Australia, and France. But China, Hong Kong, and Japan also took in 16 percent. The rest of Western Europe took in less than five percent (Hein 1993:2).¹⁰¹ In 1975 alone, about 125,000 Vietnamese, 4,600 Cambodian and 800 Laotian refugees arrived in the United States. Over the next 17 years, an average of 56,200 Southeast

¹⁰¹ Specifically, of 1,755,268 Southeast Asian refugees, the U.S. took in 930,153 (53 percent), China took in 263,000 (15 percent), Canada took in 154,264 (9 percent), Australia took in 136,157 (8 percent), and France took in 126,897 (7 percent).

Asian refugees would arrive each year, such that between 1975 and 1992, over a million (1,085,612) Southeast Asian refugees, including Amerasians from Vietnam had arrived in the United States. Of this, at least 148,000 were Cambodian, 223,000 were Laotian, and 585,000 were Vietnamese refugees (V.H. Nguyen 1995:319-320). The arrival of Southeast Asian refugees makes them the largest refugee population of any previous refugees to the U.S.

Trans-State Ties and Implications for Collective Political Action

The fact that most Southeast Asians are political migrants rather than economic migrants has implications for refugees' trans-state activities and their 'relationship' with their former homelands. Whereas economic migrant-sending countries (EMSCs) might 'feel' morally obligated to maintain contacts with or even protect the interests of their 'nationals' in the countries of destination, political migrant-sending countries (PMSCs) probably feel no such obligation. Instead, PMSCs are probably more concerned with ways to control the activities of exiled 'traitors,' so as to prevent them from interfering with the PMSCs' domestic and multilateral interests.¹⁰² Like economic migrants, many political migrants continue to interact with certain social networks in their former countries; however, PMSCs are likely to view these interactions with suspicion even as they welcome exiles' remittances and other capital-generating activities into the country.

Laotian Hmong refugees' migration to the U.S. has afforded them with certain rights, privileges, and political resources that they would not have obtained otherwise. In the U.S., these rights include the significant rights under the First Amendment, such as the freedom to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. Being in the U.S., rather

¹⁰² The Lao PDR, over time, changed its tone toward exiles/refugees, preferring to call them Laotian nationals. ... The U.S. arrest and prosecution of former major general Vang Pao in 2007 occurred following the organized protests among the general's supporters against the U.S. granting of Normal Trade Relations status to Laos in 2004.

than some other western state, also gives Hmong communities access, albeit limited, to influential political institutions and state actors such as U.S. Congress members.

The general form of Hmong's social structure has remained unchanged since their immigration to the U.S. some 35 years ago. As such, social relations that prevailed in Laos remain possible in the U.S. I contend, following Lemoine (2008:11-12), that it is the segmentarity of Hmong's social system that makes possible the maintenance of Hmong kin and affine ties over great distances. Having a segmentary lineage system means that Hmong individuals and families could disperse when circumstances compelled them to but could regroup on the basis of their lineage ties when circumstances permitted (Lemoine 2008:11). The lineage-clan system enable, if not also actively encourage persons to form various kinds of ties that could grow into lasting, resourceful alliances. As long as persons are within interaction distance, alliances could occur at just about any or a combination of levels: (a) the level of the lineage (alliances between families); (b) the level of the extended family (alliance between families related by exogamic clan marriages);¹⁰³ (c) the level of the sub-clan (alliance between several lineages); (d) the level of the clan (alliance between several sub-clans); or (e) the level of the ethnic group (inter-clan alliances). These kinship ties and other friendship ties are what enable the frequent socio-cultural and material exchanges (e.g., remittances, commodities, etc.) between the Hmong of western countries and the Hmong of Laos and Thailand.

Not all Hmong have or maintain connections with the Hmong of Laos or Thailand, however. In my interviews and surveys with Hmong American adults, it was common for Hmong college students to report that they do not personally communicate with other Hmong in Laos or Thailand even though their parents frequently do so. Although it is obvious that specific

¹⁰³ The Hmong relations in this grouping would include brother-in-laws linked through a sister/wife (*yawm yij-dab laug*); son- and father-in-law (*vauv-yawm txiv*); brother-in-laws linked through wives who are sisters (*txiv hluas-txiv laus*; etc.).

networks of Hmong Americans are linked to specific networks of Laotian-Hmong, Hmong differ from other immigrant groups that have formed hometown associations.

Conclusion

I have provided a background on Hmong society by describing their social structure, political organization, and pre-migration experiences. Some of Hmong's complex contemporary struggles in Laos and in the U.S. can be traced to their unequal, ambiguous relationship with the U.S. government. From the early 1960s through the early 1970s, the U.S. Executive Branch and its agencies, taking advantage of Laotian Hmong's politically weak position in Laos, actively 'incorporated' a significant segment of them into the U.S.' covert military. However, in the aftermath of the war in 1975 the U.S. government secretly planned to have Hmong refugees permanently resettled in Thailand, partly as a way to avoid resettling Hmong refugees in the U.S. and partly to achieve plausible deniability for the U.S. government's involvement in Laos. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. co-signed and helped finance multilateral policies that repatriated tens of thousands of Hmong and Laotians who sought refuge in Thailand. Despite or because of the historical and contemporary forms of subjugation and exclusion that displaced Hmong faced, Hmong exiles have turned to politics in order to try to advocate for their people. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, Hmong Americans, beginning in the early 1990s, actively engaged in foreign-oriented protests to try to alleviate the myriad forms of exploitation that have resulted since the end of the Laotian civil war. Furthermore, Hmong social movement actors strategically invoked Hmong's military-service to the U.S. as part of their political claims making on the U.S. government.

Figures for Chapter 2

Figure 2-1: The Basic Social Groupings in the Hmong Social Structure

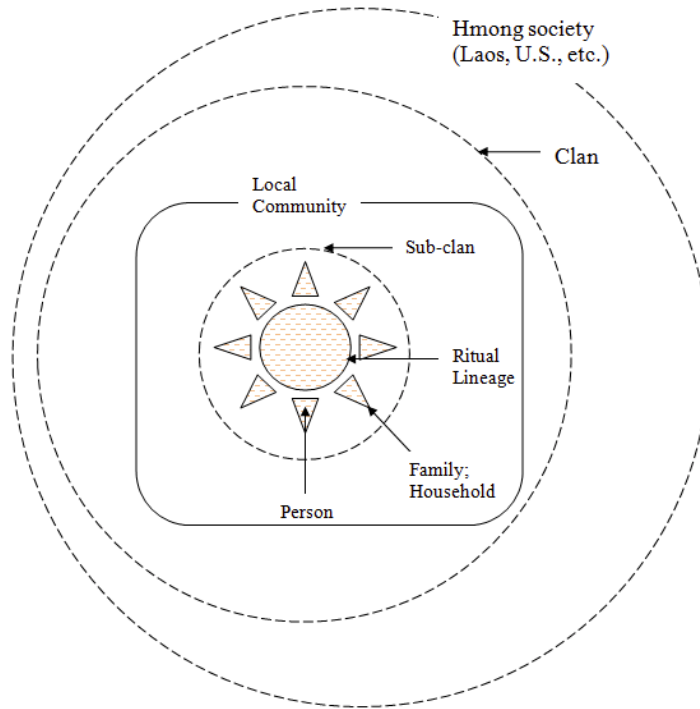
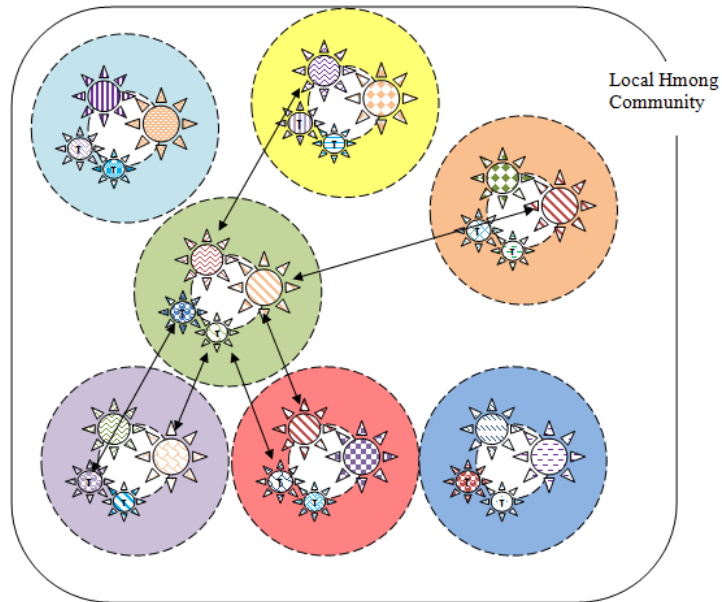


Figure 2-2: Visual Representation of a Hmong American Community



Chapter 3: Ethnic Community Formation in the U.S.

Jeremy Hein (1993) points out that the experiences of Southeast Asian refugees differ from those of other previous ‘refugees’ such as the Cubans in a number of ways. One important difference is that Southeast Asian refugees were “America’s first allied aliens” (Hein 1993:24). That is, Southeast Asians came to the U.S. because the United States’ political and military defeat in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia made Southeast Asians of the U.S. side the target of political persecution. In contrast, “most Cubans migrants [were] not fleeing political persecution” (Hein 1993:28). A second major difference, Hein notes, is that, prior to 1975 there was no sizable Southeast Asian community in the U.S.; in contrast, Cubans had existing communities (1993:30). Furthermore, others suggest that Southeast Asian refugees differ from Cuban refugees of the 1980s in that “Southeast Asian refugees have enjoyed a consistently positive contexts of reception” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:99).

In this chapter, I examine Hmong Americans’ contexts of reception in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of their reception and community formation in the U.S. Specifically, I examine how Hmong former refugees were received by established residents in particular U.S. communities and what these varied receptions have meant for their ability to form ethnic communities. I will also analyze Hmong’s naturalization as a type of political resource.¹⁰⁴ In the rest of this chapter, I will begin by analyzing the government and established residents’ reception of Southeast Asian refugees prior to their arrival and after their arrival. Next, I will describe Hmong American communities across three U.S. states, focusing on my primary site of fieldwork. Then, as formal citizenship is both an outcome and an important resource in political

¹⁰⁴ In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I use the term “Hmong” and “Hmong Americans” interchangeably. Both terms refer primarily to persons of Hmong linguistic or ethnic background who reside in the United States: they include persons of the first, 1.5, second, and third generations. Wherever I wish to distinguish Hmong groups of particular generations, countries, or refugee status, I use terms such as “Hmong former refugees,” “Hmong in France,” “Hmong Americans of the second generation,” etc.

incorporation, I will describe the prevalence of naturalization among the Hmong foreign population. Finally, as legal status and social identity are intricately interconnected,¹⁰⁵ I will draw on survey and interview data to describe the ethnic and national identities of U.S.-born and foreign-born Hmong.

Initial Contexts of the Reception: Government and Established Residents' Responses

During the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the United States' initial policy of resettling Indochinese refugees (hereinafter Southeast Asian refugees) was aimed at scattering families and households across multiple states and cities (U.S. Congress 1975; Miyares 1998:26). The primary rationale for this was to prevent the refugees from overwhelming individual states' or localities' social services. The second rationale was to encourage rapid assimilation (Zaharlick and Brainard 1987). In retrospect, this policy of dispersing Southeast Asian refugees resulted more from the U.S. Congress' uneasy compromise to a difficult social and political crisis—a crisis that the U.S. Executive Branch and its bureaucratic agencies had a direct hand in creating—than from its desire to provide refuge to the populations of war-torn Southeast Asia, let alone its desire to systematically integrate them into U.S. society. Let us try to understand how this compromise came about.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second Indochina War in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians were seen as simply “displaced persons”—because neither the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) nor Southeast Asian receiving states recognized them as official refugees (Davies 2006:9-11). Seen as only displaced persons, Southeast Asians were deemed unworthy of legal protection. Between May 1975 and the end of July 1975 alone, over 9,000 Cambodians and 32,000 Laotians left their countries; nearly all

¹⁰⁵ Both are aspects of group social location; historically, legal exclusion and racial exclusion have gone hand in hand.

sought refuge in Thailand. During that same period, about 143,000 Vietnamese escapees sought refuge in various Southeast Asian states including Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines (Davies 2006:8). This crisis grew rapidly in the following years and decade as hundreds of thousands more Southeast Asians escapees sought temporary refuge and asylum in these countries. According to Sara Davies (2006:9), Thailand and most other Southeast Asian states, in order to compel the United States to provide material assistance and resettlement places for Southeast Asian refugees within their borders, adamantly refused to be signatories to the United Nation's 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.¹⁰⁶ For its part, the "UNHCR refused to make any claims for these groups as refugees or to compel other states to provide resettlement offers" (Davies 2006:11). Instead, the UNHCR, as early as July 30, 1975, "signed a bilateral agreement with Thailand" that, among other things, promised to assist Thailand "with voluntary repatriation" as one of the "lasting solutions to *its problems*" (Davies 2006:11, emphasis added).¹⁰⁷

Although the sheer scale of the refugee population was probably unanticipated by the U.S., "by 1995, the total number of Indochinese refugees had amounted to nearly 2 million—about half of whom eventually came to the United States" (M.H. Nguyen and Haines 1997:42). In fact, between 1975 and 1994, a total of 906,233 refugees from Cambodia (14 percent or 127,413), Laos (21 percent or 192,836), and Vietnam (65 percent or 585,984) would be granted permanent resident status in the U.S. (L.W. Gordon 1996:334).

¹⁰⁶ According to Goodwin-Gill (2008), "Article 1A, paragraph 1, of the 1951 Convention applies the term 'refugee', first, to any person considered a refugee under earlier international arrangements. Article 1A, paragraph 2, read now together with the 1967 Protocol and without the time limit, then offers a general definition of the refugee as including *any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return there or to avail themselves of its protection, on account of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group, or political opinion*" (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁷ This bilateral agreement foreshadowed another UNHCR-backed plan of repatriation, the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indochinese Refugees (June 1989) which systematically used screening and repatriation to discourage further emigration of refugees and to clear out existing refugees from countries of first asylums by the end of 1995.

However, in 1975, U.S. federal officials expected to resettle no more than 130,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees (U.S. Congress 1975:6). An additional twenty thousand more Southeast Asian refugees were to be resettled only on a contingency basis—that is, only if they could not find safe haven elsewhere outside of the U.S. For, according to Lewis Dean Brown, the then-U.S. Ambassador to Jordan and Director of the Interagency Task Force under the U.S. State Department, “We intend to ask international organizations to take responsibility [for the 20,000]. Only where we fail will we consider entry into the United States” (U.S. Congress 1975:7). In spite of U.S. officials’ repeated requests on outside governments for help, however, few countries wanted to take in Southeast Asian refugees. Instead, many defined the Southeast Asian refugee crisis as “America’s problem, entirely” (U.S. Congress 1975:15). This presented the U.S. with a serious dilemma.

Joshua Eilberg, then a U.S. Representative from Pennsylvania and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law, expressed this dilemma during the first congressional hearing on Southeast Asian refugees:

We must try to solve this problem at a time when the United States faces the highest rate of unemployment in 30 years. We are also faced with a shortage of housing, a high cost of living, and a growing apprehension about foreign aid. The Congress is faced with a great dilemma. Should the United States abandon its traditional role of offering asylum to the needy and to the persecuted? Can the United States ignore the convention and protocol on the status of refugees to which we are a signatory? (U.S. Congress 1975:1)

On one hand, the U.S. government was “more than willing to recognize the Indochinese as refugees because, in doing so, their flight served as a justification for its decision to wage war in Indochina by signalling the many leaving as proof that the fight against communism was justified” (Davies 2006:12). On the other hand, some in the U.S. Congress expressed xenophobia and prejudice toward Southeast Asian refugees—xenophobia and prejudice all too similar to those directed at Chinese immigrant laborers throughout the 1800s and 1900s. These

included the fear that Southeast Asians would bring serious or communicable diseases, arrive as war criminals, and/or become public charges (U.S. Congress 1975:10-115). Policy makers undoubtedly anticipated negative reactions from established residents, even though they knew that the U.S. government had an obligation to protect refugees under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. The policy to disperse Southeast Asians across the U.S. represented an implicit compromise between the xenophobia of policy makers and their real or imagined constituents on the one hand and the United States' obligation to fulfill its national duty under the Refugee Convention and Protocol on the other.

Partly because of nativist sentiments among some policy makers and the public (Zucker 1983), and partly because U.S. law lacked a "clear intention or commitment to participate in refugee resettlement" (U.S. Congress 1979:8), the responsibility of sponsoring and resettling Southeast Asian refugees was placed almost entirely on voluntary agencies (or Volags) and individual American families. Iowa's Bureau of Refugee Services, with the approval of Governor Robert D. Ray, was the only state government entity that contracted with the U.S. Department of State to resettle Southeast Asian refugees.¹⁰⁸ Many of the Volags were church organizations such as the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, the Church World Service, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Fass 1991).¹⁰⁹

Laotian Hmong refugees began arriving in the United States as early as June 1975, albeit in small numbers. In California, cities such as San Diego, Santa Ana, and Long Beach were the first to receive Hmong refugees. As one *Los Angeles Times* article reports, "the first group [of

¹⁰⁸ Sara Frasher, "A Promise Called Iowa," Johnston, Iowa: Iowa Public Television Foundation, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Hmong Americans' adoption of a wide range of Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon denominations is linked in part to the resettlement efforts of these various church agencies.

Hmong] arrived in Orange County [California] in June, 1975.”¹¹⁰ According to C.C. Moua (2012:86), on July 7, 1975, former Major General Vang Pao and his family arrived in Washington, D.C. from France. From the District of Columbia, Vang Pao moved to Missoula, Montana, the hometown of Jerry Daniels, a former CIA operative who had worked closely with Vang Pao during the Secret War in Laos. Vang Pao would later relocate to Westminster, California in 1977. In the same year, he founded the first Lao Family Community social service organization in Santa Ana, California in 1977.¹¹¹ In retrospect, Vang Pao’s relocation to Orange County is not surprising considering that Hmong communities were beginning to emerge in Santa Ana and Long Beach at the time.¹¹² In Minnesota, the first Hmong family to arrive was Dang Her and his wife, who arrived in Anoka County on November 5, 1975. The Her family eventually relocated to the city of Saint Paul (C.Y. Vang 2008). Finally, according to Simon Fass (1991:15), “Hmong first came to Wisconsin in 1975 and 1976 as part of the federal government’s original refugee dispersal plan.”

However, it was not until the period between December 1975 and May 1976 that the first significant “wave” of Hmong refugee families arrived. Sucheng Chan (1994:49) points out that in “December 1975...Congress admitted 3,466 Hmong under parole [and in] May 1976, another eleven thousand Laotians [including Hmong] were granted entry under parole.”¹¹³ During this early phase of resettlement, cities as far apart as San Diego, Portland, Des Moines, and Philadelphia were among the first to receive Laotian and Hmong refugees. Some of the cities in

¹¹⁰ Mark Chalon Smith, "Tradition and Tragedy: In Irvine, Hmong Quilts Reflect Everything from Old Values to the Horrors of the Vietnam War," *Los Angeles Times*, December 31, 1992.

¹¹¹ Lao Family Community of Fresno, Inc., “History of Lao Family.” Retrieved January 3, 2011 from <http://www.laofamilyfresno.org/>

¹¹² According to the Hmong Association of Long Beach (formed in 1980), “the first five Hmong families arrived in Long Beach in 1975.” Retrieved January 3, 2011 from <http://hmongassoclbca.org/Docs/HALB%20Brochure.pdf>

¹¹³ The parole refers to the U.S. Attorney General’s parole program that allowed refugees to be admitted to the U.S. beyond the 17,400 ceiling set on the annual “normal flow” permitted to be admitted. See Warren Brown, "Refugee Plan Would Hurt Laos Tribe, Hill Critics Say," *Washington Post*, March 24, 1979.

which Laotian refugees initially settled had no or very small pre-existing Asian communities (Miyares 1998:26). In spite of this, in October 1975, when seven families of Thai Dam (a Laotian group) arrived in Des Moines, Iowa, they were greeted by one of Governor Ray's aides with, "We are happy to have you in Iowa."¹¹⁴ But, as we shall return to, Iowa's generally positive reception of Southeast Asian refugees was the exception rather than the norm.

The second major wave of Laotian refugees arrived between 1979 and 1982. By early 1979, 223,000 Southeast Asian refugees, including 17,000 Hmong, had been admitted to the United States.¹¹⁵ By 1982, there were approximately 46,500 Hmong refugees in the United States (Bliatout 1982:6). Moderate concentrations of Hmong (1,000 or more persons) emerged in cities such as Denver, Des Moines, Portland, Seattle, and Providence. Larger concentrations of Hmong (3,000 or more) developed in Minneapolis, Chicago, San Diego, Santa Ana, Fresno and Merced (Bliatout 1982:7).

In the early 1980s, it was quite common for refugee families to be placed with individual sponsors who lived in remote places. The fright and despair of being placed with a non-Asian sponsor are vividly described by a Hmong former refugee, 61, who recounts what happened to his elderly aunt and uncle when they were sponsored by a white couple in 1980, apparently to live and work on the outskirts of Washington:

Uncle [name] and aunt [name] were sponsored by an American couple in 1980. When they arrived to a farm in a small town [in or near Spokane] in Washington, the American sponsors gave them cartons of milk, some fruits and cans of vegetables, and told them to eat those whenever they were hungry. My uncle and aunt spoke no word of English at all and they did not know how to drink or eat those things. They were so scared because they thought they had been left there [on the farm] to die. Days later, the [white] sponsors came back to find that they have not eaten any of the things. Worried that they would starve to death, the sponsors eventually brought a Lao person to the farm. When the Lao got there, he asked if my uncle spoke Lao. The first thing my uncle did was cry

¹¹⁴ Lawrence Journal-World, "43 Indochinese Refugee Resettle in Corn Country," *Lawrence Journal-World*, October 27, 1975.

¹¹⁵ Washington Post, "Refugee Plan Would Hurt Laos Tribe, Hill Critics Say."

his heart out; my uncle explained the whole ‘nightmare’ and pleaded for the Lao person to help save them. The Lao assured them not to be afraid. Under the circumstances, the sponsors gave up on the idea of having them live on the farm and wanted to help them find a Hmong community. ... When asked, my aunt and uncle told them that they had nobody’s telephone number. But, fortunately, the Lao person knew about the Hmong community in Portland. The sponsors eventually were able to make contact with [name of Hmong lineage leader] who now lives in Fresno and drove my uncle and aunt to Portland. When they eventually arrived to Portland and the home of [name], the first thing both my aunt and uncle did when they saw [name] was cry their hearts out.¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, after resettling in Portland, the aunt became ill. After her and her husband relocated to northern California, she succumbed to her illness. Her relatives, including my interviewee, attribute the cause of her chronic illness to the extremely frightening experience that she and her husband experienced upon arrival. Her husband passed away a few years ago.

The third wave of Laotian refugees arrived during the 1986-1997 period. Between 1975 and 1989, “197,538 primary refugees from Laos were resettled in the United States” (Miyares 1998:22). From the spring of 1976 through the mid-1990s, an average of 6,000 Laotian Hmong refugees arrived annually (Dunnigan et al. 1996:191). The last wave of Hmong refugees from Laos would arrive in the mid-2000s. Between 2004 and 2006, a group of 15,000 Laotian Hmong refugees from Wat Thamkrabot, Thailand was finally resettled in the United States; many of them have been in Thailand refugee camps for decades (P. Lor 2009).

Secondary Migration and the Emergence of Ethnic Communities

Initially, the federal government, through its Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) reimbursed state agencies and Volags for providing welfare, medical, and social services to Southeast Asian refugees (U.S. Congress 1979). However, beginning in the early 1980s, the federal government left this fiscal responsibility more and more to the states. In May 1982, years before later waves of Southeast Asian refugees arrived, the Reagan administration cut off cash and medical assistance to refugees. The government had previously promised that

¹¹⁶ L. Xiong, personal communication, May 15, 2009, Fresno, California.

aid would last for 36 months after arrival. However, in 1982, it shortened it to 18 months after arrival.¹¹⁷ To make matters worse, states such as Washington and Oregon, which previously relied on federal aid to support Southeast Asian refugees, chose not to allot any special funds to continue the support to refugees after their federal aid programs were cut.¹¹⁸ These conditions made the already highly disadvantaged Southeast Asian families even more vulnerable. Southeast Asian refugees, most of whom lacked the English skills and formal credentials to find gainful employment, were left with difficult choices: to stay or to move elsewhere.

In the 1980s, thousands of Southeast Asian families, including Hmong, engaged in secondary migration on their own or as part of a lineage or subclan. But Southeast Asians migrated for various reasons rather than economic reasons alone (M.H. Nguyen and Haines 1997). As alluded to above, most were trying to escape destitution by trying to look for jobs elsewhere (Fass 1985; Desbarats 1998). For instance, many Southeast Asians took part in the Planned Secondary Resettlement program, a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to encourage Southeast Asian refugees to relocate outside of their initial states. Many migrated in order to be reunited with lineages, subclans or co-ethnic communities (Finck 1986; Miyares 1998). Still, others such as the Hmong of Philadelphia were compelled to move because of racial violence perpetrated against them by established residents—specifically, black young adults.¹¹⁹ Given the hostile environments that many families experienced, avoiding violent conflict and seeking social protection were equally, if not more important than short-term economic wellbeing. Having few state options, many Southeast Asian refugees migrated to states such as California, Illinois, Louisiana, Minnesota and North

¹¹⁷ Eugene Register-Guard, "Recession Driving Thousands of Indochinese out of Oregon," *Eugene Register-Guard*, April 15, 1982.

¹¹⁸ Jay Matthews, "Federal Aid Reductions Spur Refugees to Flee Pacific Northwest," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1982.

¹¹⁹ William Robbins, "Violence Forces Hmong to Leave Philadelphia," *New York Times*, September 17, 1984.

Carolina (M.H. Nguyen and Haines 1997).¹²⁰ In short, Southeast Asians' secondary migration was both compelled and voluntary.

Secondary migration did not bring an end to Southeast Asians' ordeals, however. In many cases, secondary migration simply meant replacing one set of established residents with another set. Southeast Asian families and their emergent communities often faced further nativist sentiments and both racial and class prejudice from the residents and/or city officials at their new destinations. For example, in response to Hmong's migration from Washington state, Robert Edmundson Jr., a refugee coordinator in North Carolina, was quoted as saying, "we don't want everybody to get in the car and come on over here"—expressing his fear that the influx of Southeast Asian refugees could turn NC and other immigrant receiving states into "little Californias."¹²¹ In Fresno, Amelia Torres of the Catholic Charities, Inc., reportedly stated, "It is going to make a severe impact on our welfare system."¹²² These attitudes and sentiments were not unlike those that the Thai government (and other host governments) held against dislocated Southeast Asian refugees throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Unwelcomed in some cities and unable to afford rent and the costs of living in others, most Hmong families settled or relocated to cities where their co-ethnics already lived. Some Hmong who relocated to California welcomed its more tolerant physical climate.¹²³ However, a better physical climate hardly translated to a more welcoming social climate. Relocated Hmong continued to face racial prejudice and nativist sentiments. For instance, in 1996, local residents publicly opposed the settlement of additional Hmong families in Yuba County, a rural and

¹²⁰ May Lee, "Indochinese Urged to Go East for New Homes, Jobs," *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 1986.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Washington Post, "Federal Aid Reductions Spur Refugees to Flee Pacific Northwest."

¹²³ Field notes: C. Xiong's family arrived in Ogden, Utah in 1981 but moved to Stockton, California in 1985. Xiong, 71, recalls the dreadful, extremely cold winters in Utah, but also explained that he moved because members of his Xiong subclan helped him with his move to California. C. Xiong, personal communication, May 5, 2009, Sacramento, California.

predominantly white, working-class county in northern California. Some established residents claimed that Hmong newcomers would overburden the social services in the area; some openly resented Hmong's alleged material success and rebuked Hmong veterans as underserving of public assistance.¹²⁴ The fact that the Hmong population in Yuba County experienced a period of decline in the mid-1990s and since the mid-1980s, never surpassed the 3,000 person mark can be attributed at least in part to these local hostilities.¹²⁵

In sum, the U.S. government's prejudices and xenophobia against Southeast Asian refugees in the mid-1970s were contributing factors (the other major factor being economic hysteria), in its decision to systematically disperse Southeast Asian refugees across the U.S. Geographic dispersion significantly disrupted refugees' social ties and access to family and co-ethnic support networks. At the same time, established residents' nativist sentiments and/or physical violence against Southeast Asian refugees in some localities pushed them out and effectively barred the latter's social and political incorporation in those localities. Furthermore, the federal and state cuts to Southeast Asian refugees' public aid in the 1980s created serious financial problems for refugees, perpetuating their vulnerability and compelling them to engage in difficult inter-state migrations.

Internal migration contributed to the important demographic shifts in some states' Southeast Asian population. Map 3-1 provides a visual representation of the Laotian refugee population—Lao, Hmong, Khmu, Mien, Tai—as it was distributed in the U.S. at the time of

¹²⁴ In a letter to the *Appeal Democrat* of Sutter and Yuba Counties, California on July 2, 1996, a resident, who signed her name as "Ms. R" wrote: "[W]e don't need any more Hmongs [sic] here. Have you noticed the new cars and vans they drive? It is our tax dollars buying them. How many of the widows of the Americans killed in action get their medical bills paid and are they driving new cars? Do they get their medical bills paid or do they have to work to pay them? ... My son-in-law and a nephew went to Vietnam and fought for our country. They saw their buddies killed in action and others crippled in World War II. He doesn't get a big check or food stamps. We don't owe a dime to any of these people that our boys fought and died to save. Enough is enough... think of our people first."

¹²⁵ During the Census 1990, 2000, and 2010, Hmong's population in Yuba County was 2,162, 2,683, and 2,426 respectively.

1990 U.S. Census.¹²⁶ Map 3-2 shows the distribution of Hmong Americans at the time of the 2000 U.S. Census. In general, between 1990 and 2000, Southeast Asian subgroups became less dispersed and more concentrated. States such as California, Minnesota and Wisconsin became “favored” destinations, in part because of the availability of financial and medical assistance programs and the prospects of obtaining gainful employment (Reder et al. 1984:22-23).

Whereas in the late 1970s, St. Paul, Minnesota was the primary resettlement area for Hmong refugees, by the early 1980s, Fresno and Merced, California also became popular destinations for Hmong engaged in secondary migration (Miyares 1998:26-31).

Hmong American Communities in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

Although Hmong American communities can be found in most of the 50 states and the District of Columbia, over 80 percent of Hmong Americans are concentrated in just three states: California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. As shown in Table 3-1, this pattern has held quite constant since the 1990 census. Between 1990 and 2000, the Hmong populations in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin increased by 32 percent, 135 percent, and 99 percent, respectively.¹²⁷ Hmong’s significant concentrations in these states, as most of my subsequent chapters will show, have direct implications for their collective political actions. More specifically, the history, size and relative proportion of Hmong’s population in an area matter for their ability to engage in both electoral and non-electoral political activities. As such, it is worth describing these aspects in some detail.

[Table 3-1 about here]

¹²⁶ Except for their denser concentrations in some areas, the distribution of the Vietnamese population in 1990 was similar to that of Laotians (not shown).

¹²⁷ The dramatic increase in North Carolina’s Hmong population is linked to the inter-state migrations that occurred in the aftermath of the 1996 federal “Welfare Reform,” whose impact on Hmong will be analyzed in a subsequent chapter.

Whether in California, Minnesota, or Wisconsin, the Hmong population makes up less than one percent of each state's total population (table 3-2). However, the three states differ significantly in terms of the relative Hmong population: specifically, Hmong as a proportion of the state's Asian American population. Whereas California's Hmong make up a mere 1.5 percent of its Asian American population, Minnesota's Hmong make up 26 percent of its Asian American population. In Wisconsin, Hmong make up an even higher percentage of the Asian American population: 35 percent. In both Minnesota and Wisconsin, Hmong are the largest Asian subgroup.¹²⁸ In contrast, Hmong Californians are dwarfed by several major Asian subgroups in that state. In Minnesota, Asians form the third largest minority group (3.6 percent), behind Hispanics (4 percent) and African Americans (4.3 percent). Similarly, in Wisconsin, Asians (2.1 percent) form the second largest group behind Hispanics (4.9 percent) and African Americans (5.9 percent). However, in California, Asians (12.4 percent) form the second largest group behind only Hispanics who comprise 36 percent of the state's population.

With respect to educational attainment, California and Wisconsin appear on par with one another. However, the average educational attainment of Minnesota's Hmong population of 25 years and older is slightly higher than that of their counterparts in California and Wisconsin. On all three indicators of income shown, Hmong Californians fared worst compared to the Hmong of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Minnesota falls between California and Wisconsin in terms of median household income, home ownership, and poverty.

[Table 3-2 about here]

¹²⁸ Within MN, the largest Asian subgroups are Hmong, followed by Asian Indians (32,979) and Vietnamese (21,445). In WI, the largest Asian subgroups are Hmong, followed by Asian Indians (19,362) and Chinese (16,492). In CA, the largest Asian subgroups are Chinese (1,164,102), followed by Filipinos (1,131,966) and Vietnamese (535,683). Source: ACS 2005-09 PUMS, Weighted Samples.

Within each state, Hmong are more concentrated in some cities than in others. In California, Hmong are dispersed across nearly all counties of the Central Valley—a flat, agriculture-rich region that includes 18 counties, stretching from Kern County in the south to Shasta County in the north (Umbach 1997).¹²⁹ According to the latest U.S. Census 2010 data, almost three-fourths of all Hmong Californians live in just three metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) within the Central Valley: the Fresno MSA (30,648), the Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Roseville MSA (25,794), and the Merced MSA (6,920). Maps 3-3 and 3-4 show the relative concentrations of Hmong Americans in Fresno and Sacramento area, respectively. The maps show Hmong as a proportion of the Asian alone population in individual census tracts. For instance, red colored tracts represent tracts in which Hmong Americans make up between 40 and 60 percent of the Asian American population. In Sacramento, Hmong are concentrated to the north and to the south of the downtown-Capitol area. As we shall return to shortly, in Fresno, Hmong are concentrated in the inner city.

In Minnesota, about 40,100 Hmong or 80 percent of the ethnic group live in the St. Paul-Minneapolis MSA. They are much more concentrated in Saint Paul than in Minneapolis, however. Saint Paul alone is home to 28,591 Hmong, making them the largest Asian subgroup (68 percent) in the city. Finally, within the state of Wisconsin, about half of all Hmong persons live in four MSAs: the Milwaukee-Racine consolidated MSA (8,078 Hmong), the Appleton-Oshkosh-Neenah MSA (4,741), and the Wausau MSA (4,453). Maps 3-5, 3-6, and 3-7 show the relative concentrations of Hmong in the St. Paul-Minneapolis metro area, the Milwaukee area, and the Wausau area, respectively. In general, Hmong are concentrated in the cores of these urban cities.

¹²⁹ The U.S. Census 2010 shows that 91 percent of Hmong Californians (86,989) live in the 18 counties of the Central Valley (Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba Counties).

[Table 3-3 about here]

Although useful, table 3-2 provides us with only information about Hmong Americans' recent socioeconomic (SES) characteristics. Secondly, it describes Hmong's SES only at the state level. To better understand Hmong Americans' more local contexts of reception and the changes in their levels of group resources over time, we turn to table 3-3. The data in table 3-3 show that, among the foreign-born Hmong population, socioeconomic level differs significantly across counties. In 1990, whereas over nine percent of the foreign-born Hmong in Milwaukee and Marathon counties (both of WI) had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, less than one percent of the foreign-born Hmong in Hennepin (MN) and Sheboygan counties had done so. Furthermore, even within the same state, median household incomes differ across counties (e.g., Sheboygan county's \$15,053 as compared to Marathon county's \$33,573). Nevertheless, the important finding is that between 1990 and 2000, Hmong communities of most counties have experienced significant improvements in SES, as measured by educational attainment, household median income, and poverty level.

However, Hmong communities of Minnesota and Wisconsin saw much greater improvements in SES compared to their counterparts in California. Whereas the poverty level of Wisconsin's Hmong community dropped from 75 percent in 1989 to 25 percent in 1999, the poverty level remained almost unchanged in California (from 54 to 53 percent). In fact, the data indicate that poverty worsened in Merced and Fresno counties between 1990 and 2000. It took another decade for Hmong Californians to see appreciable improvements in SES, especially in terms of poverty (poverty declined from 53 percent in 1999 to 36 percent in 2009; recall table 3-2). What could explain why Hmong's SES improved in Minnesota and Wisconsin but not in California?

[Table 3-4 about here]

From the census data, we can surmise that the labor market in Minnesota and Wisconsin probably provide more manufacturing job opportunities for their Hmong populations. Tables 3-4 and 3-5 use census 1990 data to provide information about the distribution of employed, foreign-born Hmong across industries and occupations. The evidence shows that both Hmong men and women are highly concentrated in the manufacturing industry of Minnesota and Wisconsin: 52 percent in MN and 38 percent in WI, as compared to 19 percent in California. My personal observations indicate that there are probably more manufacturing job opportunities for the Hmong in Minnesota and Wisconsin than in California. In the Twin-Cities area, several major manufacturing corporations such as 3M Company of St. Paul, Honeywell of Golden Valley, Cargill and General Mills both of Minneapolis, and Sara Lee Foods of Eden Prairie, Minnesota are within reach of the skilled and to some extent, unskilled work force. In contrast, Fresno and Merced have fewer comparable manufacturing companies, even though companies such as the Foster Farms in Fresno employ a number of Hmong people.

[Table 3-5 about here]

Although a larger proportion of the Hmong of MN and WI are employed in occupations within the Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers category than in the Managerial and Professional Services category (table 3-5), manufacturing jobs at major manufacturing companies probably provide greater stability in terms of wages and health benefits than service or retail sales occupations do. Furthermore, the costs of living in the major metropolitan areas of Minnesota and Wisconsin are generally lower than those of California's metro areas.¹³⁰ The greater availability of manufacturing jobs and the lower cost of living probably contribute to the

¹³⁰ A cost of living comparison was made between several metro areas using data from the Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER). Available at: <http://www.bankrate.com/calculators/savings/moving-cost-of-living-calculator.aspx>

improvement in Hmong's SES in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Next, I describe Fresno, California which is the primary site of my fieldwork.

Fresno, California: Its Populations and Economy

When it was incorporated as a city in 1885, Fresno occupied an area of only three square miles and had a population of 3,000, resulting in a population density of 1,000 persons per square mile. By 1970, the city had grown to 42 square miles and was home to 165,655 residents—the equivalent of 3,940 persons per square mile (City of Fresno 1989:3). Between 1990 and 2010, Fresno's population grew from 354,202 to 494,665 (4,400 persons per sq. mi.).¹³¹ For comparison, Los Angeles' population density in 2010 was 8,090 persons per square mile. Today, the City of Fresno is the largest city in Fresno County, which is the tenth most populous county in California.

Between 1990 and 2010, Fresno County experienced significant demographic changes. As the data in table 3-6 show, whereas in 1990 non-Hispanic whites made up 51 percent of the county's population, by 2000, they made up only 40 percent. By 2000, the population of Hispanics had surpassed that of non-Hispanic whites; and in 2010, Hispanics became the numerical majority (50.3 percent) at almost half a million strong. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010), 91.5 percent of Hispanics in Fresno County are Mexicans, 2 percent are Central Americans, and 1.3 percent are Puerto Ricans. In contrast, both the black (5 percent) and American Indian (less than 1 percent) populations remained relatively small and their proportion changed little since 1990.

[Table 3-6 about here]

¹³¹ The Fresno Unified School District, which enrolls 72,800 students (28 percent of which are English Learners) across 94 schools, is the fourth largest school district in California. See Fresno Unified School District, "District at a Glance," 2010. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from: <http://www.fresnounified.org/dept/communications/public/Fact%20Sheets/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

On the other hand, during the last 20 years, the proportion of Asians increased from 8.1 percent to 9.4 percent. Compared to thirty years ago, this represents a significant increase considering that Asians comprised only three percent of Fresno County's population in 1980.¹³² Japanese (6,500) and Asian Indians (4,700) were the first and second largest Asian subgroup in Fresno County during the 1980 U.S. Census (Reder et al. 1984:2); however, by 1990, these positions were taken by Hmong (18,300) and Laotians (8,200), respectively. But whereas Hmong held their position, Laotians did not. Between 1990 and 2010, even as the populations of Asian Indians and Hmong steadily grew, both the Japanese and the Laotian populations declined. By 2010, Asian Indians became, once again, the second largest Asian subgroup (see table 3-2) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, 2010). Before examining where ethnic/racial categories are concentrated within Fresno, let us describe Fresno's primary economy; for ethnicity and 'class' sometimes intersect in significant ways.

Agricultural business has long been the dominant industry in Fresno County. Reder et al. (1984:4-5) describe the significance of Fresno's agricultural economy in the following way:

Fresno is the center of the California (indeed, of the U.S.) agri-business economy. Fresno consistently has the highest agricultural output (total dollar value of all agricultural products) of any county in the United States, with adjoining counties usually #2 and #3 in the country. In 1982, Fresno's agricultural output was valued at \$1.9 billion: \$1.6 billion from crops and \$300 million in dairy and grazing outputs. ... A wide variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as cotton, cattle and dairy products, are produced commercially.

Even as other job industries in Fresno declined during the national recession of the 1980s, the agricultural industry expanded (Reder et al. 1984:5). Data from the Census 1990 census show that among all those employed within Fresno County, 11.7 percent worked in the agricultural industry—the third most popular industry behind only the retail trade (16.1 percent) and the professional and related services industry (24.5 percent) (U.S. Department of Commerce 1995).

¹³² Although Japanese comprised the largest Asian subgroup (with 6,471 persons), there were already 590 Vietnamese living in Fresno County (Reder et al. 1984:2).

Like elsewhere in the U.S., the agribusiness in California's Central Valley has always depended on a significant supply of field laborers, both documented and undocumented (J.E. Taylor and Espenshade 1987; Nateras and Stanley 2009). During the last 130 years, this labor supply has been comprised mainly of 'working-class' (im)migrants:¹³³ Chinese in the late 1800s, Japanese in the early 1900s, and Filipinos and Mexicans in the 1920s and 1930s (Daniels 1962; Saxton 1971; Chacon 1986). The fact that these different immigrant groups emerged and declined episodically had a lot to do with the changes in local workers' racial treatment of immigrant laborers as well as changes in the United States' market (read: capitalist) needs and political interests around the world (Cheng and Bonacich 1984). As I will come back to in later chapters, the U.S.' market and political interests around the world also shape the state's immigration, welfare and other domestic policies toward immigrant minorities.

Since the creation of the Bracero Program (1942-1964), workers of Mexican origin have been the lifeblood of Fresno County's now \$4.8 billion (farm income in 2006) agribusiness industry (Kissam 2008:5). According to Ramon Chacon (1986:7), "By 1930, more than 60 [percent] of the agricultural labor force in the Fresno area was reportedly of Mexican descent." By the 1980s, Southeast Asian refugees supplemented rather than replaced other laborers in the field. Of the 31,500 who worked in Fresno County's agricultural industry in 1990, about 62 percent were of Mexican ancestry¹³⁴, 8 percent were of German ancestry, and 4 percent were of Asian ancestry. Southeast Asians (Hmong, Laotians, and Vietnamese) made up 20 percent of the Asians employed in the county's agricultural industry (U.S. Department of Commerce 1995).

¹³³ Technically, there is a difference between immigrants and migrants. Whereas the former category refers to foreign persons who resettle permanently in a new country (e.g., the U.S.), the latter category refers to foreign persons who do not resettle permanently in a new country. In this paper, I use immigrants as a general term to refer to both these categories, but will specify whenever necessary to draw a distinction.

¹³⁴ If we count all Hispanics (Mexicans, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, etc.), this figure would be 68 percent instead of 62 percent.

In the late 1970s, Hmong refugees were attracted to the Fresno and Merced regions because they perceived or heard that people in these areas could buy farmland to grow and sell produce as means to a better life (Reder et al. 1984:3). However, Hmong did not actually move into Fresno in any significant number until after the secondary migrations of the early 1980s. As Reder et al. (1984:3) point out,

A county-sponsored refugee study estimated that 80.5% of Fresno's refugees were secondary migrants: nearly one-third (30.3%) of the refugee residents were secondary migrants from other counties in California and over half (50.2%) from other states. ... Nearly one-fourth (23%) of Fresno's refugees came from Oregon (vastly more than from any other state) and 16.4% came from Orange County (more than from any other California county).

According to Reder et al. (1984:20), Fresno's "relatively low cost of living and the feasibility of farming" attracted Hmong from other areas of California. However, in the case of the Hmong from Orange County, individual accounts suggest that push factors—unprovoked physical violence and the threat of further violence—were probably more important than pull factors in explaining Hmong's migration to Fresno. As Spenser Sherman (1985) points out, "In Santa Ana, [California], the population dove from 6,000 or 7,000 to about 2,000 after 1981. Cheu Thao, a community leader there, says many left because of an unprovoked attack on an elder Hmong couple that left the man dead."

Despite Hmong's high hopes, commercial farming was not as easy as they anticipated and only a fraction of them eventually became farmers (Reder et al. 1984). In fact, by 1990, among employed, foreign-born Hmong of 20 to 65 years within Fresno County, only 10.1 percent worked in the agricultural industry. About the same proportion of this category worked in the manufacturing industry (10.6 percent). The first and second most popular industries were the professional and related services industry (30.1 percent) and the public administration industry (15.7 percent), respectively (U.S. Department of Commerce 1995).

According to Miyares (1998:35), “by 1982...Fresno emerged as the ‘port-of-entry’ enclave for growing numbers of primary [Hmong] refugees, with Merced attaining importance in the relative distribution of new refugees from Laos.” According to longtime Hmong residents, the earliest Hmong arrivals to Fresno County settled in Clovis, a city northeast of Fresno, specifically in the south-Clovis neighborhoods east of Highway 168 and between Barstow Avenue and Bullard Avenue. Most Hmong young people attended Sierra Vista Elementary School.¹³⁵ As the Hmong community in Clovis grew, it attracted more Hmong to Clovis but especially to the downtown Fresno area. Whereas in June 1979, Fresno County’s public assistances records showed no Hmong at all, by March 1981, 1,066 Hmong individuals appeared on caseloads (Reder et al. 1984:21). By October 1982, about 6,500 Hmong, 1,500 Vietnamese, and over 300 Laotians and Cambodians were living in Fresno County. A year later, in June 1983, Fresno’s Hmong population increased to 10,000 (1984:3). As shown in Map 3-3, Hmong Americans are most concentrated in the downtown Fresno area. Indeed this has been the case since the mid-1980s. Let us examine this in greater detail.

Of the 18,321 Hmong residents in Fresno County in 1990, about 57 percent lived in the area officially designated by the City Council as Fresno’s inner city. This inner city is a trapezoidal area of 23 to 28 census tracts¹³⁶ that together comprise most of Fresno’s urban core. This urban core includes the city’s originally incorporated area, its main government facilities (City Hall, Superior and U.S. District Courts, the Convention Center, etc.), and its central business district (the Chamber of Commerce, Fulton Mall, *Fresno Bee*, etc.). But the inner city also includes the old, historically segregated Chinatown located west of the main railroad

¹³⁵ S. Moua, personal communication, Fresno, California, December 28, 2009.

¹³⁶ In 1990, the Fresno inner city encompassed or overlapped with the following census tracts: tracts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, and 37. In the 2000 Census, some of these tracts were divided into two or three tracts, hence the 28 tracts.

(Chacon 1986) and low-income housing projects in the Lowell area north of Divisadero Street. The boundaries of the Fresno inner city are formed by E. Shields Ave. to the north, E. California Ave. to the south, Highway 99 through S. West Ave. to the west, and S. Chestnut Ave. to the east (City of Fresno 2008). At least 59 public and private K-12 schools are found in the inner city.

As table 3-7 shows, a much larger proportion of Southeast Asian former refugees and their children (61 percent) are concentrated in the inner city compared to non-Southeast Asian refugees (16 percent). For comparison, only 14 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 22 percent of American Indians, 24 percent of Hispanics, and 34 percent of Non-Hispanic blacks resided in the inner city. Well aware of their co-ethnic concentrations, during the 1990s Hmong Fresnans informally called the cluster of neighborhoods¹³⁷ north of E. Kings Canyon Road and west of S. Peach Avenue, “*Zos Vib Nais*,” after the name of the Ban Vinai refugee camp in north central Thailand. At one time, Ban Vinai camp held 43,000 – 45,000 Hmong refugees inside an area of 400 acres or six-tenths of a square mile (Long 1993:58).

[Table 3-7 about here]

Given the significant contrast between whites’ and Hmong’s residence in the inner city, it is not surprising that within Fresno County, racial segregation has been highest between Hmong and whites but lowest between Hmong and other Asians. As shown in table 3-8, in 1990, the dissimilarity index (ID)¹³⁸ between whites and Hmong in Fresno County was 66, indicating very high segregation—higher than both the segregation between whites and blacks (50) and between

¹³⁷ The *Zos Vib Nais* neighborhoods correspond approximately with census tracts 29.02, 27 and 28, which contained 2,070, 551, and 1,035 Hmong persons in 1990, respectively.

¹³⁸ The dissimilarity index (ID), which ranges from 0 (no segregation) to 100 (highest segregation), is a measure of relative unevenness in the distribution of two mutually exclusive groups across all sub-areas (e.g., census tracts) of a larger geographical area (e.g., county). An ID of 60 or higher is considered very high segregation; 40-50 is moderate segregation; and 30 or below is considered fairly low segregation. An ID of 40 means that 40 percent of either the minority or the majority group would have to be redistributed in order that each sub-area would have exactly the same composition as the larger geographic area. The IDs in this chapter are based on census tracts. For a discussion of some key weaknesses of ID, see White (1983).

Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites (48). Ten years later, the ID between whites and Hmong dropped to 59; by 2010, it dropped slightly to 54. For comparison, in 2010, the ID between other Asians and Hmong was 44, and between blacks and Hmong, 45. The segregation between whites and Hmong in Fresno County (54), however, is comparatively lower than those of Ramsey County (64), Sacramento County (71), and Milwaukee County (74).

[Table 3-8 about here]

Nevertheless, Hmong's significant concentrations in the inner city coupled with their high levels of racial segregation is reminiscent of blacks' and Chicanos' historically severe segregation in West Fresno. That is, between the 1950s – 1970s, more than 90 percent of blacks and Chicanos resided in Fresno's west side (Chacon 1986). West Fresno's low-income Chicano and black communities formed around Chinatown, an area forged for Chinese during the 1870s through publicly sanctioned racial segregation (Chacon 1986:7). As Ramon Chacon (1986:5) points out,

The origins of the West Fresno community dates back to the 1870s when the city was first established and populated largely by Anglos and Chinese. By this time, out of a population of 600, 200 were Chinese who settled there following the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad which dissected the city of Fresno. From the beginning the Chinese suffered from racial attacks and the brunt of nationalist reaction. The Chinese were allowed to reside in Fresno but only on the condition that they establish residences on the west side of town, across the railway line that traversed the city. The segregation of the Chinese was formally established in 1873 following an Anglo town meeting where the whites 12 agreed not to rent, sell, or lease any land east of the railroad tracks to Chinese. Under those conditions, the Chinese were forced to live “across the tracks,” Chinatown was established, and the creation of a segregated ghetto that has lasted to the present day.

Besides the Chinese, those unwelcomed included the Japanese, Russians, Italians, German, and Mexican immigrants who mostly settled in West Fresno (Chacon 1986:5).

Hmong young people and adults in Fresno are familiar with and sometimes use the term “ghetto” to describe certain poor and dilapidated areas of the city. But with or without the term,

it is clear that neighborhoods of concentrated poverty exist and both actual crime and criminalized activities frequently occurred in them. Pakou, 30, who was born in Thailand but raised in Fresno most of her life, describes an inner city neighborhood as follows:

Back in the days [since late 1980s], a lot of Hmong lived in the Summerset apartments. It's funny; Hmong elders called it *xab maws xej*. A lot of Hmong families lived next door to each other. (...) I don't remember when exactly, but it was during a Hmong New Year in the mid-90s. There was a drive-by shooting at Summerset; I think it was Hmong gangs [shooting at] each other. Two guys were shot, one in the leg and the other in the groin.¹³⁹

Summerset Village, a low-income apartment complex, is located just three and a half miles north of old Chinatown. Ironically, Summerset is sandwiched between several east-to-west streets named after Ivy League schools: Yale, Cambridge, Harvard, Brown, Princeton, etc. Just two blocks to the east is a gated neighborhood. Finally, Summerset is surrounded by several ethnically diverse church establishments, including the United Methodist, the St. George Greek Orthodox church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, and the Baha'i Faith. Today, Summerset Village remains but most Hmong families have moved out. In recent years, the block directly north of Summerset has been developed into condominiums "designed to facilitate the housing needs of moderate and middle-income families."¹⁴⁰

To summarize, Hmong Americans are concentrated in three U.S. states; and within states, they are more concentrated in some cities than others. Within individual cities, Hmong families often reside in the inner city areas (e.g., downtown Fresno, St. Paul, Milwaukee, Wausau), where they also experience high levels of racial segregation. Next, I examine naturalization among Hmong Americans.

¹³⁹ P. Her, personal communication, May 14, 2009, Fresno, California. Summerset Village is located in Census Tract 34 of Fresno County—specifically Block Group 4, between N. Angus and Fresno Streets.

¹⁴⁰ Parc Grove Commons, "Income Guidelines," Retrieved June 5, 2012 from: http://www.parcgrovecommons.com/income_guidelines.htm

Naturalization among Hmong Americans

We know from past studies that the path from citizenship to voting is neither linear nor certain. For instance, despite Asian immigrants' relatively higher rate of naturalization and higher average group-level educational attainment, they have some of the lowest rates of voter registration (P.M. Ong and Nakanishi 2003:125-6). However, "once they are registered, Asian American naturalized citizens have among the highest rates of voting of any group" (P.M. Ong and Nakanishi 2003:124-6). Secondly, among Asian American naturalized citizens, there are differences across national Asian origin groups with respect to their rates of registration and voting (Bass and Casper 2001). That voting is never a sure outcome and that it varies across groups may be due partly to the fact that voting participation, as Pei-te Lien (2008) points out, is a "three-step process" consisting of naturalization, registration, and actual voter turnout. Using the Current Population Survey of 1996 and controlling for some socioeconomic and demographic variables, Bass and Casper (2001:122) found that among naturalized Asian citizens, "those from the Philippines are more likely to be registered than those from China, and those from Philippines, Vietnam, and India are more likely to vote than those from China."

To begin to understand Hmong Americans' potential to participate in electoral politics, let us examine their rate of citizenship within the context of Asian America. Table 3-5 presents nationally representative data on the size and legal status of seven Asian American groups: four Southeast Asian refugee groups compared to one similar Southeast Asian immigrant group (Thai) and two long-standing Asian immigrant groups (Chinese and Japanese). With the exception of Vietnamese, the other Southeast Asian refugee groups (Cambodian, Hmong, Laotians and Thai) each make up less than two percent of the total Asian American population. To be sure, complex differences exist among these groups in terms of their immigration history,

recency, group size, dispersion, historic relationship to the U.S. government, internal group dynamics, etc. Here, I want to highlight that most foreign-born Cambodian, Hmong, Laotians and Vietnamese are former political refugees who share a similar immigration history; most came to the U.S. after 1975. Many Southeast Asian refugees were born or grew up in Thailand refugee camps but most never acquired Thai citizenship. Thai are considered only as a comparison group because most ethnic Thai in the U.S. are immigrants rather than refugees.

Among Hmong Americans, 55 percent are U.S. citizens by birth, 24 percent are naturalized citizens, and 21 percent are non-citizens.¹⁴¹ When foreign-born naturalized persons are combined with native born citizens, about 79 percent of Hmong Americans hold formal U.S. citizenship. However, looking simply at citizenship rate does not tell us much about voting potential. It is important to also consider the persons who are legally eligible to register to vote. U.S. census data show that during the mid to late-2000s, about 38 percent of Hmong Americans were legally eligible to register (table 3-9). This is much lower than the figures of most other Asian groups and Asian Americans as a whole (52 percent). This difference is due mainly to Hmong Americans' relatively younger population; currently, citizens below the age of 18 (not shown) make up nearly 41 percent (79,828 of 195,614) of the Hmong American population. It will take a while longer for most persons of this group to reach voting age.

[Table 3-9 about here]

However, what table 3-9 does not tell us is how Hmong Americans' legal status has changed over time. To examine this change, we turn to U.S. Census data from 1990, 2000, and 2010. In 1990, about 65 percent of Hmong were foreign born while 35 percent were U.S. born. Among the foreign born population, 59 percent were non-U.S. citizens and only 6 percent were

¹⁴¹ Although no hard data exist, most of the non-citizens are legal permanent residents. A considerably smaller (but unknown) proportion of them are temporary migrants or tourists on visas.

naturalized U.S. citizens (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). But between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of Hmong with U.S. citizenship increased linearly (see Figure 3-1). Not surprisingly, the Hmong American population legally eligible to register (Hmong 18 years and over with U.S. citizenship) also increased from 13 percent in 1990 to 45 percent in 2010. This increase reflects the foreign born population's increased naturalization over time and the coming of age of the native born population.

[Figure 3-1 about here]

Among most immigrant groups, the rate of naturalization had already begun to rise several years before the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 became law.¹⁴² But for most immigrants, including Hmong and other Southeast Asian Americans, the naturalization peaked in 1996 (see Figure 3-2).¹⁴³ In 1996, about 10,600 persons of Laotian origin were naturalized compared to 5,600 who were naturalized in 1994 and 4,300 who were naturalized in 1995. The rate of naturalization declined after that. However, smaller peaks reoccurred and these coincided approximately with the new increases in naturalization application filing fees.¹⁴⁴

[Figure 3-2 about here]

Table 3-10 provides information on the legal status of Hmong Americans across three states with the largest concentrations of this ethnic group. Compared to California and

¹⁴² Jean Hopfensperger, "Minnesota Girds for Big Changes in Welfare Laws," *Star Tribune*, February 27, 1995. ; Steve Berg, "Political Climate Spurs Rise in Citizenship Applications," *ibid.* March 22, 1995,

¹⁴³ In 1996, about 51,900 persons born in Vietnam (not shown) became naturalized compared to the previous year's 31,700 and the following year's 36,200.

¹⁴⁴ In 1989, the fee for an adult filing a naturalization application (N-400) with the U.S. INS was \$60. The government raised this filing fee to \$90 in 1991, \$95 in 1994, \$225 in 1998, \$260 in 2002, \$320 in 2004, \$330 in 2006, and \$595 in 2007. See: William A. Kandel and Chad C. Haddal, "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' Immigration Fees and Adjudication Costs: Proposed Adjustments and Historical Context (R134040)," U.S. Congressional Research Service: 2010.

Minnesota, Wisconsin has the highest percentage of Hmong with U.S. citizenship (83 percent) and percentage of persons eligible to register (42 percent).

[Table 3-10 about here]

Some Hmong adults have been able to naturalize through regular procedures.¹⁴⁵ However, for many of the older generation of Hmong foreign born who speak little or no English, obtaining naturalization has been an extremely difficult task. What individual-level factors could affect a person's likelihood of becoming naturalized? I use U.S. census data to answer this question.

Individual Determinants of Naturalization

An analysis of Hmong's naturalization outcome using the American Community Survey 2005-09 dataset indicates that several variables are significantly correlated with naturalization: educational attainment, sex, marital status, and age. In a logistic regression model (table 3-11) where the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable measuring naturalization outcome (naturalized vs. not naturalized), I found that for every one unit increase in educational attainment,¹⁴⁶ the odds of a foreign-born Hmong adult becoming naturalized increases by 1.7 times, net of sex, age, and marital status.

[Table 3-11 about here]

Furthermore, Hmong women are 1.3 times more likely to naturalize than Hmong men, all other variables being equal. This finding is consistent with research on foreign-born Asian and

¹⁴⁵ Legal permanent residents (LPRs) could naturalize if they are at least 18 years old; have "continuously resided in the United States for five years as LPRs (three years in the case of spouses of U.S. citizens and members of the armed services); show that they have good moral character; demonstrate the ability to read, write, speak, and understand English; and pass an examination on the government and history of the United States" (Lee and Wasem 2009:1).

¹⁴⁶ The independent variable educational attainment was constructed from the ACS' SCHL "educational attainment" variable. SCHL was recoded into four categories as follows: 1 = No school through grades 7 or 8; 2 = Grade 9 through 12 or no diploma; 3 = High school graduate; 4 = Some college through doctorate degree.

Latinos that find that women are more likely to be naturalized than men (P.Q. Yang 1994; Pantoja and Gershon 2006). Interestingly, contrary to past research on Asian and Latino naturalization which finds that increased English ability and increased length of residence each increases the likelihood of naturalization (P.Q. Yang 2002; Pantoja and Gershon 2006), neither Hmong's English ability nor their length of residency in the U.S. is significantly correlated with their naturalization outcomes. Consistent with the findings of Pantoja and Gershon (2006) on Latino naturalization, I found no significant relationship between marital status and naturalization among Hmong. The fact that length of residency is not significantly correlated with foreign-born Hmong's naturalization suggests that their decision to become citizens may have more to do with real or perceived political contingencies than with mere increases in their stay in the U.S. (In Chapter 5, I examine the negative effects of federal Welfare Reform as a political contingency that influenced Hmong's movement for citizenship).

Moreover, the logistic regression analysis shows that Hmong's naturalization outcomes vary by state. Specifically, compared to the Hmong in California, the Hmong in Minnesota are 1.9 times more likely to become naturalized, net of educational attainment, age, marital status, and sex. Similarly, the Hmong in Wisconsin are 1.8 times more likely than Hmong in California to be naturalized, all else being equal.¹⁴⁷ The finding that naturalization varies by state suggests that contextual factors beyond individual-level factors may also affect Hmong Americans' decision to become U.S. citizens. As legal status and national identity are intricately interconnected, in the next section, I draw on survey data to describe the self-identifications of U.S.-born and foreign born Hmong Americans.

¹⁴⁷ Analysis was performed using American Community Survey, 2005-2009 PUMS dataset, where Hmong 18 years and older who arrived between 1975 and 2000 were selected in the sample. Replicate weights were applied using SAS 9.2. The coding of the variables and the data analysis appear in Table 3-11, "Naturalization Models."

Self-Identification and the Meanings of ‘Being an American’

Between April and June 2002, I conducted a non-random “naturalization/citizenship” survey with 113 Hmong American adults, most of whom were residents of California (93 percent). Seeking to reach educated foreign-born and U.S.-born adults from the various cities of California, I administered the survey questionnaire on the Internet. As a follow up, I interviewed 15 of the 113 total respondents.¹⁴⁸ My survey asked a wide range of close-ended and open-ended questions about respondents’ year of immigration, place of residence, experience with and location of discrimination, interactions with other ethnic/racial persons, timing of and rationale for becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen, native language ability, and their interpretations of what the term “American” means to them. In follow up personal interviews, I discussed most of these aspects in greater detail with respondents. Below, I present the findings from my survey and interviews that pertain to two key areas: how Hmong educated persons identify themselves and how they define “being American.”

Of the 113 who participated in my survey, 62 are women and 51 are men. Coincidentally, 62 are foreign-born and 51 are U.S. born. A majority of the persons who participated in the survey were college students (65 percent) and a smaller proportion was made up of non-student community persons, whose education credentials ranged from high school diploma to graduate or advanced degrees. Respondents ranged from 17 to 47 years of age; but 85 percent of them were between 18 and 26 years old. Respondents came from 16 different California cities, with Fresno (26 percent), Sacramento (18 percent), Stockton (10 percent), and Chico (8 percent) comprising the majority.

¹⁴⁸ The survey was administered using Formsite.com; the completed data were downloaded in csv format for analysis. Twenty-two initially agreed to participate in follow up interviews.

When Hmong respondents were asked the question, What do you prefer to call yourself?, and presented with a set of categorical response options,¹⁴⁹ just one person chose “American.” As shown in Figure 3-3, a majority of the respondents (55 percent) chose “Hmong” while 38 percent chose “Hmong-American.” Males and females provided generally similar responses, but a larger proportion of females chose “no preference.” Figure 3-3, however, does not distinguish between U.S. born and foreign-born persons. For this missing information, we turn to Figure 3-4, which looks at three categories: non-citizens, naturalized citizens, and U.S. born citizens.

[Figure 3-3 about here]

Foreign-born Hmong adults who become naturalized U.S. citizens appear more likely to attach the “American” suffix to “Hmong” than those foreign-born who do not become naturalized. Whereas 65 percent of non-U.S. citizens and 51 percent of U.S.-born citizens self-identified as Hmong, only 34 percent of naturalized citizens did so. On the other hand, nearly half (49 percent) of all naturalized citizens identified as Hmong-American while 37 percent of U.S. born citizens and 27 percent of non-U.S. citizens did so.

[Figure 3-4 about here]

To probe whether foreign-born persons’ self-identification changed after they became naturalized citizens, I also asked naturalized citizens (and only them) to respond to a second identity question¹⁵⁰ with virtually the same format and response options as the first identity question. An analysis of the responses from 35 naturalized U.S. citizens reveals that respondents reported changing their self-identifications after becoming naturalized. Whereas before

¹⁴⁹ These response options included the following 8 options: American, Hmong-American, Hmong-Laotian, Hmong-Thai, Hmong/Hmoob, I do not have a preference, I am not sure, and Other [Please specify].

¹⁵⁰ This second identity question—“Before you became a U.S. citizen, what did you prefer to call yourself?”—was question 25 in my survey of 42 questions. The first identity question was asked in question 5. The online survey was set up so that respondents answered question 5 (self-reported current identity) before answering question 25 (self-reported identity in retrospect), if the latter is applicable to them.

naturalization only 6 of 35 persons (17 percent) identified as Hmong-American, after naturalization 17 of 35 persons (49 percent) identified as Hmong-Americans. Conversely, whereas 22 persons (63 percent) identified as Hmong alone prior to naturalizing, only 12 persons (34 percent) still identified as Hmong after they became naturalized. What might explain this shift in self-identification? More specifically, what might explain why some naturalized adults would rather call themselves “Hmong-American” than keep simply “Hmong” or adopt simply “American” as an identity? Understanding how Hmong adults define being American and how naturalized U.S. citizens think about formal citizenship could provide us with some clues.

Most Hmong naturalized adults invoked the concepts of legal rights and social equality when they were asked to describe what “being American” means to them. These concepts are expressed most clearly in the statements below by two naturalized U.S. citizens.

To me being an “American” means I have the same rights, privileges, and freedom as any other person. And it also means that I am able to receive the same protection guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. And last, being an American to me is just being who I am and [being] able to do whatever makes me successful and happy (Statement of a 21-year-old college student who immigrated with her family to the U.S. in 1990 and became a naturalized citizen in 2001. She identifies herself as Hmong American both prior to and after naturalization.).

Being an American means I have an equal opportunity BY LAW to pursue and claim all the rights, privileges, and opportunities available for U.S. citizens. Although in actuality I know I am exactly where I started out...as a Hmong in American society (Statement of a 23-year-old college student who immigrated with her family to the U.S. in 1979 and became a naturalized citizen in 1983. She identifies herself as simply Hmong prior to naturalization but currently has no identity preference.).

Here, “being American” means having legal rights and privileges on par with “any other person” or “U.S. citizen.” As alluded to in the second statement, however, some adults are well aware of the difference between having formal rights and having social equality in practice. A 32-year-old woman articulates this view:

Being an American means that you [and] I [are] protected under the same law and I am able to hold any career position as I choose as anyone born in America. However, in philosophy and in theory [this] is [an] ideal and, in actuality, the color of the skin comes first when seeking...a prestige[ous] career position. Being an American means I need to take more responsibility in voting for people in office however deep inside [of] me I [may feel] that I would not make a difference. It does not matter who wins, I would still be treated the same among [my people in] the society. Being an American means I advocate for equal access to education for my children and children who are English Learners however deeply disappointed [I am] that I also make little difference due to the color of my skin. Being an American means I have equal opportunity to own lands and property as anyone else and so far this is the only thing that I found true because it has to do with money. Anybody will sell anything to you so far as you have the money to pay for [it]. This has been my experiences in buying four houses and 40 acres of land (Statement of a 32-year-old, married, college graduate who immigrated with her family to the U.S. in 1980 and became a naturalized citizen in 1992. She identifies herself as simply Hmong prior to naturalizing but as Hmong-American currently.).

Although my question, “What does being an American mean to you?” did not specifically ask about formal citizenship,¹⁵¹ this respondent equates having citizenship rights with being an American. Moreover, she sees “American” as a category consisting of racialized, ordered sub-categories rather than simply as a category of undifferentiated, unranked individuals. The color of a person’s skin, she holds, often matters in determining whether or how much that person’s formal activities actually count or can affect some outcome. Because skin color often “comes first,” she questions how much her participation in activities such as voting can effect social change (e.g., political representation, the educational opportunities of English learners, etc.). Even though she recognizes the persistent incongruity between legal equality and social equality in American society, this respondent emphasizes “the need to take more responsibility” by participating in the political process.

¹⁵¹ It is possible that the general topic of the survey (citizenship) and the multiple questions on naturalization might have influenced some respondents’ answers to this question on being an American.

Although some Hmong adults see “being American” as a process of assimilating into “some mainstream”¹⁵² or “being part of the melting pot,” others take “being American” to entail a great deal more. To the latter group, being American means becoming informed about and engaging in political processes in order to try to effect social change. Several Hmong adults, including those who are U.S.-born, articulate this view: “Being an American means making America your permanent home and participating in its political processes, whether in electoral or grassroots politics, to make changes.”¹⁵³ In other words, being American means “being a citizen of the United States *and* able to affect public policies” (emphasis added).¹⁵⁴ The statement of a 21-year-old college student elaborates on this view:

Being American means having full participation and acceptance into the political, economic, social, and cultural fabric of America. It means getting out of your “little bubble” and making a difference for America and the world. America consists of so many diverse cultures, peoples, issues and viewpoints that it’s partly our job to be educated on these things. Being American has always been about going beyond your comfort level and raising the bar of success a higher notch (e.g. being the 1st country on the moon). So our mindset must really not [be] just [to] stay within our home (not to say that the home isn’t important because it is extremely vital), but to also look beyond the boundaries of our town/city, state, country, and world. Being American means having a sense of how all of these levels of interaction are interconnected (Respondent immigrated at a very young age to the U.S. in 1981 and became a naturalized citizen in 1982 when his parents obtain U.S. citizenship. He identifies himself as a Hmong-American.).

The above respondent emphasizes “full participation” in the various inter-connected social fields in American society, the personal responsibility to be “educated on” diverse populations and views, and the need to “look beyond” what goes on in singular contexts.

¹⁵² “Being an American is to fit into the American society. Being raised by parents who were refugees, I grew up observing the different lifestyle that I had from many other non-Hmong students at school. Being American is trying to fall into some mainstream. All America is is the American mainstream (...) The term American has many meanings to me [but] the one described above is the most prevalent in my mind” (Statement of a U.S.-born, 20-year-old, college educated Hmong man).

¹⁵³ A. Lee, personal communication, May 27, 2002, Fresno, California. Lee was born in Thailand, arrived in the U.S. in 1979 and became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1995.

¹⁵⁴ S. Xiong, personal communication, June 2, 2002, Fresno, California. Xiong was born in Laos, arrived in the U.S. in 1980 and became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1995.

The fact that about half (49 percent) of naturalized Hmong Americans identified themselves as Hmong American rather than simply “Hmong” (27 percent) or “American” (none) appears to be related to their definition of what American is or is not. As we have seen, many Hmong equate being American with having *social equality*—not merely legal equality. To be sure, many Hmong adults acknowledge that formal legal rights are a prerequisite for social equality or at least the reduction of serious social inequalities. However, as long as social practices of exclusion and racial prejudice and discrimination continue to limit Hmong’s (and other immigrants’) social equality and opportunities, becoming simply an “American” will be highly unlikely. Hence, the term “Hmong-American” captures not just the complex identities of Hmong communities in America but also their keen awareness of the incongruity between legal rights and social rights in the United States.

Conclusion

Above, I have described and analyzed Hmong Americans’ contexts of reception, their naturalization, and their socially constructed identities. As a way of concluding this chapter and introducing what is to come, I want to suggest how “ethnic community” and naturalization could serve as political resources that, in turn, increase members of immigrant communities’ capacity to engage in collective political action.

As we have seen, the formation of ethnic immigrant communities is not inevitable. In some places, emergent ethnic communities formed through initial settlement and secondary migration, could become undone as a result of the government’s cuts to public aid (recall the Hmong of Washington and Oregon) or the result of violence (recall the attacks on Hmong in Philadelphia and in Santa Ana). Emergent ethnic communities, if they do not become undone, could become stagnant as a result of public nativist sentiments against further in-migration

(recall the nativist against further Hmong settlement in Yuba County). There are some ethnic communities that might defy the odds or grow steadily in spite of negative initial or developing reception. But these are infrequent in comparison to those ethnic communities that decline or disappear in the face of unsustainable or hostile environments.

Given the above, I want to suggest that the formation and development of ethnic communities depend crucially on the contexts of reception. There is a need to conceptualize the contexts of reception not simply as a set of contexts in a definite ‘initial’ period of time but rather as a set of contexts that develops and changes indefinitely over time. In doing so, we allow for the real possibility that, at any given time or place, established residents (of any racial category), the mass media, and/or local government officials could engage in the construction of new social problems based on some putative set of conditions that then are used to justify the exclusion of certain immigrant communities. As social actors construct social problems, they sometimes locate the cause of the problems in one or more stigmatized immigrant communities—whether these communities are ethnolinguistic, ethnoreligious, or ethno-racial communities. Vulnerable members of stigmatized immigrant communities could fall victim to this scapegoating. For instance, they could be pushed out of a city physically, in which case, they are effectively prevented from participating in that city’s social and political arenas. But immigrant communities, if they possess significant numbers, an organizational infrastructure, and resources, could stand their ground or even fight back.

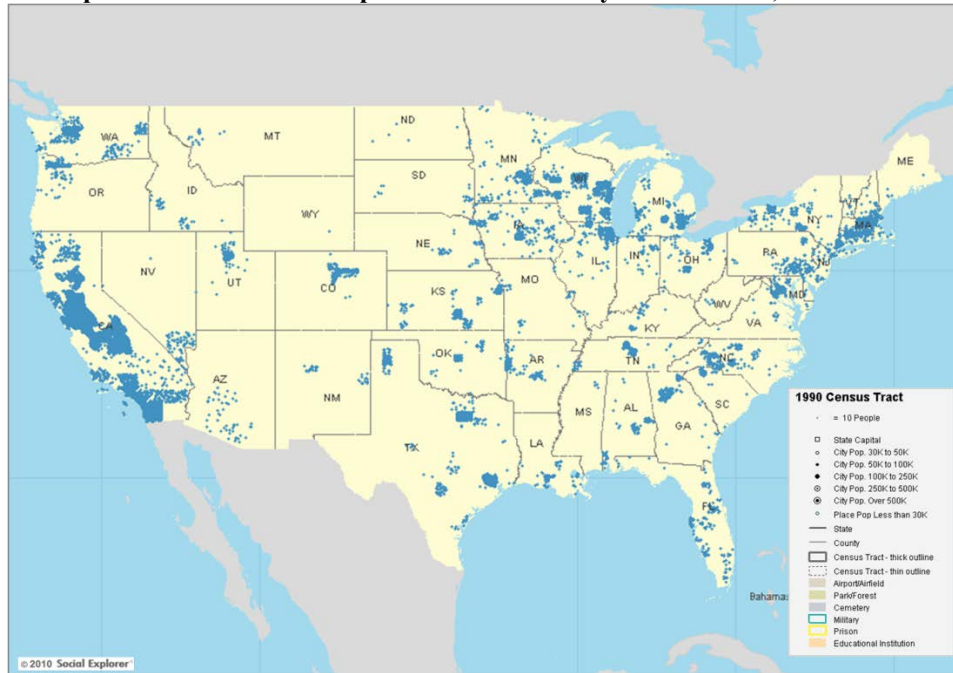
There are a number of ways that ethnic community and naturalization could facilitate ethnic actors’ political participation and possibly increase their political incorporation. The numerical size of an ethnic immigrant population in an area not only matters for their public visibility, but also the amount of discretionary resources (time, skills, money, sense of efficacy)

that they can aggregate toward collective political action. Ethnic communities with large absolute and relative population sizes should be more visible and have greater discretionary resources compared to those with small absolute and relative population sizes. U.S. citizenship as a formal credential is an important political resource; the larger an ethnic community's electorate, the more voting power it is likely to wield (if informed voting is exercised). Ethnic communities, especially if they are able to establish a minimal organizational infrastructure (i.e., a set of informal and formal organizations), could provide the leadership needed to mobilize resources and people toward collective political action.

Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the members of a putative "ethnic community," even if they see themselves as belonging to the same community and share the same goals, will actually agree on the same strategies for obtaining those goals. As we shall examine in the next chapter, disagreements between ethnic leaders can and do occur; these conflicts are reflected in protests and counter-protests. And in a later chapter on intra-ethnic conflict, we shall see that social actors of the same national origin do not necessarily see themselves as belonging to the same ethnolinguistic community or sharing the same interests. In the next chapter, I examine Hmong Americans' engagement in one important form of politics—organized protests—from 1980 to the present across different state contexts. I show that the history, location, and size of Hmong American communities matter for their organized protests. I also show that changing political contexts, including the contexts of reception and homeland contexts, affect Hmong Americans' protest issues, activities, and collective action frames.

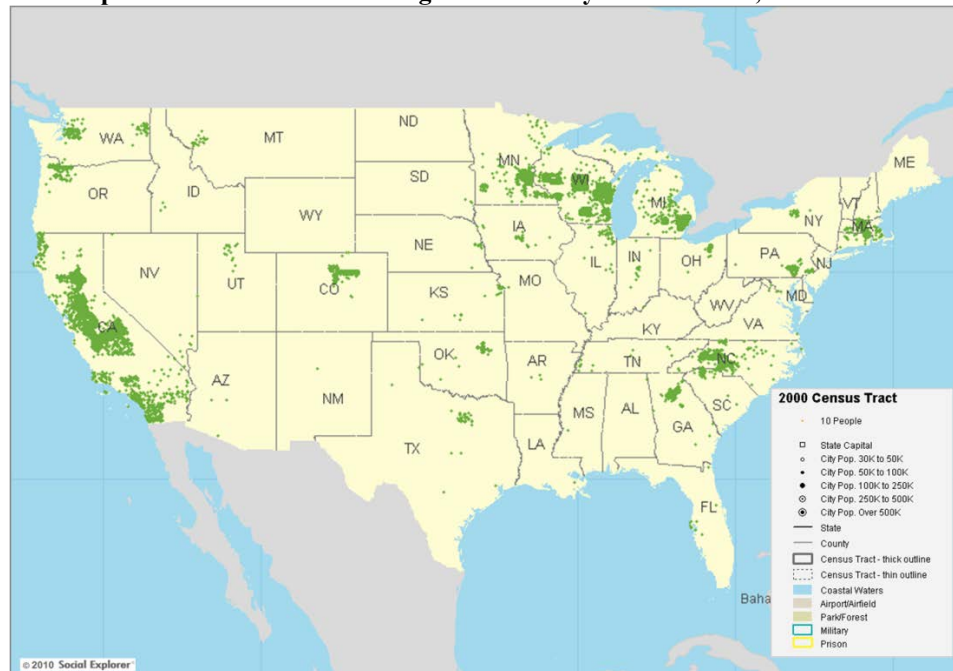
Maps, Tables, and Figures for Chapter 3

Map 3-1: Distribution of Population from Laos by Census Tract, Census 1990



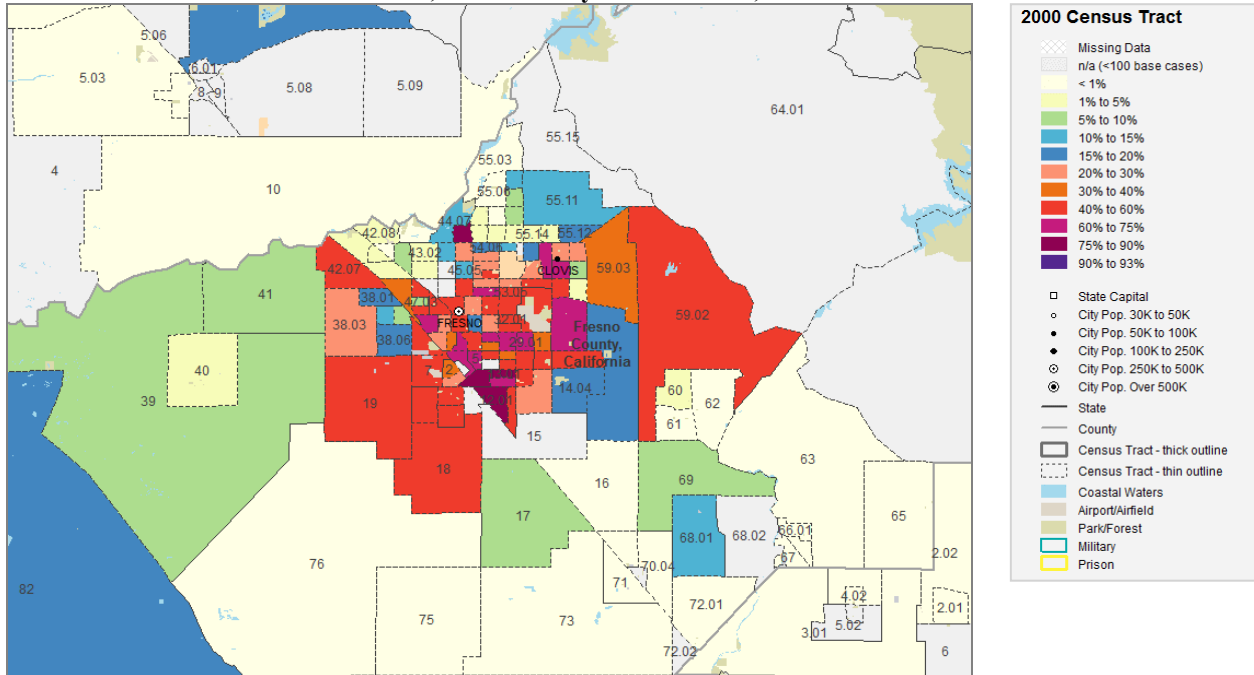
Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-2: Distribution of Hmong Americans by Census Tract, Census 2000



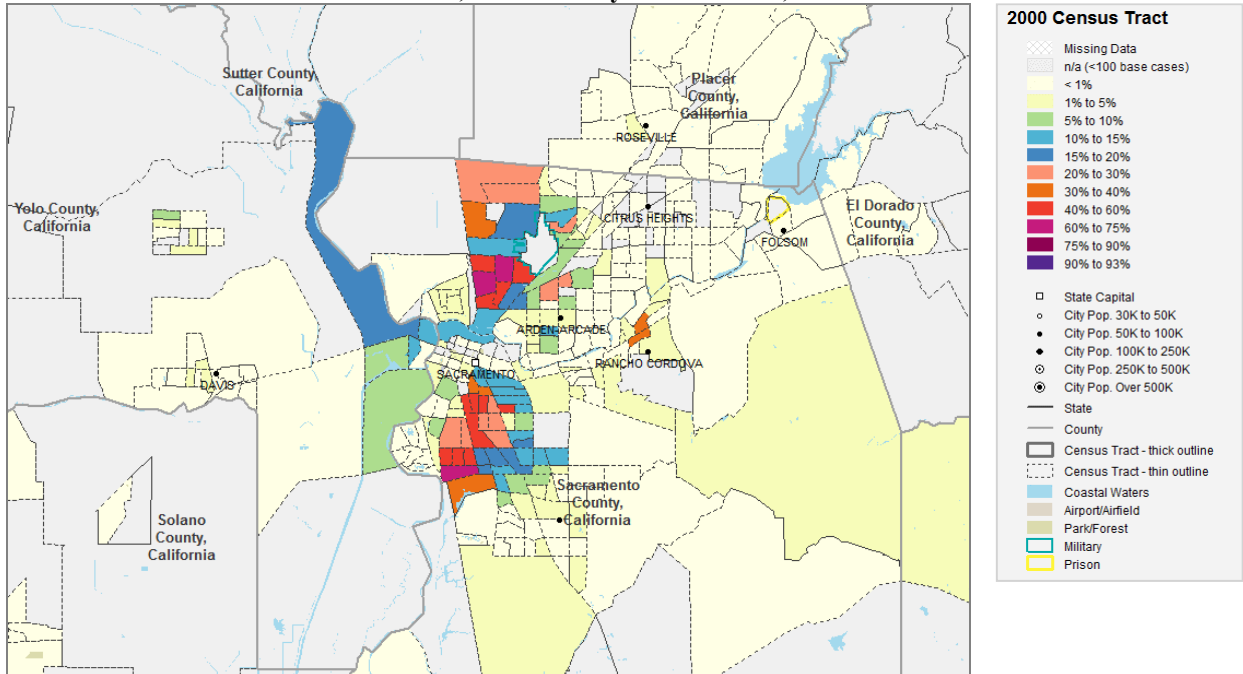
Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-3: Proportion of Hmong Americans Relative to the Asian Alone Population in Fresno, California by Census Tract, Census 2000



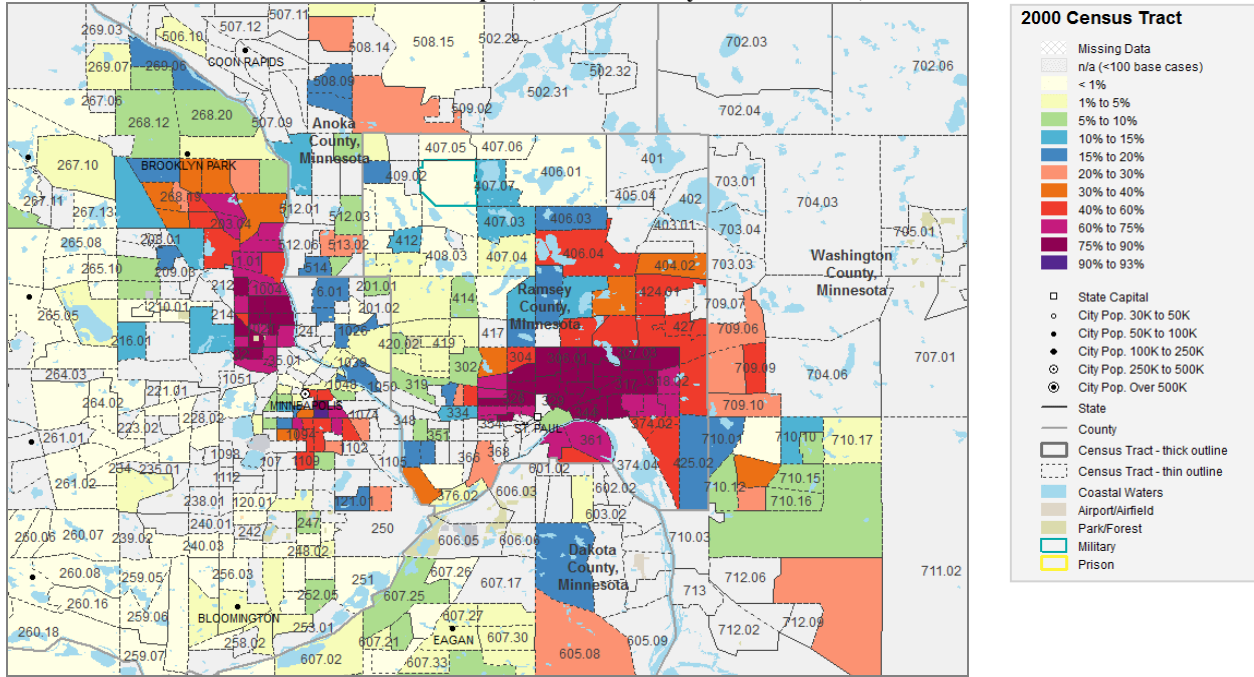
Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-4: Proportion of Hmong Americans Relative to the Asian Alone Population in Sacramento, California by Census Tract, Census 2000



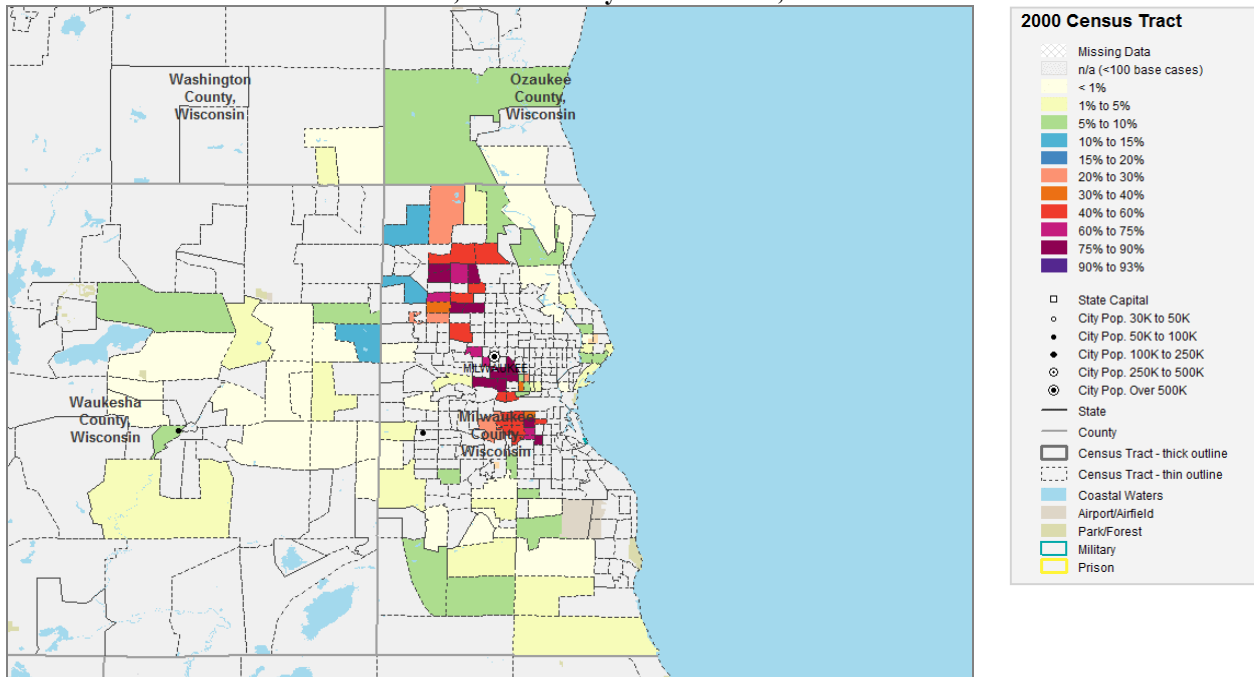
Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-5: Proportion of Hmong Americans Relative to the Asian Alone Population in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota by Census Tract, Census 2000



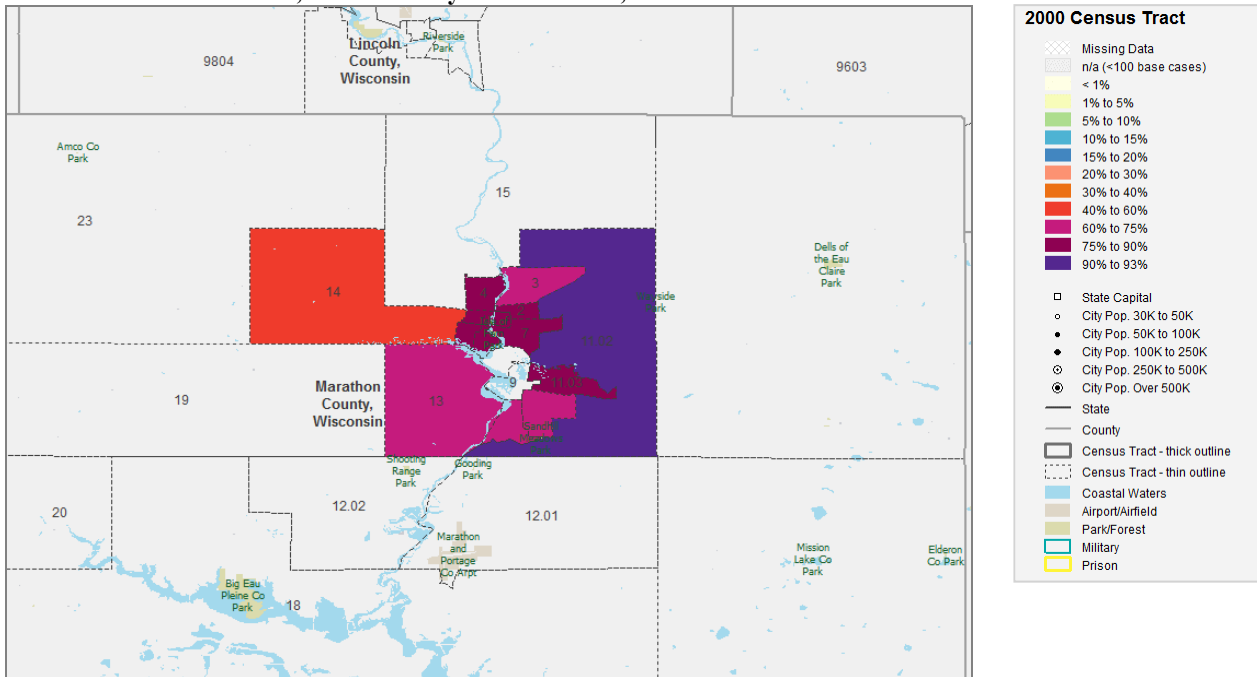
Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-6: Proportion of Hmong Americans Relative to the Asian Alone Population in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by Census Tract, Census 2000



Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Map 3-7: Proportion of Hmong Americans Relative to the Asian Alone Population in Wausau, Wisconsin by Census Tract, Census 2000



Source: 2010 Social Explorer® (based on data from U.S. Census Bureau)

Table 3-1: Distribution of Hmong Americans by Select States, 1990 to 2010*

State	1990		2000		2010		Percent Change between 1990 and 2000	Percent Change between 2000 and 2010
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
California	49,343	(52.2)	65,095	(38.4)	86,989	(35.1)	31.9	33.6
Minnesota	17,764	(18.8)	41,800	(24.7)	63,619	(25.7)	135.3	52.2
Wisconsin	16,980	(18.0)	33,791	(19.9)	47,127	(19.0)	99.0	39.5
Michigan	2,304	(2.4)	5,383	(3.2)	5,580	(2.3)	133.6	3.7
Colorado	1,207	(1.3)	3,000	(1.8)	3,611	(1.5)	148.6	20.4
Rhode Island	1,185	(1.3)	1,001	(0.6)	909	(0.4)	-15.5	-9.2
Washington	853	(0.9)	1,294	(0.8)	2,186	(0.9)	51.7	68.9
Oregon	595	(0.6)	2,101	(1.2)	2,722	(1.1)	253.1	29.6
North Carolina	544	(0.6)	7,093	(4.2)	10,433	(4.2)	1203.9	47.1
Kansas	543	(0.6)	1,004	(0.6)	1,645	(0.7)	84.9	63.8
Georgia	386	(0.4)	1,468	(0.9)	3,460	(1.4)	280.3	135.7
Massachusetts	134	(0.1)	1,127	(0.7)	992	(0.4)	741.0	-12.0
All Other States	2,601	(2.8)	5,271	(3.1)	18,323	(7.4)	102.7	247.6
United States	94,439	(100.0)	169,428	(100.0)	247,596	(100.0)	79.4	46.1

*Hmong Alone

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 100 Percent Population Estimates 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Table 3-2: Demographic Characteristics of Hmong Americans by Top Three States

	Population	Percent of State Population	Percent of Asians in State	Percent with BA or Higher ¹	Median Household Income	Percent with Own Home	Percent Below Poverty
Hmong in U.S.	195,614	--	--	12.6	\$47,900	54.9	27.9
California	66,846	0.2	1.5	12.3	\$41,000	36.0	35.7
Minnesota	48,949	0.9	26.0	13.6	\$44,700	58.5	30.4
Wisconsin	40,672	0.7	35.1	12.2	\$57,000	65.3	20.1
All Other States	39,147	--	--	12.3	\$51,800	70.6	19.5

¹ Includes only persons 25 years or older.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS, 2005-2009, Weighted Samples.

Table 3-3: Legal and Economic Characteristics of Foreign Born Hmong in Select States and Urban Areas, 1990 and 2000

State/County	Foreign-Born Adult Population		Percent Naturalized*		Percent with BA or higher**		Median Household Income*		Proportion below 100% of poverty*	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1989	1999	1989	1999
California	18,443	25,121	7.7	36.1	2.6	5.4	\$24,871	\$29,000	54.3	53.3
Fresno Co.	7,927	8,650	7.4	41.8	3.1	7.4	\$25,575	\$25,700	54.1	59.7
Merced Co.	2,196	1,568	5.0	35.3	4.0	1.6	\$20,414	\$21,650	54.7	65.6
Sacramento Co.	2,098	6,904	4.6	33.0	2.6	4.7	\$24,207	\$36,000	55.1	45.2
Minnesota	7,254	17,195	8.2	35.7	2.6	7.0	\$21,093	\$41,000	55.2	42.1
Ramsey Co.	4,608	10,883	8.5	35.8	3.7	7.6	\$20,450	\$40,300	62.3	48.2
Hennepin Co.	1,969	4,887	3.0	31.0	0.9	3.9	\$21,093	\$40,000	50.2	36.7
Wisconsin	6,290	12,707	14.6	37.4	5.4	8.9	\$19,319	\$41,000	75.0	25.9
Milwaukee Co.	1,128	3,560	5.5	46.0	9.2	11.6	\$21,950	\$46,500	64.7	22.7
Marathon Co.	830	1,837	25.8	41.2	9.2	7.2	\$33,573	\$36,200	31.3	40
Sheboygan Co.	1,595	788	12.9	26.5	0.0	3.7	\$15,053	\$40,750	95.5	38.7

* Includes foreign-born, 18 years and over only. Income figures have been adjusted for inflation (in 1999 dollars).

** Includes foreign-born, 25 years and over only.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 5 percent PUMS and Census 2000 5 percent PUMS, Weighted Samples.

Table 3-4: Industry Distribution of Hmong Americans by Select States and Sex (Percentages), 1990*

	California		Minnesota		Wisconsin	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	8.0	6.4	3.9	0.0	2.6	0.0
Mining	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Construction	5.1	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.0	0.0
Manufacturing	21.9	15.6	52.0	51.6	37.1	39.4
Transportation, Communications and Utilities	1.6	0.0	5.1	2.7	4.1	0.0
Wholesale Trade	3.7	7.0	4.6	9.7	0.0	2.3
Retail Trade	15.8	6.0	10.8	4.0	11.3	7.9
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	1.0	1.7	6.5	0.0	3.7	0.0
Business and Repair Services	8.5	4.3	5.5	0.0	12.4	0.0
Personal Services	0.0	9.2	4.4	7.6	0.0	0.0
Entertainment and Recreation Services	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0
Professional and Related Services	27.5	31.8	5.6	21.8	27.6	48.0
Public Administration	5.7	18.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	2.3

*Includes employed, foreign-born, 20-65 year-olds only. Columns do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990.

Table 3-5: Occupational Distribution of Hmong Americans by Select States and Sex (Percentages), 1990*

	California		Minnesota		Wisconsin	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Managerial and Professional Specialty Occupations	19.3	10.2	19.2	12.4	19.7	26.8
Technical, Sales, and Administrative Support Occupations	26.5	29.4	13.1	18.3	6.3	7.9
Service Occupations	9.8	33.2	14.5	15.1	41.5	7.9
Farming, Forestry, and Fishing Occupations	7.3	0.0	3.9	0.0	2.6	0.0
Precision Production, Craft, and Repair Occupations	15.5	5.4	21.6	0.0	7.2	16.8
Operators, Fabricators, and Laborers	21.6	21.7	27.6	54.2	22.8	40.6
Total Persons	2,035	900	1,400	671	926	429

*Includes employed, foreign-born 20-65 year-olds only. Columns do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990.

**Table 3-6: Population of Racial Categories and Asian Subgroups in
Fresno County, California from 1990 to 2010**

	Fresno County, California					
	1990		2000		2010	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	667,490		799,407		930,450	
White, Non-Hispanic	338,595	50.7	317,522	39.7	304,522	32.7
Hispanic	236,634	35.5	351,636	44.0	468,070	50.3
Asian and Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	54,110	8.1	63,711	8.0	87,922	9.4
Black, Non-Hispanic	31,311	4.7	40,291	5.0	45,005	4.8
American Indian, Non-Hispanic	5,070	0.8	6,223	0.8	5,979	0.6
Other Race or Multiple Races	1,770	0.3	20,024	2.5	18,952	2.0
Total Asian	56,517		63,058		87,693	
Hmong	18,321	32.4	22,371	35.5	30,648	34.9
Laotian	8,174	14.5	6,373	10.1	7,088	8.1
Japanese	6,722	11.9	5,721	9.1	4,980	5.7
Asian Indian	5,216	9.2	7,963	12.6	15,469	17.6
Chinese	4,793	8.5	4,759	7.5	5,638	6.4
Filipino	4,312	7.6	5,629	8.9	9,720	11.1
Cambodian	3,812	6.7	4,168	6.6	5,015	5.7
Vietnamese	2,008	3.6	2,471	3.9	3,114	3.6
Korean	986	1.7	1,326	2.1	1,586	1.8
Thai	387	0.7	355	0.6	505	0.6
Other Asian	1,786	3.2	1,922	3.0	3,930	4.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Table 3-7: Percent Concentration in Fresno's Inner City by Social Category and Year

Categories*	1990		2000	
	Count	Percent in Inner City	Count	Percent in Inner City
Asian	56,517	42.0	63,058	28.8
Southeast Asian Refugees	32,315	61.2	35,383	44.3
Cambodian	3,812	77.6	4,168	51.4
Laotian	8,174	67.5	6,373	52.9
Hmong	18,321	57.3	22,371	43.3
Vietnamese	2,008	41.1	2,471	18.4
Non-Southeast Asian Refugees	24,202	16.3	27,675	9.0
Asian Indian	5,216	24.7	7,963	6.6
Filipino	4,312	16.6	5,629	11.1
Thai	387	14.5	355	16.6
Chinese	4,793	13.4	4,759	7.6
Japanese	6,722	8.1	5,721	5.7
Korean	986	4.8	1,326	5.4
Other Asian	1,786	36.3	1,922	27.6
Non-Hispanic Black	31,311	34.1	40,291	26.5
Hispanic	231,853	24.4	351,636	23.4
Mexican	218,844	24.5	302,120	23.3
Puerto Rican	1,499	24.2	1,711	21.6
Cuban	202	15.3	441	21.8
Other Hispanic	11,308	23.0	47,364	24.4
Non-Hispanic American Indian	5,070	22.0	6,223	21.1
Non-Hispanic White	338,595	13.5	317,522	9.5
Fresno County Total	667,490	20.8	799,407	18.3

*Columns do not add to county total because multi-racial and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders were omitted.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 and 2000.

Table 3-8: Dissimilarity Indices (ID) for Select Social Categories Compared to Hmong by County and Year

County / Categories*	1990 ID	2000 ID	2010 ID
Fresno County, CA			
Black-White	50.1	48.4	44.6
Asian-White	40.7	33.4	33.7
Hispanic-NH White	47.8	46.9	46.5
White-Hmong	66.0	58.7	54.3
Black-Hmong	58.9	46.2	44.7
Hispanic-Hmong	56.6	51.9	50.5
Other Asian-Hmong	45.9	47.4	43.8
Sacramento County, CA			
Black-White	47.4	46.2	42.8
Asian-White	44.8	46.0	46.3
Hispanic-NH White	34.8	37.5	36.2
White-Hmong	83.4	78.9	70.5
Black-Hmong	62.5	53.1	47.3
Hispanic-Hmong	66.9	58.0	50.6
Other Asian-Hmong	70.4	64.3	57.6
Ramsey County, MN			
Black-White	54.6	53.3	46.7
Asian-White	49.1	50.3	47.5
Hispanic-NH White	41.6	49.8	43.8
White-Hmong	74.4	70.9	63.7
Black-Hmong	54.0	44.4	41.2
Hispanic-Hmong	55.6	43.8	36.9
Other Asian-Hmong	62.1	53.5	46.8
Milwaukee County, WI			
Black-White	78.2	77.8	76.1
Asian-White	43.3	40.8	38.6
Hispanic-NH White	56.6	60.2	56.8
White-Hmong	85.9	76.8	73.9
Black-Hmong	75.4	61.6	54.8
Hispanic-Hmong	56.3	61.7	73.0
Other Asian-Hmong	68.7	65.3	66.4

*Except for NH white (Non-Hispanic white) and Hmong, the categories white, black, and other Asian include persons of Hispanic background. Other Asian includes all Asians except Hmong.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Table 3-9: Legal Status of Select Asian American Groups

	Population	Percent of Total Asians	Percent Non-Citizen	Percent Citizen by Birth¹	Percent Naturalized	Percent Citizen Combined	Percent Eligible to Register²
Cambodian	209,404	1.7	24.3	39.3	36.5	75.7	47.6
Hmong	195,614	1.5	20.8	55.3	24.0	79.2	38.4
Laotian	187,328	1.5	24.0	39.1	36.9	76.0	49.2
Vietnamese	1,455,644	11.5	18.7	33.1	48.2	81.3	57.6
Thai	151,997	1.2	37.3	24.5	38.2	62.7	50.4
Chinese	3,075,822	24.2	27.9	30.9	41.3	72.2	53.7
Japanese	786,016	6.2	28.9	59.3	11.8	71.1	62.1
Other Asians	6,627,606	52.2	--	--	--	--	--
All Asians	12,689,431	100.0	29.2	32.8	37.9	70.8	51.5

¹ Includes all persons born in the U.S., U.S. territories, or abroad to U.S. parents.

² Includes all persons who are U.S. citizens and 18 years or over.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS, 2005-2009, Weighted Samples.

Table 3-10: Legal Status of Hmong Americans by Top Three States

	Population	Percent Non-U.S. Citizen	Percent Naturalized U.S. Citizen	Percent U.S. Citizen by Birth¹	Percent Total U.S. Citizen	Percent Eligible to Register²
Hmong in U.S.	195,614	20.8	24.0	55.3	79.2	38.4
California	66,846	21.7	21.4	56.8	78.3	36.7
Minnesota	48,949	23.5	25.5	51.0	76.5	36.7
Wisconsin	40,672	17.3	28.2	54.5	82.7	41.6
All Other States	39,147	19.3	22.1	58.7	80.7	40.2

¹ Includes all persons born in the U.S., U.S. territories, or abroad to U.S. parents.

² Includes all persons who are U.S. citizens and 18 years or over.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey PUMS, 2005-2009, Weighted Samples.

Table 3-11: Odds of Becoming Naturalized U.S. Citizen by Educational Attainment, Age, Sex, and State among Foreign-Born Hmong 18 Years and Older

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds Ratio	95% C.I.	Odds Ratio	95% C.I.	Odds Ratio	95% C.I.
Educational Attainment	1.58**	1.43-1.74	1.71**	1.54-1.91	1.67**	1.47-1.91
Age	1.04**	1.03-1.05	1.05**	1.03-1.06	1.05**	1.04-1.07
Sex						
<i>Female</i>	1.28*	1.07-1.54	1.42*	1.18-1.71	1.31*	1.07-1.60
Marital Status						
<i>Married</i>			1.38*	1.01-1.87	1.24	0.88-1.75
State						
<i>Minnesota</i>					1.90**	1.38-2.60
<i>Wisconsin</i>					1.83**	1.30-2.57
Weighted N	195,614		195,614		195,614	

* p < .05 ** p < .001

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey PUMS.

Notes:

Model 3: Marital status found not a significant predictor of naturalization;

English ability found not a significant predictor of naturalization;

Length of residency found not a significant predictor of naturalization.

Coding:

Analysis was performed using American Community Survey PUMS, 2005-2009 dataset, where Hmong 18 years and older who arrived between 1975-2000 inclusive were selected in the sample. The ACS supplied replicate weights were applied using SAS 9.2 (Proc SURVEYLOGISTIC VARMETHOD=BRR (FAY = 0.5)).

The dependent variable "naturalized citizen vs. non-citizen" was constructed from the ACS 05-09 PUMS' CIT "citizenship" variable.

The independent variable "educational attainment" was constructed from the ACS 05-09 PUMS' SCHL "educational attainment" variable. SCHL was recoded into four categories as follows: 1 = No school through grades 7 or 8; 2 = Grade 9 through 12 or no diploma; 3 = High school graduate; 4 = Some college through doctorate degree.

The independent variable "state" was constructed from the ACS 05-09 PUMS' ST variable. California is the reference state to which Minnesota and Wisconsin were compared.

Figure 3-1: Percent Distribution of Hmong Americans by Legal Status and Year

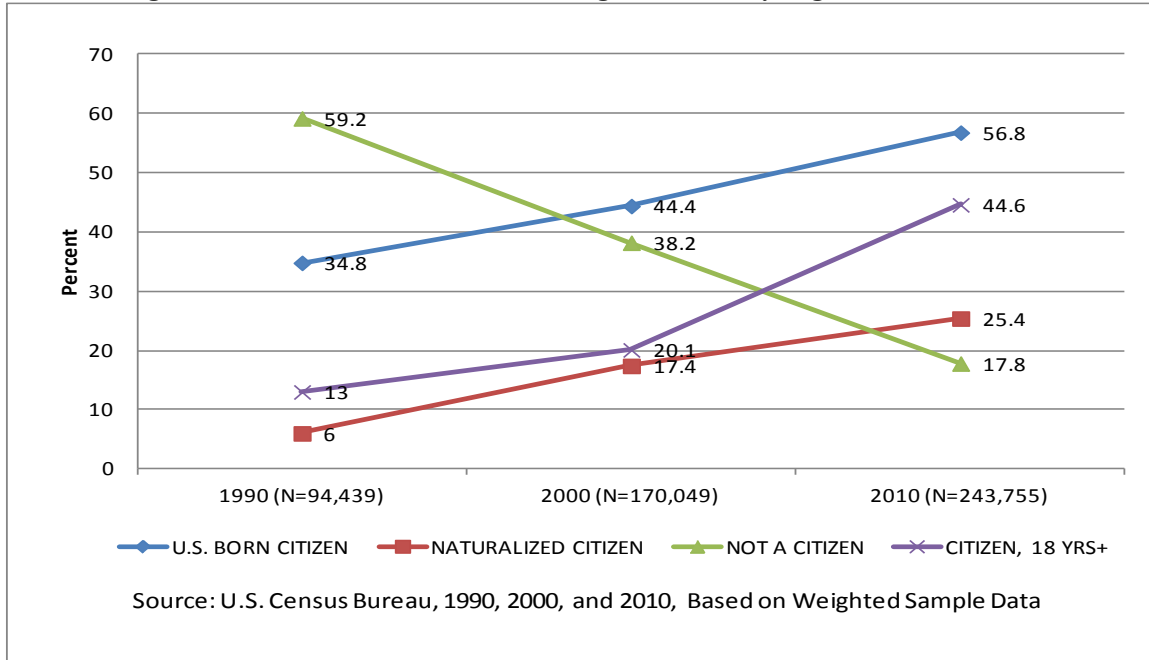


Figure 3-2: Number of Immigrants Naturalized by Country of Birth and Year

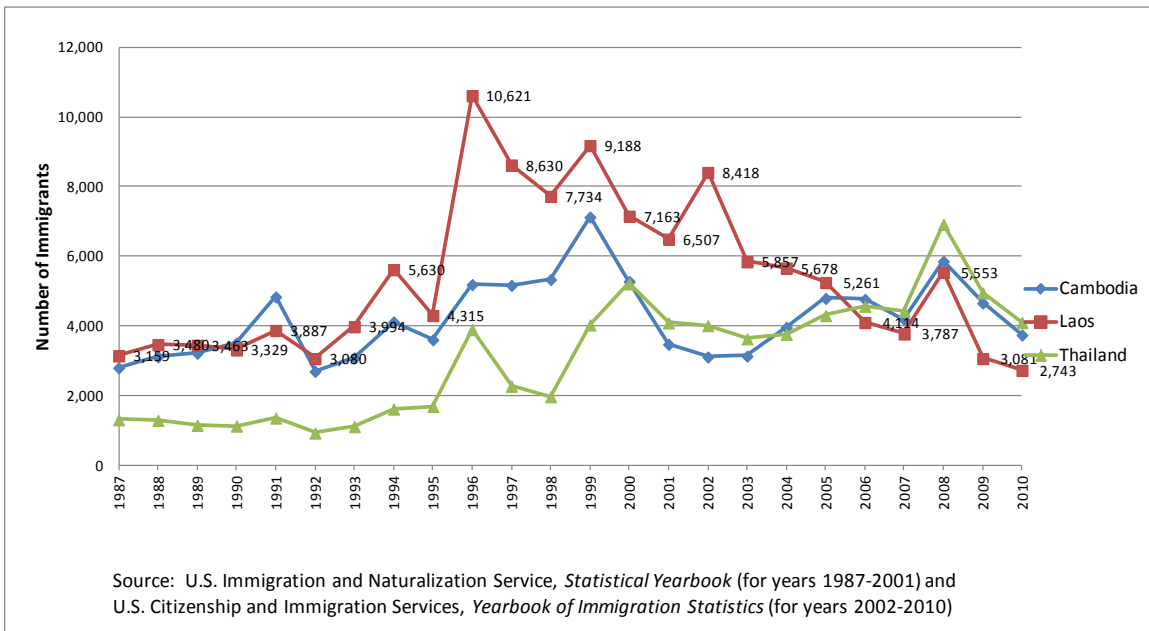


Figure 3-3: Distribution of Hmong Adults' Responses to the Question, A: "What do you prefer to call yourself?" by Gender, 2002

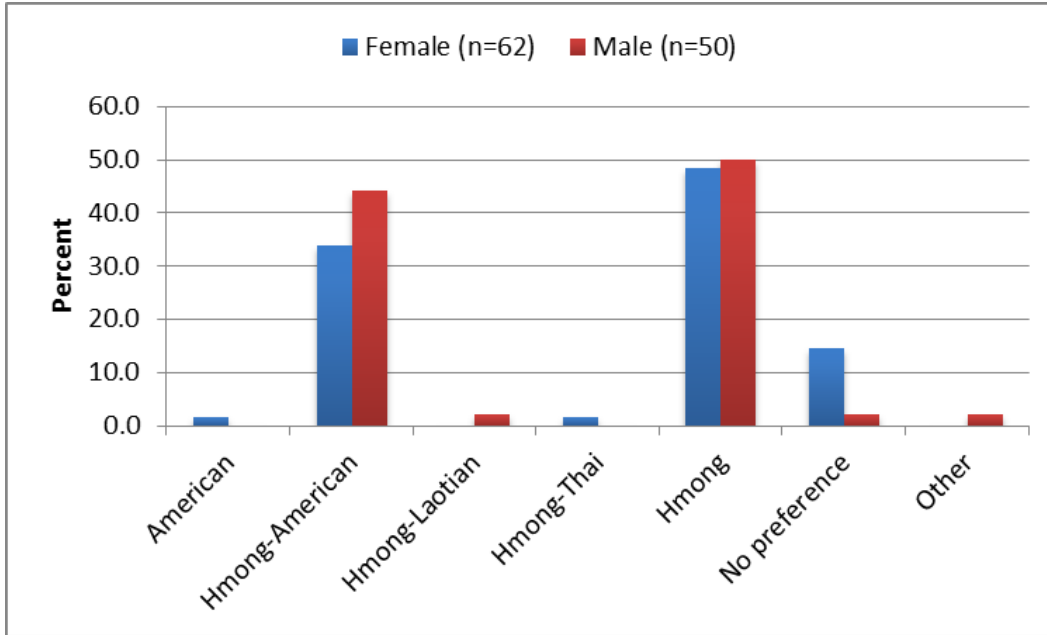
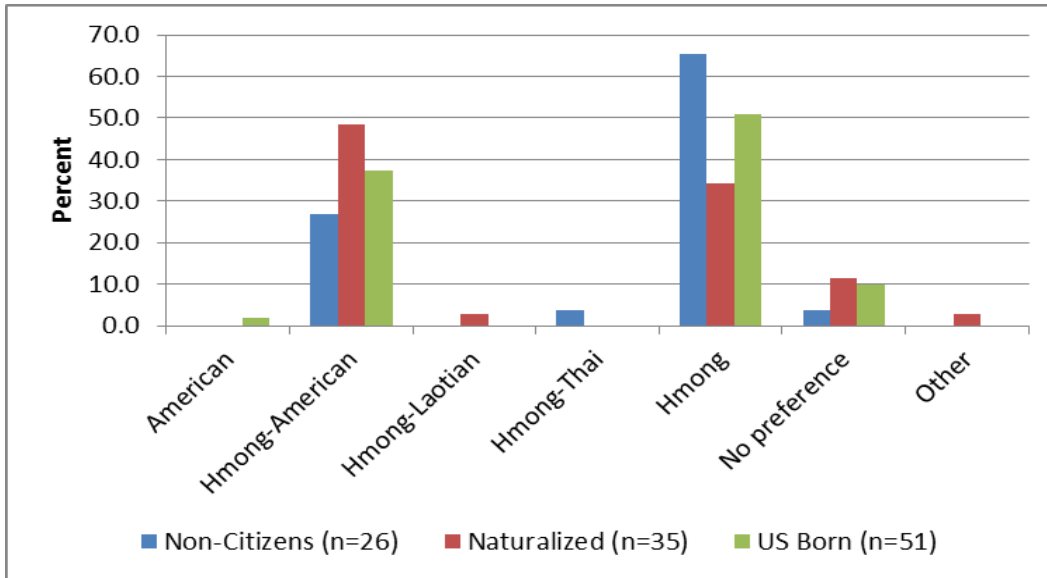


Figure 3-4: Distribution of Hmong Adults' Responses to the Question, B: "What do you prefer to call yourself?" by Legal Status, 2002



Chapter 4: An Historical Analysis of Protest Events, 1980-2011

Although many researchers make a distinction between electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation and survey analysts have operationalized each concept in a range of ways,¹⁵⁵ few have formally defined these concepts. As commonly used, electoral participation refers to voluntary, institutionalized activities, especially voting, aimed at influencing the decisions of elected representatives or government agents at the different levels of the political system. Sidney Verba and Norman Nie (1972:44) point out that, “[electoral] participation has come to be defined as voting and perhaps voting plus some additional campaign activity.” On the other hand, non-electoral participation refers to voluntary activities other than voting that are aimed at influencing the decisions of the political system (Verba and Nie 1972:29).¹⁵⁶ As a type of non-electoral participation, protests have often been studied as part of excluded groups’ so-called ‘unruly’ politics or ‘politics by other means’ (Gamson 1975).

Referring to the civil rights movements of the 1960s, political scientist Michael Lipsky (1968:1144) points out that “the frequent resort to protest activity by relatively powerless groups in recent American politics suggests that protest represents an important aspect of minority group and low income group politics.” Relatively powerless groups are “those groups which, relatively speaking, are lacking in conventional political resources” (1968:1144) that are needed to organize and sustain political activities. These resources include things such as money, time,

¹⁵⁵ For instance, Jones-Correa and Leal (2001:756), relying on the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the Latino National Political Survey, operationalized electoral and non-electoral participation as follows: Electoral participation “include[s] voting in the most recent congressional election (1988), voting in the most recent presidential election (1988), voting in school board elections, having ever been registered to vote, and being currently registered to vote. ... [N]on-electoral measures [include] wearing a button or posting a placard advertising a candidate preference, signing a petition, writing a letter to an elected official, attending a public meeting, attending a rally, contributing to a political campaign or cause, and volunteering time for a political campaign.”

¹⁵⁶ In her study of immigrant political incorporation, Junn (1999) uses a different pair of terms to make much the same distinction. Junn defines “system-directed [forms of political] activities [as those activities] aimed at influencing elected representatives and other agents of government, whereas...direct political activity include those types of participation that involve working directly with others, where the action is not necessarily aimed at elected or appointed officials” (1999:1423). Junn includes protests in the latter category.

skills, constituents, and organizational capacity which vary across groups depending on their “[socioeconomic] status, numbers [and group] cohesion” (1968:1146). According to Lipsky, groups that lack conventional political resources lack the power to directly confront or influence the political system. These groups often must rely on more indirect methods to gain access to and obtain rewards from the economic or political systems.¹⁵⁷

The members and leaders of relatively powerless groups could use protest as a way to create political resources that, in turn, could increase their bargaining¹⁵⁸ power during contentious politics (J.Q. Wilson 1961). Leaders of protests could try “to create political resources by activating other groups to enter the conflict” or political arena (Lipsky 1968:1146). Lipsky (1968) calls these third parties “the *reference publics* of protest *targets*” (p. 1146). Following J.Q. Wilson (1961), Lipsky contends that “the ‘problem of the powerless’ in protest activity is to activate ‘third parties’ to enter the implicit or explicit bargaining arena in ways favorable to the protesters. This is one of the few ways in which they can ‘create’ bargaining resources” (1968:1145). Reference publics could serve as political resources to protesters by helping to legitimate a social problem or by putting pressure on the target(s) to take action on such problem. Lipsky explains, for instance, that rather than “fifteen people sitting uninvited in the Mayor’s office [to try to] move City Hall...[a] better formulation would suggest that the people sitting in may be able to appeal to a wider public to which the city administration is sensitive” (1968:1146). Echoing similar points, McCarthy, Smith, and Zald (1996:291) contend that “[social actors in] [m]ovements usually lack the political and/or material resources necessary

¹⁵⁷ Lipsky (1968:1145) defines protest as “a mode of political action oriented toward objection to one or more policies or conditions, characterized by showmanship or display of an unconventional nature, and undertaken to obtain rewards from political or economic systems while working within the systems.”

¹⁵⁸ James Wilson (1961:291) defines “bargaining” as “any situation in which two or more parties seek conflicting [but not necessarily incompatible] ends through the exchange of [intangible or tangible] compensations. (...) The essential element in bargaining is that concessions are rewarded. The task is to find a mutually agreeable ratio for the exchange of those rewards.”

for routine access to political decision-makers and therefore must rely primarily on ‘outsider’ strategies to draw the attention of publics and policymakers to the problems they wish to have resolved.”

Lipsky, however, is keenly aware of the “instability of protest movements” (1968:1158) and of the limitations of relying on third parties (external political resources) to obtain tangible rewards in the American political system. Lipsky is critical of Robert Dahl’s (1956, 1961) pluralist view of the American political system as a ‘fluid’ system. Against Dahl’s view that the “normal American political process” provides “a high probability that an active and legitimate group in the population can make itself heard effectively at some crucial stage in the process of decision” (Dahl 1956:145-6, cited in Lipsky 1968:1147), Lipsky points out that not just “any group can make itself heard [effectively]” by the system (1968:1157). For, being heard effectively means “more than the simple fact that it makes a noise...[but rather] that one or more officials are not only ready to listen to the noise, but expect to suffer in some significant way if they do not placate the group, its leaders, or its most vociferous members” (Dahl 1956:145-6, cited in Lipsky 1968:1147).

Secondly, Lipsky argues, even when protests help challengers gain legitimacy for their demands, this does not ensure that challengers will actually receive *tangible* rewards for their efforts. This is because targets, in response to political pressure from protesters and reference publics, could make any number of excuses not to grant protest goals or dispense only “token material satisfactions” (1968:1155). Instead of responding directly to protest groups by dispensing tangible rewards to protest groups, targets may “respond primarily to their own reference publics” (Lipsky 1968:1155) by dispensing symbolic rewards to appease these reference publics, who may also be the reference publics of protest groups. According to Lipsky,

“symbolic dispensations may not only serve to reassure unorganized political group interests, but may also contribute to reducing the anxiety level of organized interests and wider publics which are only tangentially involved in the issues” (1968:1155). In effect, dispensing “symbolic reassurances” helps “to remove immediate pressure [off of targets] and delay specific commitments [to protesters] to a future date” (Lipsky 1968:1155-56).

Given these difficulties, Lipsky (1968:1158) believes that the more fruitful purpose of protest may be its role in “building organizations” as a type of internal and possibly more stable political resource. Lipsky suggests,

Ultimately, relatively powerless groups in most instances cannot depend upon activating other actors in the political process. Long-run success will depend upon the acquisition of *stable political resources* which do not rely for their use on third parties (1968:1158, emphasis added).

In their study of political incorporation across ten California cities, Browning et al. (1984:83, 96) emphasized the role of Hispanics’ demand-protests in developing their “organizational resources” and leadership. Organizations and leadership developed through protests subsequently facilitated Hispanics’ engagement in electoral mobilization (1984:83).

One of the three main goals of this chapter is to try to understand how social actors’ engagements in protests help them to develop their community’s organizational capacity. I propose to define organizational capacity broadly as the set of resources (skills, knowledge, etc.), communication networks and tactics¹⁵⁹ that enables social actors to mobilize collective action in response to perceived social problems (of which perceived threats is a type) and/or political opportunities. Communication networks are the set of interconnected social organizations that rely on some media (e.g., ethnic radios) to communicate among leaders and between leaders and supporters. New informal or formal organizations may emerge out of protest movements, adding

¹⁵⁹ John Wilson (1973:227) defines “tactics” as “both the set of principles concerning methods and techniques of action and those concrete activities intended to further the aims of the movement.”

to a community's institutional completeness and contributing to its organizational capacity; however, organizational capacity is not determined by any specific set of organizations.

Organizational capacity in and of itself does not produce collective action. Nevertheless, collective political action depends crucially on a group's ability to organize people and mobilize resources. As McCarthy and Zald (1977:1216) point out, "Because resources [they mean money and labor] are necessary for engagement in social conflict, they must be aggregated for collective purposes. Second, resource aggregation requires some *minimal form of organization*" (emphasis added). But, as Gamson and Schmeidler (1984:569) point out, "organization" does not refer to any "particular form of organization," since collective action still requires the social actors' "skills and routines for carrying it out." Rather, organization is "more [about]...the presence of an infrastructure (...) particularly structures of solidarity and communication. [It is this infrastructure], generally maintained by an array of organizations, [that] makes it easier to aggregate resources and to use them in collective action" (Gamson and Schmeidler 1984:569). As I shall come back to, Hmong Americans' experiences organizing and constructing protests during the last two decades have had an impact on some states policies as well as on their community's organizational infrastructure and capacity.

By examining the complex process through which relatively powerless groups can sometimes (not always) turn protests into political resources, Lipsky's (1968) work has inspired and informed later sociological research on the role of resource mobilization and political contexts in social movements. But perhaps because Lipsky was doing work in the mid-1960s—a period when massive immigration from Latin America and Asia had just begun and non-European immigrants' trans-state politics was less salient (not necessarily less frequent) compared to subsequent decades—his focus was on relatively powerless groups in the context of

the American political system in general rather than on U.S. immigrants. Yet, U.S. immigrant groups are a unique population especially because of their dual social status¹⁶⁰ and their dual role as constituents of the U.S. and potential reference publics for ‘like-minded’ compatriots of sending countries.¹⁶¹

It is common knowledge that the members of many U.S. immigrant groups maintain social ties with people outside of the U.S., but especially those in immigrants’ respective sending countries. However, we know less about how immigrant groups utilize their position and political freedoms (political opportunities) in the U.S. to respond to social problems or perceived threats against their less privileged compatriots abroad. We know much less about how changed international political contexts (e.g., bilateral policies that change the constellations of power), can suddenly change the U.S. government’s treatment of certain national origin groups and how these groups respond to the state. Studying immigrant protests opens up a set of interesting research questions, such as a) Under what conditions do immigrants resort to protests and for whom do they protest?, b) Do immigrants engage in foreign-oriented protests as much as they engage in domestic-oriented protests?, and c) Do immigrant groups’ protest activities decline as they become more politically incorporated in the host society?¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ In general, immigrants are less powerful (in the political and economic sense) compared to whites and established racial minorities in the U.S. such as blacks and American Indians. However, relative to their compatriots in the sending country, most documented immigrant groups, including those with relatively low socioeconomic status, are economically and politically more powerful by virtue of them being permanent residents or citizens of the United States—a country that is technologically, militarily, economically more powerful than most and considered by many as a key political actor in the “international community.”

¹⁶¹ U.S. immigrants are *selective* about who they care about or who deserves resources or protection in the former homeland. We cannot assume that members of the same ethnic or national origin group will see each other as like-minded compatriots. From the standpoint of *some* Southeast Asian refugees, like-minded compatriots might only include those still in Southeast Asia whom they perceive as non-communists.

¹⁶² This question draws inspiration from Jack A. Goldstone’s (2004:333) question and doubt about the probability that protest/social movements will fade away as social movement actors gain greater access to democratic institutions: “[A]re the opportunities, or more generally, the factors that facilitate social movements, including radical and violent movements, likely to increase or diminish with the global spread of democratic, representative institutions?” See Jack A. Goldstone. 2004. “More Social Movements or Fewer? Beyond Political Opportunity Structures to Relational Fields.” *Theory and Society* 33:333-365.

In this chapter, I examine Hmong Americans' protest events of the past 30 years in order to 1) describe some of the characteristics of Hmong American protests; 2) analyze the extent to which Hmong Americans' foreign-oriented protests (as determined from protest issues) have declined or increased relative to domestic-oriented protests; and 3) consider the impact that protests have had on state policies and on Hmong Americans' organizational capacity. I will begin by describing Asian Americans' engagement in protests and Hmong's past experiences with protests. Next, I describe the method and data used to study Hmong American protest events. Then I examine the characteristics of protest events, focusing on the locations, activities, targets, and allies of protests. Then I describe the range of protest issues in order to consider the frequency of foreign- and domestic-oriented protests. Finally, I discuss how protests have impacted state policies and Hmong's organizational capacity.

Asian Americans and Political Participation

Research in the United States has found that ethnic/racial minorities are more likely than whites to engage in protest activities. Using data on political behavior from a nationally representative survey and a Texas-wide survey conducted in the 1990s,¹⁶³ Jane Junn finds, "Of all the types of political activity in both surveys, protesting is the only form in which minority Americans [African, Asian, and Mexican Americans] consistently outpace Whites" (1999:1424). More specifically, Junn finds that "Asians are almost twice as likely as Whites to engage in protest but half as likely to serve on a board or local council and work with others in the local community" (1999:1424).

Nevertheless, Asian Americans' engagement in politics is not simply determined by their lack of or command of resources. Two findings by Junn (1999) based on the 1990 American

¹⁶³ These surveys are the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (n = over 15,053) and the 1993-1994 Texas A&M Minority Survey (n = 2,129), both of which used stratified sampling to over sample non-white minorities.

Citizen Participation Study suggests that factors other than socioeconomic status (SES) influence Asian Americans' decision to engage in political activities, whether those activities are system-directed or direct. First, Junn finds that, among Asian Americans, assimilation (operationalized as being born in the U.S.) is the most important predictor of individuals' participation in system-directed political activities and that only income—not education—is modestly positively correlated with system-directed activities. This finding contrast with past research findings that education is strongly, positively correlated with system-directed activities such as voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Secondly, Junn finds that, contrary to the predictions of the socioeconomic approach to political participation, neither educational attainment nor income is significantly correlated with Asian Americans' participation in direct political activities (1999:1432). Furthermore, none of the assimilation variables¹⁶⁴ are correlated with direct political activities. These findings suggest that economic resources, even if they help to explain how, do not explain why or when Asian Americans participate in protests.

Asian Americans' relatively higher engagement in politics probably has more to do with their experiences with racial discrimination than their SES backgrounds (Wong et al. 2011:224). However, with respect to protests, recent research has found that Asian subgroups who report higher racial discrimination are not necessarily more likely to engage in protests than subgroups who report lower experiences with discrimination. Using a nationally representative survey of Asian Americans, Wong et al. (2011:215-16) found that Vietnamese Americans were more likely to participate in protests than groups such as Filipinos, Koreans, or Chinese (all three groups reported greater discrimination than Vietnamese). Assuming that self-reports of political behavior reflect actual behavior, what explains why Vietnamese are more likely to engage in protests than other Asian subgroups? According to Wong et al. (2011:218), "For Vietnamese

¹⁶⁴ The two assimilation variables are being born in the U.S. and speaking English as the first home language.

Americans, the pathway to greater-than-expected political participation [protesting and voting] is built largely on strong levels of party identification.” But although the authors address the question of why Vietnamese former refugees have identified more with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party, they provide little explanation for why Vietnamese are more likely to engage in protests than other Asians.

An alternative explanation is that the manner and recency of Vietnamese’s exit from Vietnam, combined with Vietnamese former refugees’ collective beliefs¹⁶⁵ that the political contexts (especially state policies) of the homeland continue to have harmful effects on like-minded compatriots, help account for Vietnamese Americans’ greater engagement in protests.¹⁶⁶ I want to suggest that political contexts, more so than a group’s SES background, shape the motivations of a group to engage in (or disengage from) politics, especially non-electoral politics. Political contexts—i.e., the unilateral and bilateral policies of sending and receiving states—create various political contingencies, of which only some ever become defined as social problems. If social actors define one or more political contingencies as a social problem, they probably will engage in political claims making activities aimed at obtaining legitimacy for such problem in order to seek ameliorative action on the problem.

With respect to protest activity, I suspect that if we were to gather a large sample of Asian American-organized protests and disaggregate them by ethnicity and by orientation (domestic-oriented or foreign-oriented), we would probably find that Asian American subgroups

¹⁶⁵ Collective beliefs are shared beliefs (and thus independent of individuals) about the world, created by individuals through social interactions, that help social actors make meaningful sense of their material and social environments. See pp. 82-82 in Bert Klandermans, "The Social Construction of Protest and Multiorganizational Fields," Pp 77-103 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Morris and Mueller, New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992. Collective beliefs contain collective memories transmitted generationally. A group’s collective memories of war can persist for a very long time (and be reconstructed from time to time), but length of residency in the U.S. will inevitably modify (change, erode) collective memories as members of a population with the lived experiences pass away, new political needs arise, etc..

¹⁶⁶ The explanation for Vietnamese’ greater than expected voting activity is harder to disentangle, not least because we have little data on who or what individuals have voted for or during what period of time.

engage in both domestic- and foreign-oriented protests but that Vietnamese engage in foreign-oriented protests more frequently than other non-refugee, less recent Asian subgroups do. If so, this would help account for why Vietnamese appear more likely to engage in (aggregated) protests than other Asian subgroups. As former political refugees or semi-voluntary emigrants of authoritarian governments, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian exiles in the U.S. have few ways to directly influence social policies in Vietnam. Protest is one relatively feasible, albeit not always safe or effective means through which those with a stake in the outcome of trans-state politics could try to indirectly influence decisions in the homeland contexts—that is, the former homeland and/or the country of first asylum.

When faced with a (perceived) threat in the homeland contexts such as human rights violations against compatriots, immigrant stakeholders and their supporters could simultaneously make use of their (perceived) political opportunities available in the U.S. (i.e., the right to assemble), to engage in organized protest. Protesters can request that influential reference publics (e.g., the U.S. State Department) put pressure on the alleged perpetrators (e.g., a foreign government) to stop and prevent future wrongdoings against the alleged victims (e.g., like-minded compatriots). What makes trans-state political activities, of which foreign-oriented protest is a type, meaningful for immigrant participants is the fact that most are embedded in transnational communities.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Besides causing the massive destruction of human lives, the American-Vietnam war resulted in the displacement and dislocation of millions of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians. For countless refugee families, selective emigration and immigration policies, along with arbitrary repatriation policies, only exacerbated the problems of family separation and other forms of social separation. Ironically, it is the members of geographically separated social networks who have a stake in producing and maintaining ‘transnational’ communities: networks of social actors who engage in regular communication and material exchange with each other across sending and receiving countries.

Southeast Asian Refugees' Experiences with Contentious Politics

Most Southeast Asian former refugees are no strangers to what students of social movements call “contentious politics” (Tarrow 1996).¹⁶⁸ Unlike most of their U.S.-born descendants and perhaps most Americans more generally, many foreign-born Southeast Asian adult refugees have experienced or participated in various forms of contentious politics ranging from non-violent protest demonstrations to armed rebellions and armed resistance. Between 1946 and 1979, the peoples of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were embroiled in three major wars: the First Indochina War (a war between the French colonialists and the Vietnamese); the Second Indochina War (three civil wars in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam); and the Third Indochina War (the Cambodian-Vietnamese War and later the Chinese-Vietnamese War). During this 33-year-long period, armed rebellion and resistance became very much a part of Southeast Asians’ everyday life as millions of men and women were forced to take up arms in support of or against one or more military factions in Southeast Asia. Fighting civil wars in their countries—wars that were also shadow wars of the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and China—Southeast Asians sought outcomes that ranged from personal retaliation to political representation to social and political revolution.

The armed movements in Southeast Asia, of course, differ in significant ways from the episodic riots and protest movements that have taken place in the U.S. in the post-American civil war and post-Civil Rights era. The risks and costs associated armed rebellions in terms of human lives and resources are vastly greater than those of non-violent protests or even violent riots. Besides being violent, Southeast Asian rebellions and resistance movements involved

¹⁶⁸ Tarrow (1996:874) defines contentious politics “as collective activity on the part of claimants—or those who claim to represent them—relying at least in part on noninstitutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state.” See Sidney Tarrow. 1996. "Social Movements in Contentious Politics: A Review Article." *American Political Science Review* 90(4):874-883.

entire villages or regions of the country for prolonged periods of time (several years or decades). Moreover, Southeast Asians' participation in armed rebellions and resistance was largely non-voluntary; they were often undertaken in response to decades of oppression and exploitation by foreign empires (e.g., French colonial authorities) or other newly appointed governments.

In Laos, Hmong on both sides of the Laotian civil war were involved in guerilla movements. However, once Hmong became refugees in Thailand, non-violent protests and covert, armed resistance replaced large-scale guerilla warfare.¹⁶⁹ More specifically, since 1975, when the Pathet Lao took control of Laos and formed the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Hmong refugees who escaped to Thailand have been engaged in non-violent protests against the Lao PDR government for its persecution of Laotian and Hmong civilians and veterans, including many whom the government suspected had ties to the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Protests against the Lao PDR for human rights violation still occur from time to time. Beginning in the mid-1980s and lasting through to the present year (2011), Hmong former refugees in Thailand have, on multiple occasions, protested forced repatriation of Hmong refugees to the Lao PDR. In their protests against the Thai government, Thai-Hmong protesters used tactics such as demonstrations, hunger strikes, and petitions and have, on occasion, targeted the United States government for help.¹⁷⁰ In sum, for Hmong and other Southeast Asian former refugees, protests and some protest tactics common to the U.S. context are not new; only the specifics of protests (actors and issues) and their material and political contexts have changed.

¹⁶⁹ During the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, minor segments of the exiled Laotian-Hmong refugee population engaged in covert, armed resistance movements.

¹⁷⁰ Bangkok Post, "Protesters Gather for Mass Rally: Thousands Set to Converge on City," *Bangkok Post*, June 23, 1998. ; Agence France Presse, "Hmong Refugees on Hunger Strike in Thailand," *Agence France Presse -- English*, August 17, 2007.

Data and Method

The design of this study was inspired by Nhu-Ngoc Ong and David Meyer's study (2004), in which they used Lexis-Nexis cataloged newspapers to examine Vietnamese American protest events in the United States. Ong and Meyer coded protest events with the following categories: "date (actual or reported), source (name of newspaper—for multiple accounts of the same event, only the newspaper which contributed the most information to the event coding was recorded), actors, targets, leaders, locations, issues, positions/demands, tactics, number of participants, duration, and outcomes" (2004:7). I borrowed their code categories and added a few extra categories¹⁷¹ in my coding of Hmong American protest activities.

Because the aim of this chapter was to describe the characteristics and development of protest events rather than examine the motivations or characteristics of individuals, my unit of analysis is the protest event. To compile a sample of Hmong American-involved protest events in the United States, I relied mostly on print news media archived in the online catalog of Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.¹⁷² Between March and May 2011, I searched and coded articles using the Lexis-Nexis: Easy Search feature by "All News" as a search type; the search covered news published from 1980 to the present.¹⁷³ The initial search words I used were "Hmong" and "Hmong demonstrations." These search words yielded 1,000 and 997 news sources, respectively. The sources were narrowed by searching "protest" within sources, resulting in 616

¹⁷¹ Additional categories: state allies; state actors or targets (non-allies); organizations (allies and non-allies); slogans and/or symbols used; the number of news sources covering the same event (same protest time & location); and whether Hmong/Laotian veterans participated or were used as protesters.

¹⁷² Lexis-Nexis catalogs an extensive set of U.S. and world newspapers. However, it does not necessarily carry the same set of newspapers from year to year. Since my research (2009-2011), several newspapers apparently have been removed as single sources in the Lexis-Nexis Academic catalog (e.g., the *Modesto Bee*, the *Fresno Bee* and *Sacramento Bee*). Although selected full texts of these newspapers can still be found under McClatchy-Tribune Business News, this could present some difficulty in terms of data replication.

¹⁷³ Using the "Easy Search" as opposed to the Power Search feature of Lexis-Nexis Academic has the added benefit of filtering out hundreds (possibly thousands) of duplicate news articles. The presence of these duplicate articles resulted in over 3,000 sources when using the search word, "Hmong."

full-text news articles. It is from these articles that I compiled the initial list of 82 Hmong American-involved protest events. The final list contains a sample of 84 protest events.¹⁷⁴

Relying partly on Taylor and van Dyke's (2004) definition of protest, I classified an event as a protest when it involved "the collective use of unconventional methods of political participation to try to persuade or coerce authorities to support a challenging group's aims" (p. 263). I relaxed the criteria to also include protests that tried to persuade or coerce non-authorities. However, rather than count all protests that utilize all types of tactics, I limited protests to those that used any of the three out of four types of protest tactics that V. Taylor and van Dyke (2004:263) specified: "conventional strategies of political persuasion; confrontational tactics; and violent acts." This means that I excluded the "cultural forms of political expression." My main reason for excluding this fourth type of protest tactic is practical rather than theoretical; the news articles upon which I relied to construct the events data do not lend themselves easily to coding for this type. My observations suggest that there seems to be an implicit bias on the part of the mainstream news media (i.e., English, non-ethnic specific media) to cover protests where the first three types of tactics are found, perhaps because they are considered more news-worthy—that is, presumed more dramatic, controversial or entertaining for readers.

To be included in the sample, a "Hmong American-involved protest event" also needed to have taken place in the United States and have at least some Hmong participants, either as leaders, organizers or supporters in the protest.¹⁷⁵ Through this process of coding, I tabulated a

¹⁷⁴ Aware that at least two other protest events were missing from this list, I performed another search using Lexis-Nexus limited to two California news sources, the *Fresno Bee* and the *Sacramento Bee*. Upon inspection and another round of coding, this yielded two more protest events, bringing the total number of protest events to 84.

¹⁷⁵ In some instances, the same protest event (same time and location) was covered by multiple news sources. In these instances, I regarded the protest as a single case.

total of 84 protest events, 90 percent of which were Hmong American-*led* protests.¹⁷⁶ These 84 protest events occurred between February 3, 1990 and October 15, 2010. I then extracted the relevant information from each protest event and coded them in Excel.¹⁷⁷ I completed the coding of the protest events and their activities over a continuous one-month period.

Given that this list of protest events includes only those protest events reported by the mainstream news media, it leaves out other unreported protest events or events reported in non-cataloged, non-English or ethnic-specific newspapers.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, as Ong and Meyer (2004:6-7) point out, “Coverage of ethnic groups in mainstream media is generally biased toward food, crime, and festivals. As a result, political activities within the [ethnic] community may be underreported because they do not fit the stereotypical editorial framework.” My own ongoing research on U.S. mainstream news media representations of Hmong Americans since the 1980s reveal that the mainstream media has had a tendency to construct, focus on and/or over-represent “cultural clashes” between Hmong *immigrants* and other sectors of American society, especially health and court institutions.

Nevertheless, the use of events data using a single source (e.g., Lexis-Nexis Academic) could enable data reanalysis or verification. Furthermore, events data enable analyses that compare events and changes in their participants and activities over time within a relatively bounded space. In other words, this kind of data also enables us to observe cycles of protest over

¹⁷⁶ With the exception of 8 protests, such as the protest against the Vietnamese (SRV) Prime Minister’s visit to the U.S., the protest against the deportation of Cambodians, and some of the protests against federal welfare reform in Sacramento, 76 of the 84 protests were organized and led by members of Hmong American communities.

¹⁷⁷ My final data consist of 26 variables (not counting recoded variables) for each of the 84 cases of protests.

¹⁷⁸ The *Hmong Times* (L & W Communications based in St. Paul, Minnesota; URL: <http://www.hmongtimes.com/>) is one of the most established of all major Hmong American news sources; it publishes both paper and online news content in English and Hmong languages and provides coverage of U.S. events as well as events around the world. A recent search in the *Hmong Times* under “all sections” of its Advanced Search feature using the keywords “protest,” “demonstrations,” “rally,” and “petition” for the period from January 1, 2003 (the earliest that the search engine permitted) to June 1, 2011 yielded 62, 39, 41, and 29 articles, respectively. Many of these articles reported on protests carried out by other social groups instead of by Hmong Americans. The articles that reported on protests carried out by Hmong Americans generally report similar information found in mainstream newspapers.

time. The data on protest events over several decades give us an opportunity to “see” more significant changes in political contexts and how these changed political contexts create opportunities or constraints on Hmong Americans’ collective political action.

Results

Frequency and Location of Protests

Between 1980 and 1989, no protest event was reported by the mainstream news media. The first reported protest event occurred on February 3, 1990 in Los Angeles, in which about 100 Hmong from Santa Ana, California demonstrated in front of then-Republican Senator Pete Wilson’s office at the Los Angeles federal building.¹⁷⁹ On that day, three other reported protests also occurred in three different locations: St. Paul, Minnesota at the Capitol; Milwaukee, Wisconsin at Ziedler Park; and San Francisco outside of Senator Alan Cranston’s office. According to one report, similar protests were also scheduled to occur on that same day in “Denver, Milwaukee, Minnesota, Sacramento, San Diego and Washington, D.C.”¹⁸⁰ Among just the reported protests, over 2,000 Hmong individuals, including many Lao Hmong veterans, were in attendance to (1) protest Vietnam¹⁸¹ for backing “attacks on [Hmong] villages opposed to communist domination in Laos”; and (2) call “for international condemnation of the attacks and urge the United States to withhold funds from the Laotian government designated for anti-drug work and searchers for U.S. soldiers missing in action.”¹⁸² Many more multi-site protests against

¹⁷⁹ Thanhha Lai, "Laotians Take War Concerns to Wilson: They Seek U.S. Help to Stop Communists from Bombing Villages," *The Orange County Register*, February 3, 1990.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Since July 2, 1976, Vietnam’s official name is the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. From 1954 to 1976, North Vietnam was known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In 1976, with the unification of North and South Vietnam, the country became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Source: U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Vietnam,” Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

¹⁸² Jodie DeJonge, "Southeast Asians Decry Torture, Killings in Laos, Seek U.S. Help," *Associated Press*, February 3, 1990.

violence and human rights violations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) would occur throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

As shown in figure 4-1, the number of Hmong American protest events steadily increased between the early 1990s and late 2000s. Specifically, whereas there were only four reported protest events in 1990, by 2007, there were 15 protest events. On average, between 1990 and 2010, Hmong American protest events increased by about four protests per year.

[Figure 4-1 about here]

What might account for the fact that Hmong-led protests and electoral campaigns emerged in the early 1990s but not earlier? Making a comparison to the Vietnamese former refugee community may provide some clues. In their study of protest events in Vietnamese American communities, Ong and Meyer (2004) found that, “Vietnamese protest episodically, relatively infrequently *until the late 1980s*, then increasing to a peak in 1994 during the debate about normalizing relations with Vietnam” (p. 9, emphasis added). Furthermore, they point out that between 1975 and 2001, about 135 or “[m]ore than half of the [209] protests” that they examined occurred “in Orange County, mostly in Westminster or Garden Grove, the home of Little Saigon” (2004:10). The emergence of Vietnamese American protests during the late 1980s and of Hmong American protests during the early 1990s indicate that neither group participated in conventional protests until 10 years or greater after their arrival to the United States.

Many studies have documented Indochinese refugees' severe economic hardships upon their arrival and that these hardships persisted years afterward. We also know that Indochinese refugees, including Vietnamese and Hmong were initially dispersed across the United States as part of the U.S. government's and other voluntary agencies' resettlement policy (Fass 1985; Miyares 1994). This dispersal policy of resettlement was intended to avoid overwhelming

individual cities' social support systems and to assimilate refugees as quickly as possible (Fass 1985). We also know that, in response to their dispersal, Indochinese refugees engaged in secondary, inter-state migrations in order to be reunited with their families and co-ethnics in states such as California (Miyares 1998).

With this information in mind, I think that at least two processes may help account, in part, for how Vietnamese and Hmong protests emerged during the period that they did and not earlier. First, because the vast majority of refugees were preoccupied with meeting basic survival needs during their first several years of resettlement, they had little time to participate in political activities. For many members of each refugee group, it would take a decade or more for their socioeconomic (SES) levels to improve. The improvement in group SES level could translate into an increase in the refugee group's capacity to carry out protests. Secondly, while both Vietnamese and Hmong refugees have had experiences with many forms of protest in their home countries, many members of both groups probably arrived with relatively little knowledge of conventional (read legitimate) American protest activities. As both groups' length of residence increased, we can expect that their acquaintance with conventional repertoires of protests also became greater. This greater exposure or acquaintance, in turn, could help account for the more gradual emergence of conventional protests.

Furthermore, the emergence of Vietnamese American protests in Southern California during the late 1980s and Hmong American protests in Central Valley California during the early 1990s suggest that one other crucial community- and state-level factor may also be at work: the concentration of co-ethnics in urban cities within states that contain significant concentrations of Asian Americans. This can operate in the following way. First, co-ethnic concentrations could potentially give rise to effective, visible ethnic enclaves—that is, ethnic communities that exhibit

a high level of institutional completeness and are comprised of a significant middle-class ethnic population along with coethnic members who come from a diversity of national origin and social class backgrounds (Zhou 2009:9-13). Externally, the ethnic enclave creates ethnic political visibility; and internally, it facilitates strong social networks of interpersonal relations (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Zhou 2009:11). Living in close proximity to each other does not guarantee that groups will share the same interests or that mobilization will emerge; but it does make it so that when groups choose to come together, they can do so without incurring too much expenses.

Indeed, the locations of Hmong American protest events reflect roughly their population distribution in the United States. Figure 4-2 shows that nearly 40 percent of the 84 protest events took place in California. This is followed by Minnesota (34 percent) and Wisconsin (16 percent). Together, California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin accounted for nearly 90 percent of all reported protest events. The rest of the protests (10 percent) occurred in Washington, D.C. and three other states: Rhode Island, North Carolina and Nebraska. Within California, most protests (28 of 33) took place across two cities about equally: Fresno, mostly at City Hall and the Bernie F. Sisk Federal Building in downtown, and Sacramento, mostly at the State Capitol and the U.S. District Court. In Minnesota, three-fourths (21 of 28) of protests took place in St. Paul, mostly at the State Capitol. In Wisconsin, half of the 14 protests took place in Madison, mostly at the State Capitol.

[Figure 4-2 about here]

Furthermore, the data reveal significant differences between California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin in terms of protest development over time. Throughout the 21-year period (1990-2010) surveyed, national Hmong American protest movements certainly stimulated state- and local-level participation in protests. However, each state also exhibited a different pattern of

protest participation. In California, protest occurred most frequently between 1994 and 1997, but declined over the next three years and then stabilized from 2003 through 2006. In Minnesota, protests fluctuated almost from year to year between 1995 and 2009. Nevertheless, an average of 1.33 protests occurred each year in Minnesota. In Wisconsin, where on average only 0.62 protests occurred per year, protest participation was not only the lowest of all three states but also remained quite stable throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The major peak in protests in all three states in 2007-2008 resulted from the intense, multi-state protests against the arrest of the late-Vang Pao, a Hmong leader and former general in Laos who served under the U.S. CIA throughout the secret war in Laos.

[Figure 4-3 about here]

Types of Protest Activities

Following Ong and Meyer's (2004) lead, I classified protest activities into four categories: demonstrations, symbolic or educational actions, institutionally-oriented actions, and transgressive actions. Some protest events clearly involved two to three protest actions. As such, these actions were counted as separate instances; consequently, the total number of activities exceed the total number of protest events. Table 4-1 shows the types of protest activities in which Hmong Americans engaged.

[Table 4-1 about here]

Demonstrations, including rallies and marches, comprised most (71 percent) of the protest actions. This is followed by symbolic and/or educational actions (14 percent), which ranged from making public statements about an issue to attending public meetings to show support for an issue. These tactics were aimed largely at educating others about an issue or showing support for one position or another. Institutionally-oriented actions made up six percent

of the actions and ranged from petition signing or submission to making testimonies at public hearings, usually in support of a resolution.

Finally, transgressive actions, or activities that either violated some law or formal policy or contained violence, made up eight percent of the total protest actions. These include the action of the 200 Hmong men who stopped attending required English language classes in Fresno and Clovis during their 1994 protest of the GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence) program—an employment program for public assistance recipients. During another 1994 protests against the GAIN program, Hmong protesters also trapped workers inside of Fresno County’s welfare headquarters for about five hours and blocked public streets that surrounded private businesses.¹⁸³ Transgressive action also include the actions of thousands of Hmong public school students who missed school in order to join the 2007-2008 protests against the arrest of General Vang Pao and nine other men at the Sacramento federal courthouse. Transgressive actions also include Hmong protesters’ intentional occupying and blocking of the main entrances to and the hallways of the hearing rooms of Minnesota’s House Health and Human Services Committee.¹⁸⁴ With the exception of one protest event, no arrest or physical violence was reported in any of the other 83 protest events. On one occasion, during a Hmong-organized protest against the U.S. establishing normal trade relations with Laos, an arrest occurred after a melee broke out between a few Hmong protesters and Lao counter-protesters.¹⁸⁵ The rest of the demonstrators and counter-demonstrators, however, were non-violent.

¹⁸³ Alex Pulaski, "Frustrations Boil Over," *Fresno Bee*, May 4, 1994.

¹⁸⁴ Linda Fullerton, "Is Minnesota Too Nice?; Many Would Like to Change Minnesota's Reputation as a Welfare Haven. But Can the State Afford the Solutions?; the Policy," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 29, 1995. ; Jean Hopfensperger and Chris Graves, "Hmong Group Leads Welfare Reform Protest at House Panel Hearing," *Star Tribune*, January 19, 1995.

¹⁸⁵ Todd Nelson, "Fight Breaks out at Laos Trade Protest Two Men Arrested on Assault, Riot Charges," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, April 15, 2004.

Targets of Protests

By targets, I mean those persons or organizations that are implicitly or explicitly requested by protesters to take some action in order to influence those capable of granting or compromising with protesters' goals. Because protesters do not always make clear or thoroughly present their grievances, demands, targets, or goals, it is not always possible to be certain about the specific target or targets to which a protest directs its efforts. In most instances, I rely on the media's report of who is doing or being asked to do what for the protesters in each event. Table 4-2 shows the distribution of Hmong American protests by types of target, as far as they can be identified from the events data.

Approximately 53 percent of protests targeted the U.S. government, its executive, judicial or legislative branches, or one of these branches' agencies. About 18 percent of protests targeted state-level governments or their branches. Another 18 percent of protests targeted county and city government officials and school district officials. Altogether, excluding the administrators of individual public schools and universities, nearly 90 percent of Hmong American protests targeted U.S. public officials from the school district level through the White House. If we include in this the protests that targeted the Lao Embassy, an authority of a foreign government, then the percentage of system-directed protests is even greater. This finding suggests that most Hmong American protests or protest movements have the same general function as system-directed political activities—that is, they are aimed at “influencing elected representatives and other agents of government” (Junn 1999:1423).

[Table 4-2 about here]

Hmong American protesters almost always targeted the U.S. federal government when it comes to social problems in Laos or Thailand. However, their access to the federal government

(in this case, both the U.S. Executive and Legislative Branches) is usually mediated by the U.S. Congress. Using their position as U.S. citizens, Hmong American interest groups often appealed to their members of the U.S. Congress, seeking their help to influence other members of Congress, officials at the U.S. State Department, the President, or the United Nations. Protesters would, for example, request that the U.S. Congress investigate wrongdoings (forced repatriation, grave desecrations) in Thailand and/or put pressure, through the U.S. State Department, on the Thai government to stop these wrongdoings. Hmong American protesters' concerted efforts to influence various state targets and mobilize state allies show that they recognize "the importance of the state in shaping political changes" (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995:3). For as Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans have pointed out, "As the institutionalized center for the legitimate monopoly on the means of violence, the state is the ultimate arbiter for the allocation of socially valued goods. The state is therefore simultaneously target, sponsor, and antagonist for social movements as well as the organizer of the political system and arbiter of victory" (1995:3). Next, I examine protest issues in order to assess the frequency of homeland-oriented issues relative to domestic-oriented issues.

Protest Issues and State Allies

By protest issue, I am referring to a specific grievance or social problem that is the main focus of a protest event. Table 4-3 shows the nine most frequently occurring protest issues of Hmong American protests during the last 30 years. Protests against human rights violations in Laos occurred 14 times (17 percent of all protests), the most of any kind of protest issue. If we include the set of protests against granting normal trade relations to Laos in the same category as protests against human rights violations in Laos (see below for rationale), then this category alone makes up almost a third (30 percent) of all protest issues. If we group all Hmong

American protest issues aimed at the governmental or non-governmental entities of Cambodia,¹⁸⁶ Lao PDR, Thailand or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) into one category, then foreign-oriented protests make up 45 percent (38 of 84) of all protests.

[Table 4-3 about here]

Grouping protests in this way, however, does not tell us about how much foreign-oriented protests have increased or declined over time relative to domestic-oriented protests. To have a better idea of that trend, I grouped all protests issue aimed primarily at foreign entities into one category and all protests aimed primarily at domestic entities into another. I display this trend visually in Figure 4-4.

[Figure 4-4 about here]

Since 1981, both foreign- and domestic-oriented protests have increased steadily, albeit at different rates. Foreign-oriented protests increased at the rate of about 2.3 protests every five years while domestic-oriented protests increased at 3.3 protests every five years. What is most interesting here is that Hmong Americans' homeland politics has increased rather than declined over time. Data from the most recent period (between 2005 and 2010) show that foreign-oriented protests have declined slightly; however, it is too soon to tell how that pattern will behave in the next five years. Domestic-oriented protests, for instance, appeared to be declining by 1998, but by 2002, it increased again.

Despite the persistence of foreign-oriented protests, domestic-oriented protests now constitute the majority (55 percent) of Hmong Americans' protests (table 4-3). In the early 1990s, the predominant, domestic-oriented issue was state welfare policies. Hmong American

¹⁸⁶ The protest against violence in Cambodia is included in this count, but the protest against U.S. deportation of Cambodians is not included. Although both protests raised the issue of human rights issues in Cambodia, the latter was primarily concerned with stopping the U.S. INS from deporting permanent residents.

groups in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin each protested their states' welfare policies for being unfair and/or ineffective. That Hmong American defined state welfare policies and county welfare implementation practices as social problems early on is perhaps not surprising considering Hmong's experiences with unemployment, concentrated poverty, and the stigma and discrimination that go along with being poor. Research in California's Central Valley has also found that in the late 1960s poverty was among the first protest issues to emerge among minority communities (Browning et al. 1984:67).

Since the mid-1990s, domestic-oriented issues have become more diverse. These issues included protest issues as diverse as housing demolition; racial prejudice from heads of local welfare offices; federal cuts to SSI and Food Stamps; racial prejudice from corporations; violence in Cambodia; university fee increases; the job transfer of a police officer; the forced kidnapping of Hmong abroad; the research and statements of an academic historian; and the deportation of Cambodians. Between 2003 to about 2010, Hmong Americans' protest issues continued to diversify but clustered around the arrest and prosecution of Hmong-leader, General Vang Pao and 10 other men who the U.S. government alleged were planning to overthrow Laos.

Interestingly, foreign-oriented protests have enjoyed greater support from state allies than domestic-oriented protests. Table 4-4 shows that about 73 percent of the 40 distinct state allies involved in Hmong American protests were involved in supporting foreign-oriented protests. Neither the frequency of protest nor the size of protest events seems to correlate with the number of state allies.

[Table 4-4 about here]

However, the level of state ally support seems to vary according to the type of leader and state contexts. Specifically, protests led by non-profit or non-governmental organizations

garnered 43 percent of the support of state actors (figure 4-5). This is followed by protests led by individuals, which received support from 36 percent of the state allies. Furthermore, Minnesota-based Hmong American protests account for nearly half (45 percent) of all the state allies who supported Hmong protests (figure 4-6). In contrast, California- and Wisconsin-based protests accounted for only 15 and 9 percent of all state allies, respectively. Minnesota's greater share of state allies is perhaps not surprising considering that it is the state with a longer history of state ally support for Hmong interests (compared to CA and WI), and considering that it is the only state which has elected two Hmong persons into the state legislature (Senator Mee Moua and Representative Cy Thao). But the data in figure 4-5 suggest another interesting conjecture. They suggest that, where a state lacks significant ethnic concentration, protests will not likely occur unless there is (a history of) state support for them. Whereas in California or Minnesota, where the Hmong population is significant, state ally support is less necessary for carrying out protests, in states such as Rhode Island, where the Hmong population is small, protest groups need state ally support to carry out protests.

Protests as Trans-State Politics

Given the centrality of homeland politics to Hmong American political participation, let us examine some of the protest issues that have been longest standing and try to understand their relationship to shifts in the broader political contexts. The political persecution of the Hmong in Laos and the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees in Thailand remain two of the most enduring protest issues at the time of this writing. Hmong refugees have been privately protesting¹⁸⁷ the political persecution of Hmong in Laos since at least 1975; however, Hmong Americans' organized public protests against the same problem emerged only in the early 1990s.

¹⁸⁷ Rather than use public protests, many Hmong protested by writing letters to the United Nations, the French government, and the U.S. government. Similarly, Hmong refugees in Thailand have been protesting forced repatriation since at least the mid-1980s.

In the 1990s, Hmong American protesters described persecution as involving the imprisonment, torturing, bombing and/or killing of Laotian Hmong who fought or were believed to have fought on the side of the Royal Lao Army and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.¹⁸⁸ Since the mid-1970s, most reports on the persecution of Hmong in Laos have been and continue to be produced by western media,¹⁸⁹ non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, Lao veteran organizations, and Hmong individuals. But in the early 1980s the U.S. government, through its State Department, published two reports for the U.S. Congress and the United Nations that claimed to show evidence that the Lao and Vietnamese militaries were using Soviet supplied chemical weapons against the Hmong in Laos between 1976 and 1982 (U.S. Department of State 1982a, 1982b). As late as 1989, the U.S. State Department still reported that “Lao armed forces conduct operations against resistance groups [in Laos]” (1990:906).

However, in 1990 and thereafter, the U.S. executive branch reversed its position on this highly politicized subject (Soviet supplied chemical weapons) as the Reagan and the Gorbachev administrations enjoyed relatively warmer relations, the Berlin Wall came down, and the U.S.S.R. ‘collapsed’ into a number of states. For instance, in 1990, even as the U.S. State Department (1991:944) acknowledged that “there have been reliable reports of the use of aircraft for ground attack, causing civilian deaths,” it also claimed, “no credible evidence has been found” that chemical weapons were being used against Hmong and Royal Lao insurgents. In 1993 and 1994, U.S. State Department (1994, 1995) reiterated its position that there is “no conclusive evidence to support [the] claims” that chemical weapons were used against Hmong in

¹⁸⁸ Associated Press, "Southeast Asians Decry Torture, Killings in Laos, Seek U.S. Help."

¹⁸⁹ One of the earliest media reports about Hmong’s struggles in Laos appeared in the *National Geographic*. See Wilbur E. Garrett, "The Hmong of Laos--No Place to Run," *National Geographic*, January, 1974.

Laos.¹⁹⁰ Since then, the U.S. State Department has generally ignored Hmong Americans' and other independent organizations' reports about the persecution of Hmong in Laos. Instead, it repeatedly emphasized "there were no reports of political killings by government officials" (U.S. Department of State 1994, 1997, 1998a). Furthermore, since 1998, it increasingly reported, without qualification, that "Hmong insurgents" committed "acts of deliberate terror" against civilians in Laos (U.S. Department of State 1999). These U.S. actions marked a significant shift in the U.S. government's foreign policies in Southeast Asia, including Laos, and in its attitude toward Laotian-Hmong refugees inside and outside of Laos.

In retrospect, it appears that the U.S. government's stance of indifference and neglect toward the persecution of displaced and dislocated Hmong refugees throughout the 1990s was consistent with its anti-Southeast Asian immigration policy and with its reactive, improved political relations with the war-torn countries of Southeast Asia. During the early 1990s, the U.S. government actively funded the repatriation programs in Thailand and Laos in order to encourage the 'voluntary' repatriation of Laotian Hmong refugees to Laos. Secondly, since the mid-1990s, the U.S.' policies toward Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) have been reactive to the extent that they developed largely in response to China's increased market and political influence in this particular region of the world. That is has been the case is suggested in the statement of Raymond Burghardt, a former U.S. ambassador to Vietnam (2001-2004), during a *PBS* televised interview about U.S. and Vietnam trade relations in the midst of Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's 2005 visit to the White House:

¹⁹⁰ In its *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the U.S. State Department (1994) writes of the conditions in Laos: "In 1993 there were reports of insurgent attacks to the east and the west of their traditional area of operations north of Vientiane and south of Luang Prabang. Both sides have reportedly used brutal tactics on occasion, with the insurgents occasionally assassinating military and local officials, ambushing vehicles, and attacking villages. They reportedly killed about 15 persons in a road ambush in April and 7 Lao road construction workers in May. The insurgents, in turn, have claimed repeatedly that the Government employs chemical weapons against them, but extensive investigation of these allegations have produced no conclusive evidence to support these claims."

MARGARET WARNER: Ambassador, what is the geopolitical significance of this relationship for each country?

RAYMOND BURGHARDT: I think for both...both countries see the relationship as helpful in maintaining a balance in Southeast Asia. The Vietnamese told me...they told us when I was there that while the relationship with China had developed very well, they saw China's increased influence in Asia as something that needed to be kept in balance. And they saw the U.S. as critical for that.

And for the U.S., I mean, we're not trying to contain China. That would be a futile cause, but we do see the need for balance. I mean, China's influence is increasing, and it's good to have friends in Southeast Asia who are large countries, growing countries, and to help to maintain that kind of security there.¹⁹¹

From the U.S. point of view, the pursuit of geopolitical interests (i.e., balancing China's power in Southeast Asia in order to maintain national security) far outweighed the costs to little known groups such as Hmong, thousands of whom were still living as refugees in Thailand camps in the 2000s. Because of its desire to improve political relations with Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the U.S. State Department has, more often than not, dismissed reports of the human rights violations against Hmong in Laos. This U.S. stance helps account for why Hmong American protests against human rights violations in Laos emerged publically in the early 1990s and have only increased since then.

The intense Hmong American-led protests against the U.S. granting of normal trade relations (NTR) status to the Lao PDR, which took place between 1997 and 2005,¹⁹² can be seen as an extension of the protests against real and perceived human rights violations in Laos, for two reasons. First, many of the same individuals and organizations (e.g., Lao Veterans of America) that organized and led protests against NTR also organized protests against human

¹⁹¹ Jim Lehrer, "U.S.-Vietnamese Relations," *PBS NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, June 21, 2005.

¹⁹² The process of formalizing NTR between the U.S. and the Lao PDR began as early as 1997. The Bush administration considering establishing NTR with the Lao PDR in 1997, the same year that China established NTR with Laos and many other Southeast Asian countries. On September 29, 2003, U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (D-Minnesota) along with U.S. Representative Robert Matsui (D-California), introduced H.R. 3195 during the 108th Congress, which was a bill meant to extend NTR to Laos. H.R. 3195 was not passed; however, it was followed by H.R. 3943 and S. 2200. These latter bills later were incorporated into the Miscellaneous Trade and Technical Corrections Act of 2004 (H.R. 1047), which eventually passed on Nov. 19, 2004, formalizing NTR.

rights violations in Laos. Secondly, protesters of NTR defined the broader problem as a human rights violation problem, arguing that normalizing trade relations would “sanction continued human rights violations against Hmong in Laos.”¹⁹³ Their opponents, among whom were other Hmong and Lao American individuals and businesses, argued that NTR, by drastically reducing taxes on exported Lao commodities, would strengthen cooperation between the U.S. and Laos, create trade and business investment opportunities in Laos, and improve the Laotian economy. A more competitive Laotian economy, supporters of NTR argued, would benefit the Laotian people by improving their standard of living (U.S. Congress 1999).

Hmong Americans’ homeland politics has not simply been about Laos—the country that many Laotian-born Hmong adults consider their former homeland.¹⁹⁴ It has also involved Thailand, which after 1975 became the country of first asylum for hundreds of thousands of Laotian refugees. Between 1975 and 1990, over 120,000 lowland Lao refugees and 100,000 highland Lao (mostly Hmong) refugees were resettled in western countries. In 1991, about 59,300 Laotian refugees, including Hmong, were still living in Thailand refugee camps (U.S. Congress 1991:1). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as the Thai and Laotian governments closed camps and implemented screening processes as part of the Comprehensive Plan of Action and the Luang Prabang Tripartite Agreement, thousands of Hmong exiles in Thailand were forcibly repatriated (H. Vang 2011:20-21).

Forced repatriation¹⁹⁵ against Hmong refugees in Thailand has been a long-standing protest issue since 1991. In the 1990s, protesters of forced repatriation won the support of

¹⁹³ Pha Lo, "U.S.-Laos Trade Ties Split Hmong," *Pacific News Service*, June 6, 2004.

¹⁹⁴ Foreign-born Hmong adults often refer to Laos as “*yus teb yus chaw*” (our homeland).

¹⁹⁵ The Thai government and at times, the U.S. State Department deemed that Hmong’s repatriation was voluntary despite non-government reports that Hmong former refugees were being ordered at gunpoint to return to Laos. See for example the publication by Doctors Without Borders/*Médecins Sans Frontières*. Médecins Sans Frontières, "Hidden Behind Barbed Wire: Plight of Hmong Refugees Held in Detention Camp in Northern Thailand Ignored Amid Ongoing Deportations to Laos," New York, NY: Médecins Sans Frontières, 2009.

important state allies, such as U.S. Representative Bruce Vento (D-Minnesota) and U.S. Representative Steve Gunderson (R-Wisconsin). In April 1994, Congressman Vento testified in Congress to express concerns about the safety of Hmong returnees to Laos and urge the U.S. government to provide “truthful information about what [returnees] can expect upon return” (Vento 1994). In December 1994, Congressman Gunderson was part of delegation that visited Hmong refugees in Thailand, where he found the refugees living in deplorable “concentration camps.” Upon his return, Gunderson urged Congress to hold hearings on the “inaccurate and flawed” information that the State Department and the United Nations have been giving to the U.S. Congress regarding the processing of Hmong refugees in Thailand. He also urged Congress to “immediately pressure Thailand to stop repatriation and reopen refugee camps so that U.S. officials can determine who qualifies for resettlement to America.”¹⁹⁶

Having examined some characteristics of protests, I now turn to discuss the outcomes of protests. I focus on two types of protest outcomes: impact on state policies and impact on Hmong Americans’ organizational capacity.

The Impact of Protests on Policies and Organizational Capacity

Among organized protests that do have policy aims (policy-oriented protests), protesting has had, at best, mixed results. Table 4-5 shows the policy-oriented protests against three U.S. domestic policies and two U.S. foreign policies and their respective outcomes. Except for the protests against the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 and the USA Patriot Act, the other protests had little or only delayed effect on state policies. For example, between October 1994 and December 1995, Hmong Americans led at least two protests against the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees in Thailand. It did not have any immediate effect as more than 14,000 Hmong were

¹⁹⁶ Brian Bonner, "End Sought to Hmong Repatriation; Gunderson Report Bucks U.S. Policy," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 2, 1995.

eventually repatriated. However, because Hmong American groups sustained this movement, their efforts were realized when in 2004-06 the U.S. admitted about 15,000 Hmong refugees from Wat Thamkrabot, Thailand. In spite of 11 coordinated protests against the U.S. granting of normal trade relations (NTR) status to the Lao PDR, and in spite of relatively wide media coverage and support from multiple state allies, protesters were unable to block the U.S. granting of NTR status to the Lao PDR. This case suggests that when a policy goal (the granting of NTR to Laos) has the backing of strong political segments of the U.S. political system—specifically, the U.S. Executive Branch and some members in the U.S. Congress—even well-coordinated, widely publicized protests will not likely be able to stop such policy from being passed. These mixed outcomes lend support to the adage that by itself “protest is not enough” to bring about desired social changes (Browning et al. 1984).

Although protests do not always produce the outcomes that protesters seek, they have other important functions. To reiterate, Browning et al. (1984) have suggested that protests help to develop organizational resources and leadership that, in turn, could be employed in electoral mobilization. How might a group’s engagement in protests help it to develop its organizational capacity? Next, I discuss how the processes of organizing and participating in protests help Hmong American interest groups develop leaders and organizations, cultivate political resources external to the ethnic group, and refine tactical repertoires of protest.

Hmong American protests have always had a degree of organization even when formal organizations were not directly involved. Over time, this organization has become more diverse both in form and in leadership. Yet, a level of continuity in terms of leadership remains; such continuity provides crucial resources (civic skills and experiences, social connections, knowledge of the political system, etc.) for later protests. The diversification in organizational

form and leadership is partly the result of the emergence of news forms of Hmong American leadership and newly defined social problems.

During the early 1990s, much of Hmong's protests were against human rights violations in their former homeland, Laos. These protests were coordinated by organizations such as the United Lao National Liberation Front,¹⁹⁷ the Hmong American Human Rights Committee,¹⁹⁸ the Lao Family of Minnesota,¹⁹⁹ and the Lao Human Rights Council, Inc.²⁰⁰ The leaders of these organizations were usually Lao and Hmong men who held leadership positions in Laos before 1975 or individuals who were associated with this leadership segment. One of the remarkable achievements of these earlier organizations was their ability to coordinate and stage multiple simultaneous protests across the U.S. For instance, on February 3, 1990, Hmong Americans organized nationwide protests against the Vietnamese and Laos governments for continuing to bomb, torture and kill displaced Hmong in Laos.²⁰¹ On the same day, groups of Hmong American also staged protests in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, San Diego (California), Milwaukee (Wisconsin), Minneapolis (Minnesota), Denver (Colorado), and Washington, D.C.²⁰² This tactic of staging multiple simultaneous protests would continue to be used by Hmong Americans from time to time, especially against social problems that they define as having national significance and consequence. For instance, during the 2007 through 2010 protests against the arrest and indictment of General Vang Pao and nine other men in California, Hmong Americans throughout many parts of the country staged massive simultaneous

¹⁹⁷ The Orange County Register, "Laotians Take War Concerns to Wilson: They Seek U.S. Help to Stop Communists from Bombing Villages."

¹⁹⁸ San Francisco Chronicle, "Laotians Protest in SF," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 3, 1990.

¹⁹⁹ The Associated Press, "Hmong Protest Homeland Bombings," *Associated Press*, February 3, 1990.

²⁰⁰ Louis Galvan, "Hmong Rally in Fresno for U.S. Intervention," *Fresno Bee*, April 27, 1994.

²⁰¹ Associated Press, "Southeast Asians Decry Torture, Killings in Laos, Seek U.S. Help."

²⁰² The Orange County Register, "Laotians Take War Concerns to Wilson: They Seek U.S. Help to Stop Communists from Bombing Villages."

demonstrations. During one of the demonstrations at the California State Capitol and the federal courthouse, the news media estimated that the Hmong protesters numbered about 10,000.²⁰³

Beginning in the mid-1990s, other types of protest leaders emerged to take on domestic issues that affected Hmong American communities. These leaders/mobilizers included Hmong college students, English-fluent Hmong community professionals, and women and men activists from Hmong's 1.5 and second generations. Through the collective efforts of these new leaders, organizations such as the Hmong Chapter of the Minnesota-based Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and the Hmong American Political Association (Fresno, California) were established. Once established, these organizations came to play important roles as mobilizers of more than one community protests.²⁰⁴

By the late 1990s and during the 2000s, an increasingly diverse number of organizations coordinated Hmong American protest events. These organizations included older organizations such as the Lao Veterans of America, Inc. (Fresno and St. Paul branches) and the Women's Association of Hmong and Lao, Inc.²⁰⁵ But newer organizations also emerged as important advocates of justice and social change. These included the Hmong International Human Rights Watch,²⁰⁶ the Community Action Against Racism (CAAR),²⁰⁷ and the Hmong American Friendship Association.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, multi-ethnic coalition organizations such as the Asian

²⁰³ Mike North, "Cal State-Chico Students Join Thousands in Sacramento Protest," *The Orion, University Wire*, May 13, 2009.

²⁰⁴ Star Tribune, "Hmong Group Leads Welfare Reform Protest at House Panel Hearing. "; Jack B. Coffman, "Gingrich Lauds Governor's School Voucher Plan; Speaker Predicts Republicans Will Have Flat-Tax Plank," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, February 8, 1996. ; Jim Steinberg, "Rallying Support for Hmong in Fresno; Community Protests Image as Burden; We Did Not Come Here for Welfare, Speaker Tells City Hall Conference," *Fresno Bee*, July 2, 1996.

²⁰⁵ Lucy Y. Her, "Urging Education, 100 Protest Violence against Hmong Women; Walk for Peace Draws 100, Some of Them Young," *Star Tribune*, May 23, 1999.

²⁰⁶ Brian Tumulty, "Hmong Protesters Seek Release of Political Prisoners in Laos," *Gannett News Service*, October 27, 2002.

²⁰⁷ Noel Holston and Staff Writer, "Hmong Groups to Protest Alleged Racist Remarks by Kqrs Crew," *Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)*, August 21, 1998.

²⁰⁸ "Hundreds Protest Shooting by Police," *Wisconsin State Journal (Madison, Wisconsin)*, February 18, 2005.

Women United,²⁰⁹ the Providence Student Youth Movement,²¹⁰ and the United Lao Congress for Democracy²¹¹ helped organized protest events. Finally, other ad hoc committees or coalitions such as the Lift the Ban Coalition,²¹² the Hmong-Lao Emergency Crisis Task Force,²¹³ the National Association of Hmong Justice,²¹⁴ and the Hmong American Ad Hoc Committee of Chico²¹⁵ became active organizers of Hmong American protests.

Between 1990 and 2010, Hmong American protests tended to be organized and led by leaders or formal community organizations who have organized or participated in previous protests. For instance, the Hmong Chapter of the Minnesota-based Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), organized protests against the Community Work Experience Program in 1995 and in 1996, they also protested the effects of U.S. Welfare Reform. The Lao Veterans of America, Inc. was the organizer of separate protests in 1997, 2000, 2003, and 2004. Hmong community activists such as Vaming (Yee) Xiong, along with the Asian Law Caucus (Hwang 2002), helped organized and led protests against federal Welfare Reform in California during 1997 and throughout 2007-2010, he was also a lead organizer of the protests against the arrest of Hmong former-general Vang Pao in northern California. This suggests that the continuity of ethnic leadership is crucial for protest mobilization.

The data on protest events reveal that since the mid-1990s, Hmong Americans have frequently joined forces with other ethnic and pan-ethnic coalitions in order to protest injustices.

²⁰⁹ Star Tribune, "Urging Education, 100 Protest Violence against Hmong Women; Walk for Peace Draws 100, Some of Them Young."

²¹⁰ Karen Lee Ziner, "Rally Targets Ins - the Protesters Seek to Halt Deportation of 1,500 Cambodians," *Providence Journal-Bulletin (Rhode Island)*, November 9, 2002.

²¹¹ Tom Webb, "D.C. Protest Includes Twin Cities Contingent," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, February 16, 2000.

²¹² Kevin Duchscherer, "Hmong Protest Como Parking Rules; They Say St. Paul's Restrictions During a Large Annual Sports Tournament Unfairly Target One Group," *Star Tribune*, December 10, 2002.

²¹³ Todd Nelson, "Hmong Bash U.S.-Laos Trade Idea Human Rights Must Come First, Some Argue," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, June 2, 2003.

²¹⁴ Tim Nelson, "St. Paul Mission to Study Hmong Refugee Burial Complaints Sparks Debate," *ibid.* September 19, 2007.

²¹⁵ The Orion, University Wire, "Cal State-Chico Students Join Thousands in Sacramento Protest."

This is especially the case after 1996, following the passage of the federal “Welfare Reform” Act. It was clear to almost all people that the impact of Welfare Reform is national rather than limited to any one ethnic, racial or immigrant group. Equally clear was that no single group could protest and expect changes to occur. Social problems as massive as Welfare Reform would require that groups put aside their differences and draw upon their similarities or construct new similarities from scratch in order to engage the U.S. public and the multiple segments of the U.S. political system as a unified voice and force. It was not surprising then that Hmong Americans and their community organizations joined forces with other more established organizations such as the Asian Law Caucus (Hwang 2002) in their joint protests against the massive cuts to public assistance that Welfare Reform enacted.

I am suggesting that protest has helped social actors/groups to cultivate “alliance systems”²¹⁶ (Klandermans 1992) that might not have been possible to achieve otherwise. Absent the sense of shared threat, the members of different ethnic/national origin groups, who usually are ethnically or racially segregated, might seldom or never interact with one another. But disparate groups might come together as a united political force if enough members within these groups define or perceive the same condition to be harmful to their interests. For instance, on April 6, 1997, Hmong Americans of Rhode Island joined “immigrants...from Russia, Cambodia, Colombia, Liberia, Mexico, Cape Verde and other countries” and over “40 organizations, agencies, unions and churches,” in their march at the Rhode Island State House to protest federal cuts to SSI and Food Stamps.²¹⁷ On May 28, 1997, Hmong community activist, Vaming Xiong

²¹⁶ By alliance system, Klandermans means the “groups and organizations that support” social movement organizations (1992:95). Klandermans contrasts alliance system with “conflict system” or those “representatives and allies of the challenged political systems, including countermovement organizations” (1992:95). Together, the alliance system and conflict system constitute a “multiorganizational field” which is “the total possible number of organizations with which the movement organization might establish specific links” (1992:95).

²¹⁷ Tatiana Pina, "Immigrants Rally over Benefits; Hundreds March to the State House to Protest Cuts in Ssi and Food Stamps to Legal Immigrants," *Providence Journal-Bulletin (Rhode Island)*, April 6, 1997.

helped organized hundreds of Hmong from California's Central Valley to join a 4,000 strong demonstration against cuts to public assistance at the California State Capitol. Besides Hmong, Laotians and Iu Miens, this protest included "Vietnamese, Chinese, Latinos, Bosnians, Russians and Eastern Europeans" who comprised "about 150 California organizations."²¹⁸ Through working with other organizations and coalitions, Hmong American activists have been able to cultivate invaluable and much needed ties with established civil rights organizations such as the Asian Law Caucus, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

But besides developing organizations and cultivating political resources endogenous to the ethnic group, Hmong American protesters have also acquired and refined tactics of protests. Chief among these tactics are the techniques for avoiding overt police repression and the methods for mobilizing collective consensus and action. Remarkably, none of the 84 Hmong American-involved protests in my sample encountered overt police or state repression.²¹⁹ This is surprising given that protests organized by U.S. racial minorities and the disadvantaged more generally have frequently been defined as *threats* and sometimes subjected to overt state or police repression (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). As Goldstone and Tilly (2001) suggest, the use of state repression could very well change social actors' 'opportunity' to engage in protests and hence the rate of protests and possibly other attendant forms of political mobilization.²²⁰

One explanation for the lack of overt state repression against Hmong protests may have to do with the fact that most Hmong-led protests, including those whose participants numbered

²¹⁸ T. T. Nhu, "Immigrants Plan Capitol Protest," *San Jose Mercury News (California)*, May 28, 1997.

²¹⁹ The absence of overt state repression does not necessarily mean that other covert forms of repression, manipulation or undermining of protest movements are non-existent. Overt police repression is simply one important form of social movement repression.

²²⁰ Admittedly, given that none of the Hmong American-involved protests (whether led by Hmong or non-Hmong) faced overt state/police repression, it is not knowable how repression could impact the rate of protests.

in the several thousands were non-transgressive. But Americans, especially activists, unionized minority workers and college students, have witnessed plenty of protests in which peaceful demonstrations (civil disobedience) have been met with police riot—that is, violence committed by uniformed officers on participants or bystanders with or without the approval of their superiors. The absence of overt police repression against Hmong American-led protests may have more to do with both protesters’ ability to manage their impressions and the perceptions of the police, officials, and mass media toward protesters than whether or not the protests were transgressive. Take for example the massive Hmong protests that occurred between 2007 and 2010 in Sacramento, California. That police perception matters can be inferred from the generally positive views of a retired police officer and the subsequent positive media portrayal of Hmong protesters. In a letter to the *Sacramento Bee* editor, David Campbell begins with, “Kudos to Hmong protesters” and continues,

I am a retired law enforcement officer and in my career have worked several protests. Recently I had business at the Sacramento Federal Courthouse during the Hmong demonstrations in support of the defendants who allegedly sought to purchase weapons to overthrow the government in Laos. The Hmong community presented one of the most organized and *disciplined* demonstrations I have ever witnessed. They provided security to monitor their own people. They provided transportation and even water to their people. *Most importantly*, they were *respectful* of the court security officers and other law enforcement. They *complied* with all instructions from the court officers and encouraged others to do the same. They even dealt with one disruptive person and escorted him from the building. When the demonstrations were over, the Hmong collected their trash and even washed down some of the sidewalks. I wish the demonstrators I dealt with in the past have been so *considerate*. - David Campbell, West Sacramento (emphasis added).²²¹

Significantly, this letter was published during the first month of Hmong Americans’ four-year-long protests (2007 – 2010) against the arrest of former General Vang Pao in downtown Sacramento and elsewhere in the U.S. As such, it probably colored public views toward later protests. For instance, in May 2009, the Sacramento-based television news, *KCRA-3*, which was

²²¹ Sacramento Bee, "Letters to the Editor," *Sacramento Bee*, June 30, 2007.

covering the same case, described the 8,000-10,000 Hmong protesters at the Sacramento federal courthouse as “students, teachers, professionals and laborers” who are “educated, organized, and passionate about the case” and “one of the most polite crowds you’ve ever been...[who are] not only cooperative but also highly organized.”²²² According to Chris Riva of *KCRA-3*, “In talking to the Sacramento Police Department, they were even told not even to bring out the riot gear.”²²³ This last statement suggests that the media’s view on protesters is not completely independent of the police’s views on the same. A group perceived (categorized) as educated, polite and cooperative will, in general, be seen as less of a threat requiring police control than one perceived as educated but unruly and confrontational.²²⁴

Finally, social actors’ experiences dealing with protesters and counter-protesters have given them time to test out and refine methods for forming group identities and for mobilizing collective consensus (solidarity). The formation of collective identity and the mobilization of collective consensus—processes which shape and are shaped by collective action (Klandermans 1992)—are made possible in large part through the use of meaningful symbols and strategic claims making. Since the late 1990s, Hmong American protesters have tended to rely on certain symbols more so than others. One of the most visible and most enduring symbols of Hmong American identity is the uniformed Hmong veteran figure. Wherever an issue has called for it, social movement organizations such as the Lao Veterans of America have relied on their existing network of fee-paying members to recruit, coordinate and transport to protest events Hmong men and women in army fatigue. Uniformed Hmong veterans have participated in protests against

²²² KCRATV, "Thousands March in Support of Hmong Leader," Sacramento, California: KCRA 3, 2009.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ I do not have data to address the role of race with respect to this particular topic on protest and police repression. It is possible that Asian Americans and Middle-Eastern Americans, especially the men among them, may be seen by authorities as *more* (not less) threatening to cultural and political norms than the members of other racial categories.

the U.S. Ambassadors to the Lao PDR,²²⁵ against a U.S. senator for proposing eleventh-hour bill,²²⁶ against U.S.-Lao PDR normal trade relations;²²⁷ against what Hmong protesters consider fabrications of their history by an academic historian;²²⁸ and even against Hmong-initiated education legislation.²²⁹ Outside of protest events, uniformed Hmong veterans have regularly participated in Hmong New Year celebrations across the nation; other celebratory community occasions; U.S. congressional recognition events; and most recently, in the funeral ceremony to honor their revered leader, General Vang Pao. By their presence, Hmong veterans serve as visible reminders to observers, including the media, about Hmong's turbulent history and about Hmong refugees' reason for being in the United States. By their presence, Hmong veterans serve to legitimate or at least make salient certain issues of significance that might otherwise be dismissed as trivial, illegitimate, or myth.

But there is a more general reason for why uniformed Hmong veterans have been a recurring symbol in so many seemingly disparate protest events within Hmong American society. As I discussed in chapter two (historical background on Hmong), years before Hmong became refugees and before the first Laotian Hmong arrived on U.S. soil, Hmong's identity has been powerfully circumscribed by their unique²³⁰ relationship with the United States

²²⁵ Brian Bonner, "Envoy to Laos Stands Ground against Critics," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, July 3, 1998. ; Curt Brown, "Ambassador to Laos Draws Protesters; Doug Hartwick, in St. Paul to Promote Normal Trade Relations, Was Met by Demonstrators Who Want the Southeast Asian Nation to Address Human-Rights Issues," *Star Tribune*, May 7, 2003.

²²⁶ David Hanners, "Hmong Put Pressure on Grams; Veterans, Their Supporters Urge Senator to Back Wellston-Vento Citizenship Bill," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 9, 2000.

²²⁷ Curt Brown, "Hmong Oppose U.S. Trade with Laos; About 400 People Protested Rep. Betty Mccollum's Support for Normalization," *Star Tribune*, April 15, 2004.

²²⁸ Pat Schneider, "Hmong Vets March in Support of Vang Pao; Retraction of Uw Prof's Allegations Sought," *Capital Times (Madison, WI)*, April 19, 2002.

²²⁹ Lee Romney, "What's in a Name? For Hmong Disappointed by Bill, Everything," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 2003b.

²³⁰ Hmong are not the only ethnic group that has provided military service to the U.S. or fought alongside U.S. forces. There are ample historical and contemporary examples of U.S.' allied-ship with or use (exploitation) of other ethnic and/or tribal peoples during declared and undeclared wars around the world. Hmong former refugees,

government. This relationship was Hmong's military service to the United States Central Intelligence Agency during the Second Indochina War. I argue that it is uniformed Hmong veterans who embody and help sustain one of the most powerful collective action frames in Hmong Americans' tactical repertoires of protest. This frame is the military-service frame.

The data on Hmong Americans' cycles of protest suggest that Hmong social actors have relied on at least three master frames between 1990 and 2010.²³¹ In rough order of their appearance, these master frames are: the refugee protection master frame; the military-service master frame; and the civil rights master frame. Against powerful dominant discourses, protesters as well as social movement actors have appropriated one or more of these master frames during particular protests or protest movements. Their strategic use has resulted in limited success for certain protest movements. In spite of their powerful potential as counter-discourses and cultural resources, master frames do not work effectively in all circumstances. This may have to do, at least in part, with the type of the master frame. As Snow and Benford (1992:140) point out, some master frames are relatively restricted while others are relatively elaborative.²³² Below, I focus on Hmong's use of the military-service frame.

At least since the mid-1990s, in response to nativist sentiments, state welfare reforms and the 1996 federal Welfare Reform Act, Hmong American groups began publicly using a military-service collective action frame. This collective action frame would later on become a master frame. The military service frame entails the following set of inter-related claims: (1) Hmong

like other Laotian, Cambodian, and Southern Vietnamese, are political refugees whose veterans have provided military service to the U.S. even as they were also defending their own countries from opposing forces.

²³¹ Collective action frames and master frames are defined elsewhere (see Chapter 1, Theoretical Framework). Collective action frames do the work of mobilizing collective consensus *and* collective action at the level of individual social movements, while master frames do this work at a broader level: across cycles of protests.

²³² One of the main distinctions between these two types is that whereas a restricted master frame "provide[s] a constricted range of definitions and allow[s] for little interpretive discretion," an elaborative master frame "allows for numerous aggrieved groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its basic problem-solving schema" (Snow and Benford 1992:140).

veterans fought in the Second Indochina War for the United States and died in the tens of thousands protecting U.S. air and ground military forces; (2) the U.S. lost this (undeclared) war and pulled out; (3) many Hmong were left behind to be persecuted or killed by the communists; and the more “fortunate” ones became political refugees with few legal protection; (4) being left behind was an act of great betrayal by the U.S. government; (5) the U.S. promised Hmong that they would be taken cared of should “we” (U.S. & Hmong) ever lose the war; (6) that promise has only partially been fulfilled when eligible Hmong refugees became admitted to the U.S.; (7) because of Hmong soldiers and their families’ great sacrifice through military service to the U.S., Hmong refugees deserve legal protection, especially refuge, from the U.S. and they and their U.S.-children deserve to receive the full benefits that its citizenry receive.

Like organized protests themselves, the military-service frame represents a political resource to Hmong American groups. It is a political resource in at least three ways: the set of claims in the military-service frame helps create solidarity (the sense of shared identity and common interests) among protesters; it helps to activate influential third parties (legal organizations; state representatives; and sometimes, the mass media), who otherwise might not enter the political arena; and because it draws on rather than directly contradicts dominant U.S. discourses (especially discourses on anti-communism and national service, honor and loyalty), it helps to “maximize [the] chances of success among those capable of granting goals” (Lipsky 1968:1144).

I contend that the military service collective action frame has become a master frame in the Hmong American context. This frame is embodied in and sustained by uniformed Hmong veterans. Like other groups, Hmong recognize that the state has a strong tendency to conveniently and collectively forget certain histories of certain groups of people. Through the

veteran symbol, Hmong try to invoke their history and the United States' intervention in this history. Depending on who the observer is, the veteran symbol might appear to be overused—much like the 'race card' that, according to privileged people or people with racial options, appears to be overused by racial minorities. In actuality, it is not that Hmong simply choose to invoke their military-service whenever it might benefit them. Rather, it is because American institutions and their practices of institutional forgetting compel Hmong to do so in order to even be "heard" by parts of the American political system. Unless Hmong or their allies invoke Hmong's military-service to the United States government, the state has a strong tendency to ignore or show indifference to Hmong issues. For too long, Hmong Americans, like so many other ethnic and racial minorities, have felt that they live in American society, but have never been accepted as part of American society. The power of the uniformed Hmong veteran symbol comes from its ability to remind the U.S. government of its involvement in the decades-long wars in Southeast Asia and of the United States' role in making Hmong (and others) political refugees and one of the most persecuted groups in modern-day Southeast Asia.

To be sure, the use of the military-service frame has never guaranteed a response from the government, its representatives or its institutions. Nevertheless, it has been one of the few frames that some representatives of the state feel morally compelled to listen to, and occasionally, take action on. As we shall see in the next chapter, especially when the frame is used by compassionate leaders and statesmen/women to make claims upon the state, it has been relatively successful in bringing about policies that reflect Hmong American groups' interests.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have documented some of the characteristics of Hmong American protests. The evidence suggests that Hmong Americans engage in foreign-oriented protests

almost as often as they engage in domestic-oriented protests. However, foreign-oriented protests have garnered a greater share of state allies than domestic-oriented protests. Although protests have had mixed effects on state policies, protest mobilization has had important impacts on Hmong Americans' organizational capacity. This can be seen in the development of younger leaders, the formation of new organizations, and the cultivation of a broad alliance system. But protest mobilization has also helped social actors/organizations to refine methods for building collective identity and mobilizing collective consensus. Through the use of specific symbols such as the uniformed veteran, protesters not only create collective identity among participants but also make that collective identity more visible to reference publics and targets. Using the military service frame, protesters try to mobilize consensus among supporters as well as urge collective action from targets. Finally, I have started to clarify how shifts in political contexts can affect social actors' protest issues and the timing of protests. In the next and subsequent chapters, I will give more in-depth attention to how social actors engage in politics in response to perceived threats or opportunities brought about by changes in domestic and/or foreign political contexts.

Figures and Tables for Chapter 4

Figure 4-1: Hmong American Protests Events, 1980 to 2010

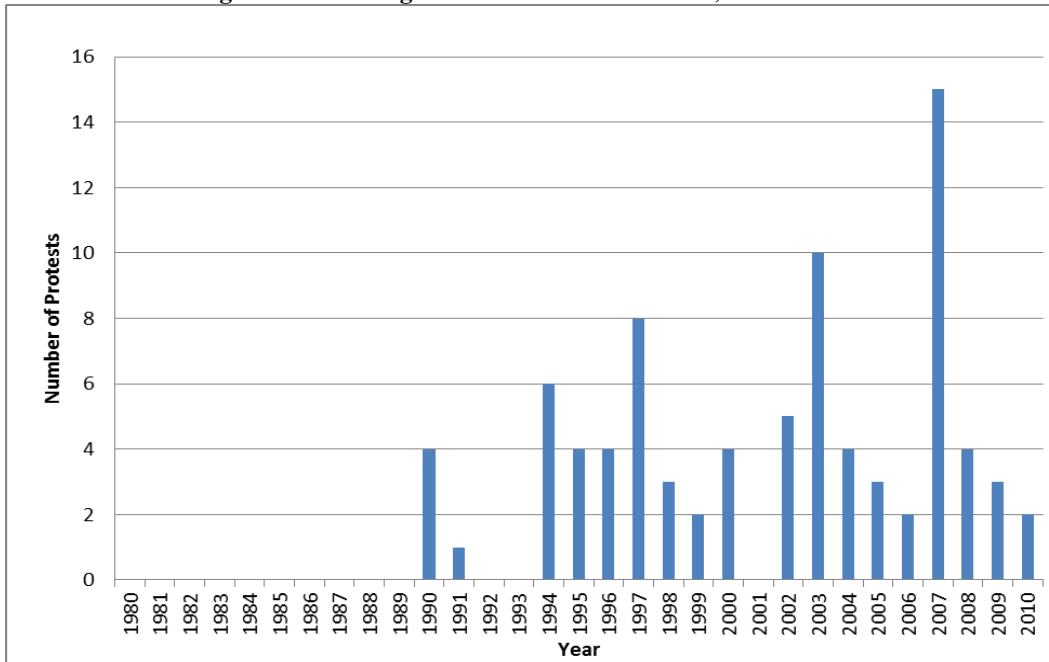


Figure 4-2: Hmong American Protests by Location, 1980-2010

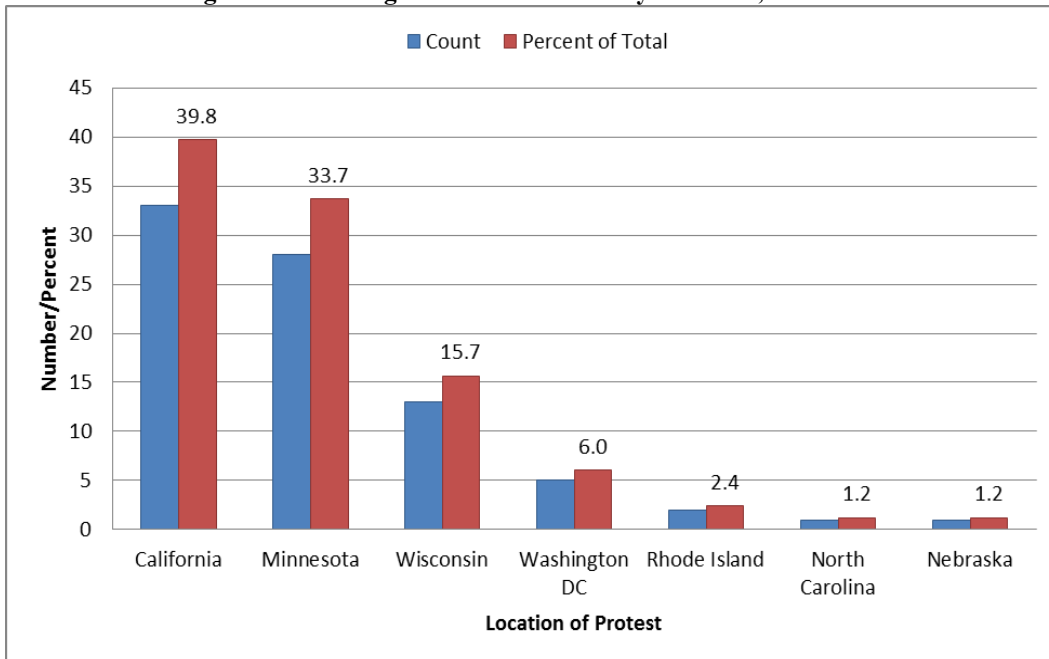


Figure 4-3: Hmong American Protests by State, 1990-2010

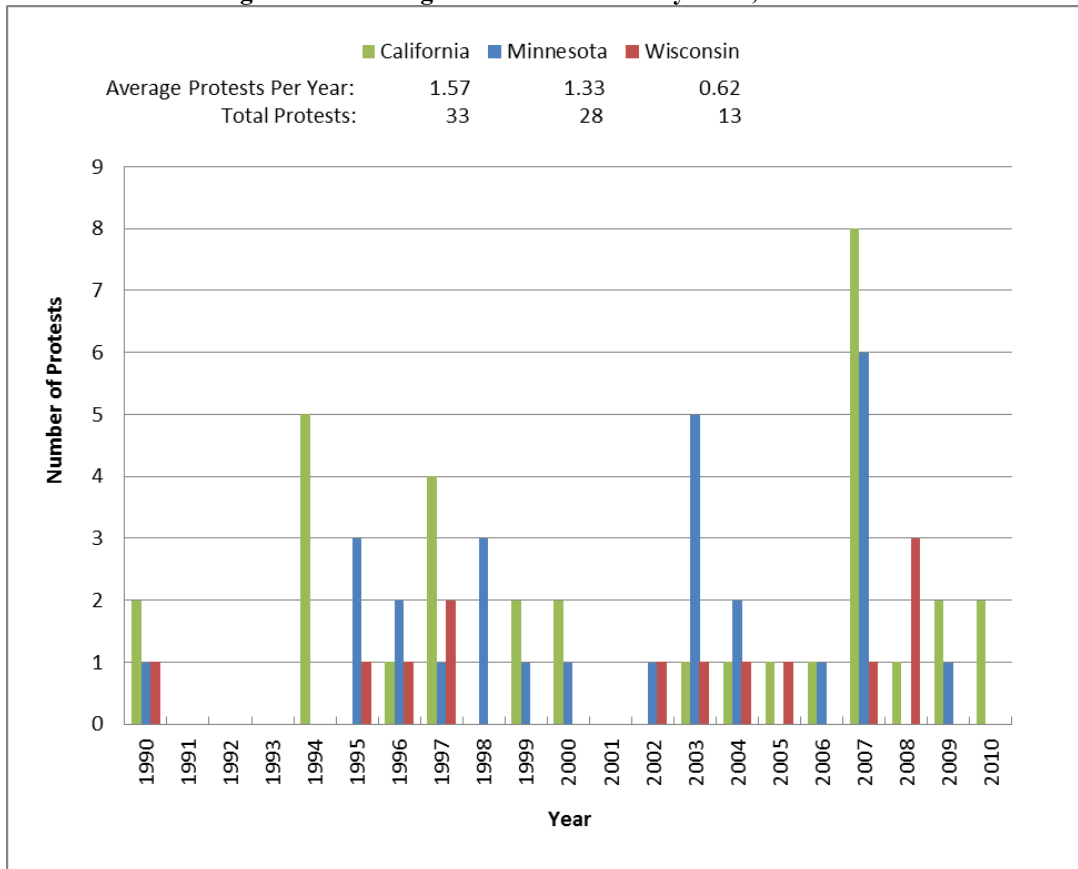


Table 4-1: Frequency Distribution of Types of Protest Activity, 1980 to 2010

Type of Activity	Count	Percent
Demonstrations	70	71.4
Symbolic/Educational	14	14.3
Transgressive	8	8.2
Institutional	6	6.1
Total*	98	100.0

*Some protests involved 2-3 protest activities. These activities were counted as separate instances; consequently, the total number of activities exceed the total number of protests.

Table 4-2: Frequency Distribution of Protest Targets, 1980-2010

Target Type	Count	Percent	Cumulative Percent
US Government	7	7.5	7.5
US President	2	2.2	9.7
US Congress	11	11.8	21.5
Specific US Congress Members	8	8.6	30.1
US State Department	3	3.2	33.3
US Ambassador to Laos	3	3.2	36.6
US District Court	14	15.1	51.6
US Immigration and Naturalization Services	1	1.1	52.7
State Governor	3	3.2	55.9
State Legislature	13	14.0	69.9
State Trial Court	1	1.1	71.0
County District Attorney	1	1.1	72.0
County Social/Welfare Officials	2	2.2	74.2
Mayor	1	1.1	75.3
City Council	9	9.7	84.9
City Police Chief	2	2.2	87.1
School District Board of Education	1	1.1	88.2
School District Administrators	1	1.1	89.2
School Administrators	2	2.2	91.4
University Administrators	1	1.1	92.5
Private Business/Association	2	2.2	94.6
Children's Hospital	1	1.1	95.7
Non-Profit Community Organization	1	1.1	96.8
Hmong American Community	1	1.1	97.8
US-Based Lao Embassy	2	2.2	100.0
Total*	93	100.0	

Total of targets (93) exceeds the total number of protests (84) because some protests had more than one significant target.

Table 4-3: Hmong American Protests by Protest Issues, 1980-2010

Protest Issue	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Foreign-Oriented			
Human Rights Violation Against Hmong (Lao PDR & Vietnam)	14	16.7	16.7
Normal Trade Relations (Lao PDR)	11	13.1	29.8
Persecution of Hmong Freedom Fighters (Lao PDR)	7	8.3	38.1
Forced Repatriation (Thailand)	3	3.6	41.7
Grave Desecration (Thailand)	2	2.4	44.0
Violence in Cambodia (Cambodia)	1	1.2	45.2
Domestic-Oriented			
State Welfare Programs (U.S.)	8	9.5	54.8
Arrest and Prosecution of Gen. Vang Pao (U.S.)	7	8.3	63.1
Racial Prejudice or Discrimination Against Hmong (U.S.)	6	7.1	70.2
Federal Welfare Reform & Patriot Act (U.S.)	5	6.0	76.2
Police Brutality or Killing of Hmong Individuals (U.S.)	4	4.8	81.0
Deportation of Cambodians (U.S.)	1	1.2	82.1
Accusation of Child Abuse (U.S.)	1	1.2	83.3
Domestic Violence Against Hmong Women (U.S.)	1	1.2	84.5
Firing or Hiring Decisions in Organizations (U.S.)	1	1.2	85.7
Lack of Financial Loans, Rabobank (U.S.)	1	1.2	86.9
Non-Voluntary Medical Treatment in Local Hospital (U.S.)	1	1.2	88.1
Proposed Federal Legislation, Naturalization (U.S.)	1	1.2	89.3
Proposed State Legislation, CA AB78 (U.S.)	1	1.2	90.5
Non-Voluntary Residential Dislocation (U.S.)	1	1.2	91.7
Written History about Hmong (U.S.)	1	1.2	92.9
Other Non-Repetitive Domestic Issues* (U.S.)	6	7.1	100.0
Total	84	100.0	

*These other issues included 6 protests: protest of a governor's state budget plans for a Hmong cultural center; protest of the transfer of a police officer off a gang unit; protest of Senator Mee Moua's grave desecration team; students' non-attendance/boycott of a high school after a fight; protest to re-name a school after Vang Pao; and a protest against a young Hmong man after his girlfriend died from a suspected suicide.

Figure 4-4: Domestic-Oriented Protests Relative to Foreign-Oriented Protests, 1980-2010

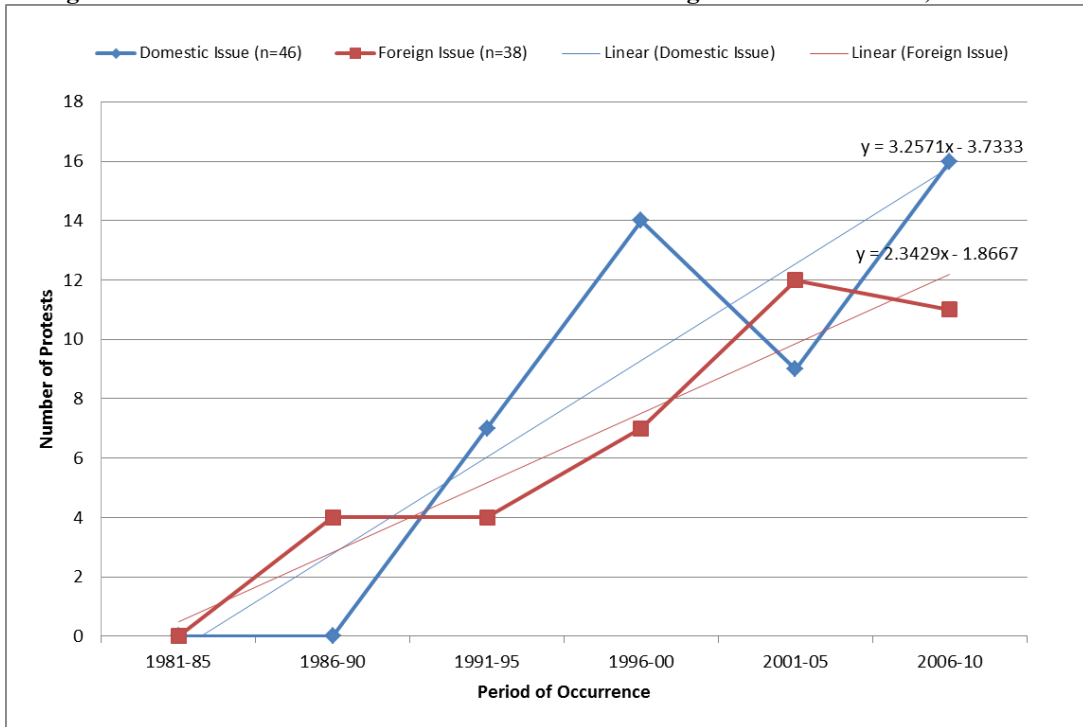


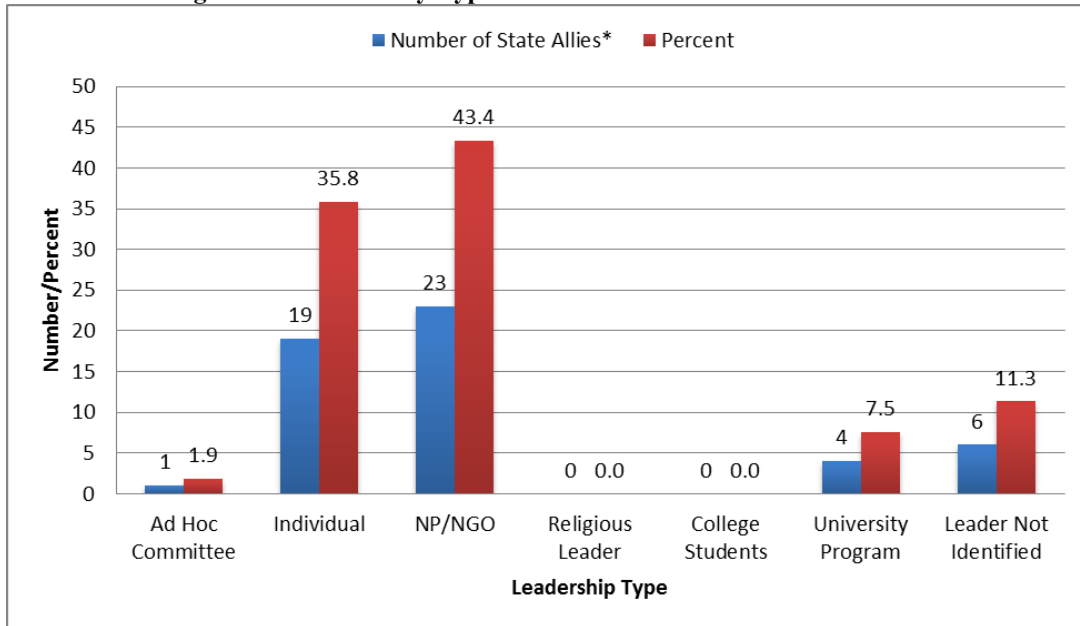
Table 4-4: Protests by Number of State Allies and Average Size of Protest, 1980-2010

Protest Issue	Number of		Frequency of Protest	Average No.
	State Allies ¹	Percent		of Protestors Per Protest ²
Normal Trade Relations (U.S. & Lao PDR)	12	30.0	11	150
Human Rights Violation Against Hmong (Lao PDR & Vietnam)	8	20.0	14	450
Forced Repatriation (Thailand)	5	12.5	3	2,550
Grave Desecration (Thailand)	4	10.0	2	112
Racial Prejudice or Discrimination Against Hmong (U.S.)	4	10.0	6	250
State Welfare Programs (U.S.)	2	5.0	8	470
Mandated Federal Legislation: Welfare Reform (U.S.)	2	5.0	4	1,690
Deportation of Cambodians (U.S.)	1	2.5	1	300
Proposed Federal Legislation, Naturalization (U.S.)	1	2.5	1	150
Written History about Hmong (U.S.)	1	2.5	1	50
Mandated Federal Legislation: USA Patriot Act (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	1,800
Persecution of Hmong Freedom Fighters (Lao PDR)	0	0.0	7	1,700
Arrest and Prosecution of Gen. Vang Pao (U.S.)	0	0.0	7	4,000
Police Brutality or Killing of Hmong Individuals (U.S.)	0	0.0	4	325
Accusation of Child Abuse (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	50
Domestic Violence Against Hmong Women (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	100
Firing or Hiring Decisions in Organizations (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	200
Non-Voluntary Medical Treatment in Local Hospital (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	220
Proposed State Legislation, CA AB78 (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	200
Non-Voluntary Residential Dislocation (U.S.)	0	0.0	1	30
Other Non-Repetitive Domestic Issues (U.S.)	0	0.0	8	80
Total	40	100.0	84	

¹ State allies refer to any elected official who serves (or served) at the state or federal level of the U.S. government. Individual state allies who were present during multiple protests for the same issue are counted only once.

² Calculated based on only those protest events in which the news article reported the approximate total number of demonstrators.

Figure 4-5: Protests by Type of Leader and Number of State Allies



*Here, the total number of state allies total 53. This figure represents the total number of state allies that participated in all of the 84 protest events, regardless of protest issue overlap.

Figure 4-6: Protests by State, Proportion of State-Supported Protests and Share of State Allies, 1980-2010

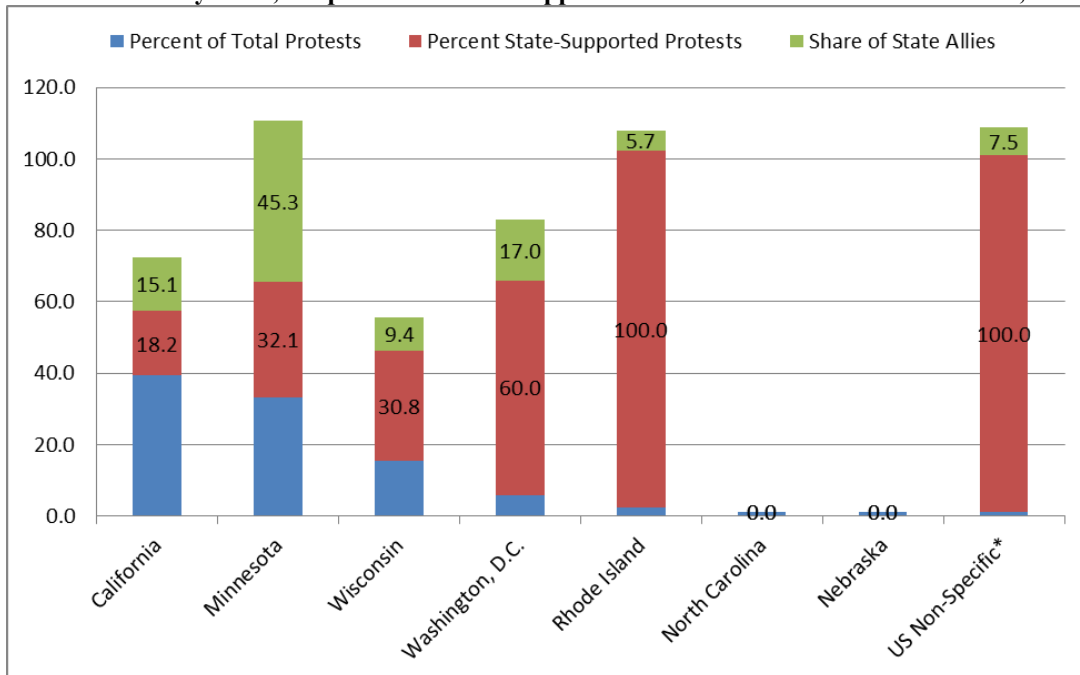


Table 4-5: Policy-Oriented Protests and Outcomes

Total Protests Staged and Period of Occurrence	Existing/Proposed Policy	Outcome
2 Protests against forced repatriation occurred between Oct. 1994 and Dec. 1995.	1989: 70 governments including the U.S., Thailand, and Laos-- established the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) regarding refugees. One of the aims of CPA was to repatriate all Hmong in Thailand determined not refugees back to Laos by 1995.	Mixed Effect --Between 1992 and 1994, over 14,000 Hmong refugees were repatriated to Lao PDR. ¹ In 2004-07, the U.S. resettled about 15,000 Hmong refugees from Wat Thamkrabot, Thailand. ²
5 Protests against federal Welfare Reform occurred between Feb. 1996 and Apr. 1997.	1996: Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 denied public benefits to non-citizens, including Hmong permanent residents.	Positive Effect --Jan. 1998: <i>The Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998</i> contained a clause that restored Food Stamp benefits to Hmong permanent resident veterans and their spouses/unmarried children.
11 Protests against passing NTR occurred between Jul. 1997 and Nov. 2004.	1997: Proposed Normal Trade Relations between U.S. and Lao PDR.	No Effect --Dec. 2004: NTR Passed as part of the <i>Miscellaneous Trade and Technical Corrections Act of 2004</i>
1 Protest against the USA Patriot and REAL ID Acts occurred on Dec. 16, 2007.	2001 and 2005: The USA Patriot Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005 denied immigration to former Hmong refugees and naturalization to recent Hmong arrivals for having "provided material support to terrorists or terrorist organizations."	Positive Effect --Dec. 26, 2007: the <i>Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008</i> provided "Relief for Iraqi, Hmong and other refugees who do not pose a threat to the United States"--essentially, taking Hmong off the terrorist list.

¹ Vang, Her. 2010. "Dreaming of Home, Dreaming of Land: Displacements and Hmong Transnational Politics, 1975-2010." PhD Thesis, History, University of Minnesota.

² U.S. Homeland Security. 2009. *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2008*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics.

Chapter 5: The Emergence of the Military Service Frame

With respect to the United States, the conferring of formal citizenship has been and continues to be intricately linked to the nation-state's participation in war and violence. War and violence not only cause mass devastation, instability and dislocation, but they also powerfully shape the cycles of political alliances and collective discourses on what constitutes national social problems. Political alliances and collective discourses, in turn, shape the cycles of exclusion and inclusion both at the national border and within the nested boundaries of the United States. For instance, it was only when World War II compelled the U.S. to form an alliance with China (and other countries) that the U.S. Congress passed the Magnuson Act of 1943. This Act, which represented a temporarily changed national discourse on Chinese immigrants, repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and its subsequent acts, allowing a limited number of Chinese to immigrate. But even as Chinese and Chinese immigrants became defined as a racialized ally, over a hundred thousand Japanese Americans were deemed suspected "enemy aliens" and forcibly interned on the western coast. During World War II, Japanese, whether they were citizens or non-citizens, living in Japan or the U.S., became, in the eyes of the U.S. government, all at once immigrants, aliens and enemies.²³³

As political contexts changed, so have the U.S. government's discourses and practice of selective inclusion. During that same war, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, responding to a Presidential Order,²³⁴ volunteered to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces. As a result of their military service, in March 1942, Filipinos

²³³ Race and racism became, all at once, hypervisible and invisible: hypervisible because all sides of the war practiced racism; "invisible" because membership in the categories of "ally" and "enemy," rather than in racial categories, determined group treatment.

²³⁴ On July 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a Presidential Order (6 Fed. Reg. 3825), which called upon the Philippine Commonwealth Army into service.

were allowed, for a limited time at least,²³⁵ to become citizens and to receive full U.S. veteran benefits. However, after World War II ended, the U.S. Congress passed the Rescission Act of 1946, declaring that the military services that Filipinos provided “before July 1, 1946” were not “active military, naval, or air service for the purposes of any law of the United States conferring *rights, privileges, or benefits*” (emphasis added).²³⁶ As U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye (from Hawaii) points out, “among other things, Section 107 [of the 1946 Act] denied Filipino veterans access to health care, particularly for non-service connected disability, and pension benefits. Section 107 also limits service-connected disability and death compensation to 50 percent of what is currently received by their American counterparts.”²³⁷

It would not be until 1990, after decades of Filipino mobilization, that the U.S. Congress eventually granted formal citizenship (without veteran benefits) to Filipino veterans of World War II.²³⁸ It would take another 20 years after that for the U.S. Congress to finally approve a one-time payment to Filipino veterans who were wrongly denied veteran benefits for their military service. But even during this moment of symbolic inclusion, citizenship status was used to determine social worth and to maintain—to use Thu-Huong Nguyễn-Vo’s (2005:162-4) apt phrase—the “zones within” the nation: \$15,000 went to aging Filipino veterans who are U.S. citizens but only a little over half of that (\$9,000) went to those who are non-citizens.²³⁹

However, it would be inaccurate to say that the U.S. Congress, let alone the executive and judicial branches, actively sought to redeem the nation or to promote consistent inclusion. The government’s exceptions to Filipino veterans resulted from decades of litigation, organized

²³⁵ The naturalization law expired on December 31, 1946. Many Filipinos were unable to apply for naturalization because the naturalization examiner was ordered to be removed for a nine-month period toward that year.

²³⁶ “Certain Service Deemed Not To be Active Service,” 38 U.S.C. §107.

²³⁷ Senator Daniel Inouye. “Filipino Veterans.” Retrieved December 2011, from <http://inouye.senate.gov/Service/Filipino-Veterans.cfm>.)

²³⁸ The Immigration Act of 1990

²³⁹ This was part of a provision in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

protest and lobbying by Filipino veterans and their allies, especially other non-Filipino veterans and state allies such as Senator Daniel Inouye.²⁴⁰ In all of these forms of mobilizing, ordinary persons, activists and state allies had to create moral sentiments by making explicit claims about Filipinos' military service and constructing narratives about national honor in order to counter persistent anti-foreigner discourses and to persuade their target (U.S. Congress) to take redemptive action. That is, they had to strategically frame social problem claims in order to counter opposition and induce corrective action. For instance, in response to opposition to grant the one-time payments to Filipinos living in the Philippines, Senator Inouye appealed to Congress members' moral sentiments by reminding them: "[T]he *honor of the United States* is what is involved. I love America. I love serving America. I am proud of this country, but *this is a black chapter. It has to be cleansed*" (emphasis added).²⁴¹ As Noakes and Johnston (2005:13) point out, how collective action frames are constructed by social movement actors and how they are received by their intended targets matters for frame resonance (consensus that the social problem exists) and consequently, whether or not corrective action is taken on the social problem.

In this chapter, I examine a vulnerable Asian American group's mobilization to keep their public benefits and to obtain U.S. citizenship. Specifically, I examine two cases of mobilization²⁴²: Hmong's mobilization to restore food stamp benefits cut off by the Welfare

²⁴⁰ Paul Feldman, "A Battle for Rights: Filipino Veterans of Wwii Fight for Citizenship, Pensions Despite Missing Army Records," *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1994.

²⁴¹ Floor Statement by Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii). In "Senator Inouye Hails Inclusion of Compensation for Filipino Veterans in House-Senate Conference Report on H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009," February 5, 2009, p. 2.

²⁴² I am using "mobilization" as a shortened form to stand in for two inter-related processes of social participation: the mobilization of collective consensus (which entails the use of framing to effect public opinion and activate influential third parties) and mobilization of collective action (which entails the aggregation and use of economic and political resources in order to effect concrete social changes). By "community mobilization" I am referring to a process in which social actors try to induce others to participate in the collective definition of a social problem and to organize or take collective action towards ameliorating a social problem.

Reform Act of 1996 and their mobilization to pass the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act. What is remarkable about these cases is that, despite the small size of the Hmong American population relative to Asian America and to the rest of American society,²⁴³ despite an anti-immigrant political climate (Chavez 1997), the challengers in these social movements were eventually able to attract broad bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress and obtain presidential approval to create exceptions specifically for Hmong veterans under two major federal legislations: the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and the Immigration and Nationality Act. By examining these cases, this chapter aims to accomplish three things: (1) to examine how political context, specifically existing state policies shape the making of collective action frames; (2) to analyze how the military service frame²⁴⁴ emerged out of the claims making activities of ordinary Hmong persons; and (3) to analyze how formal organizations and state allies elaborated upon this collective action frame in order to mobilize consensus and motivate collective action from the federal government. The data for this chapter come mainly from official documents (congressional hearings, bills and policies), news articles, interviews, and an existing case study.

I will proceed as follows. First, I briefly describe Southeast Asian refugees' migration to and reception by the United States. Next, I describe the 1996 Welfare Reform Act and its initial effects on legal immigrants, with a focus on Southeast Asians. Then I examine Hmong Americans' collective mobilization to restore public benefits that were cut by the Welfare

²⁴³ Hmong Americans make up less than two percent of the Asian American population, which itself makes up less than five percent of the U.S. population.

²⁴⁴ According to Snow and Benford, a frame is "an interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action in one's present or past environment" (1992:137). Framing "denotes an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. We refer to the products of this framing activity as collective action frames" (1992:136). Social actors use framing both during the mobilization of consensus prior to collective action and as a way to sustain collective action. See David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," Pp 133-155 in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Morris and Mueller, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

Reform Act of 1996. I examine this alongside the collective effort to pass the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000. I pay particular attention to the debates during the congressional hearings on the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1997. I argue that, in both policy-oriented movements, social actors' activation of political resources (especially law organizations and state allies) outside of the ethnic community and their strategic use of the military service collective action frame, were crucial in bringing about the generally positive outcomes in these two social movements. Ordinary Hmong persons provided the raw materials and evidence that produced a crucial military service frame; and formal organizations and state allies elaborated on this frame to mobilize consensus and motivate collective action from the federal government. Essentially, the military service frame, by emphasizing Hmong's past service/allied-ship and Otherness (alien, non-veteran), created a new subject category that the rest of Congress deemed culturally and politically acceptable and therefore, worthy of being granted exception under two federal legislations.

A Changing Political Context: Federal Welfare Reform

Like Chinese and Filipinos, hundreds of thousands of Indochinese (Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians) also fought as allies of the United States Armed Forces. Only this time, instead of fighting the Japanese, "non-communist" Southeast Asians on the side of the U.S. were involved in an undeclared "Vietnam conflict" as part of the U.S. Cold War struggle to "contain communism." But like Chinese and Filipinos, Southeast Asians also had an unequal relationship with the United States. In the aftermath of the American-Vietnam war in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians, including Hmong refugees fled to nearby countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. Recognizing their role in the war, aware of their obligation under the 1951 United Nations Convention and 1967 Protocol related to refugees, and knowing that

other nation-states were unwilling to take in Southeast Asian refugees displaced by that highly unpopular war, the United States hesitantly admitted Southeast Asian refugees beginning in 1975.²⁴⁵ Most of these refugees, including Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodian, and Hmong refugees were granted legal permanent resident status soon after arriving in the U.S.

As legal permanent residents, Southeast Asian former refugees determined to be needy received time-limited, federally-funded cash and medical assistance such as Aids for Dependent Children (AFDC), Medicaid, or Supplemental Security Income. Many also received social services in the form of English-language training and employment services (Haines 1996:19-21). However, over time, as federal funding was reduced,²⁴⁶ states increasingly had to bear the cost of meeting the needs of the refugee population. In spite of their relatively high reliance on public assistance, public assistance has helped Indochinese refugees to meet basic material and health needs since the late 1970s. Public assistance coupled with investments in human capital, especially education and job training, have helped hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian former refugees and their children move from extreme poverty to less poverty.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, *Indochina Refugees: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Ninety-Fourth Congress, First Session, May 5 and 7, 1975*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975. The statement of U.S. Representative Martin Russo (Member of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, and International Law) suggests that other nation-states were unwilling to admit Indochinese refugees, who they considered “America’s problem”: “I have recently returned from the ICEM Conference in Geneva, and I would like to share some of my feelings with you Mr. Ambassador [L. Deal Brown, Director of Interagency Task Force]. The feedback that I received from the people with whom I discussed this problem is that it is America’s problem, entirely, and America had better get itself out of it because *there will be limited if any resettlement in foreign countries* according to the members of the ICEM nations that I talked to” (1983:15). ICEM refers to the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration; presently the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In the end, France, Australia, Canada and Germany also took in Indochinese refugees, but the U.S. experienced the largest flow.

²⁴⁶ Under the Refugee Act of 1980, *federal funding* to support cash and medical assistance for refugees was limited to the first 36 months in the U.S. Over time, the time limit for federal funding declined as new amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act were made: 31 months on March 1, 1986; 24 months on February 1, 1998; 4 months on January 1, 1990; and 0 months on October 1, 1990 (Haines 1996:23).

²⁴⁷ Indeed, since the 1980s, all Southeast Asian groups (Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Hmong) have made tremendous improvements in their socioeconomic status. Nevertheless, in an increasingly tight economy with rising costs of living and greater competition in the labor market, many families still rely partially on one form of public assistance or another to make ends meet.

However, in the mid-1990s, the political contexts of the reception changed dramatically for all immigrants as the U.S. government made greater efforts to restrict legal and illegal immigration. In 1996, the U.S. Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)²⁴⁸ and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.²⁴⁹ The PRWORA, among other things, replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) public assistance program with a downgraded program called Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and required participation in work or work-related activities as a condition of receiving aid. The PRWORA also caps aid recipients' eligibility to five years over their lifetime (Truong 2007). Beyond trying to control (or manage the impression of being in control of) the national border, PRWORA represents the welfare state's strategy of creating new subject categories and assigning differential consequences to these subject categories. In one category are those people that the government deems *deserving* of public assistance; in another category are those that it deems *undeserving* of the same.

Prior to the PRWORA, most legal immigrants, including legal permanent residents, were eligible for Food Stamps. However, under the 1996 PRWORA, legal immigrants who were non-citizens became ineligible to receive food stamps²⁵⁰ and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)²⁵¹ (Parrott, Kennedy, and Scott 1998; U.S. Department of Agriculture 2003; L. Schmidt 2004).

²⁴⁸ "Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," Public Law 104-193, August 22, 1996 (110 Stat. 2105). This Act has come to be known as the Welfare Reform Act, a euphemism compared to the full name, which emphasizes individual responsibility and asserts the myth of equal work opportunity.

²⁴⁹ It was not a coincidence that these federal laws share similar titles. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-208, Division C, September 30, 1996 (110 Stat. 3009)), like many immigration laws before it, placed the blame on individual migrants rather than U.S. corporations (for greed and exploitation) or its governments (for maintaining corporations and all sorts of inequities).

²⁵⁰ According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "in 1998, Congress began restoring food stamp eligibility to legal immigrants who were in the United States before August 22, 1996 and were elderly, are children, or are disabled" (2003:1).

²⁵¹ On the average, between 1982 and 1997, non-citizens receiving SSI payments comprised only about 8.1 percent of the total number of persons receiving SSI annually in the United States. The year with the highest non-citizen usage was in 1995 (with 12.1 percent noncitizens receiving SSI). In 1997, the total number of non-citizens receiving SSI payments was 650,830 persons (Parrott, Kennedy and Scott 1998:18).

According to the U.S. government, only certain groups deserve public assistance: those who or whose families have previously contributed documented labor or documented service.

Specifically, only U.S. citizens and three categories of non-citizens could be exempt from cuts to public assistance: 1) recent refugees and asylees within their first seven years in the U.S., 2) immigrants who could show documentation of having worked 40 quarters (about 10 years) in the U.S.; and 3) immigrants who had served in the U.S. Armed Forces (Hwang 2002:95-6).

Consequently, in 1997, at least 935,000 low-income legal immigrants lost their federal food stamps as a result of the PRWORA. This figure represents 52 percent of the 1.8 million legal immigrants who received food stamps in 1995 (Cook 1998:219).

But, as Lynn Fujiwara (2008) points out, the PRWORA did not only target non-citizens for denial of public assistance. It also “clearly demarcated Southeast Asian refugees as no longer worthy of public support” (2008:68). The so-called “Welfare Reform” Act made Hmong former refugees, like other vulnerable and struggling Southeast Asian former refugees, even more vulnerable. In 1989, about 62 percent of Hmong families lived in poverty and that their per capital income (in 1989 dollars) was \$2,692—the lowest income of any Asian American group (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b). In 1990, about 65 percent of Hmong were foreign born while 35 percent were U.S. born (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). Among the foreign born, 59.2 percent were non-citizens and only 6 percent were naturalized citizens. Below, I discuss two initial effects that Welfare Reform had on the Hmong American community: 1) the widespread panic and tragic suicides, and 2) the eastward migration of Hmong in search of jobs.

Initial Effects on Hmong Americans

Welfare Reform affected most Hmong communities but it had even more serious effects on the most physically vulnerable, non-English speaking segment of these communities; this

segment included the foreign born seniors, many of whom depend on SSI as a last resort for basic survival. Welfare Reform caused a string of suicides and suicide attempts in the Hmong American communities of California's Central Valley and elsewhere in the country.²⁵² In March 1997, Sai Chou Lor, a disabled veteran and Hmong refugee who arrived in Stockton, California in 1995, attempted suicide after receiving notice that he would lose his SSI.²⁵³ In September 1997, Ye Vang, 59-year-old, hung herself in Fresno, California.²⁵⁴ Ms. Vang was a Hmong refugee who, in 1993, resettled in Fresno to be closer to her brother and his family. Prior to her death, Ms. Vang received supplemental security income due to her disability. But since the passage of Welfare Reform, Ms. Vang had tried unsuccessfully to pass the U.S. citizenship exam, the only ticket to possibly keeping her SSI income. In October of that same year, another Hmong woman, Chia Yang, 54-year-old, committed suicide in her Sacramento, California home.²⁵⁵ She was the mother of two children and wife of Sua Chai Vue, a veteran of the secret war in Laos who served in the special guerrilla units trained by the Central Intelligence Agency from 1961 to 1974. Prior to Mrs. Yang's death, she received a notice from the state informing her that her SSI income of \$640 a month would be cut because she was not a U.S. citizen. Earlier that year Mrs. Yang had tried twice but failed to pass the English version of the U.S. citizenship test (Fujiwara 2008:51-52). Whether seen as acts of protest against a faceless "welfare system" or as desperate acts carried out to end extreme vulnerability, suicides devastate entire extended families.

²⁵² In Wisconsin, Chue Tou Vang, 83, committed suicide by hanging on April 3, 1997, after receiving a letter that his SSI would be cut. Vang was a Hmong veteran of the secret war in Laos who arrived in the U.S. in 1980 with his wife and eight children. See Carol Morello, "Aid Cutoff Driving Immigrants to Suicide," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 25, 1997.

²⁵³ Daniel Sneider, "Reforms Begin to Cut Off Dollars to Us Immigrants," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 1, 1997.

²⁵⁴ Bert Eljera, "Hmong Desperate on Welfare Reform," *AsianWeek*, December 4-10, 1997.

²⁵⁵ Deborah Hastings, "Hmong Woman's Suicide Puts Spotlight on Welfare Problems," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1998.

The implementation of Welfare Reform policies also was a push factor in Hmong Americans' migration to mid-western states such as Minnesota and other eastern states such as North Carolina that, prior to 1996, had only small pockets of Hmong neighborhoods or no Hmong presence at all. Threatened with the loss of their public assistance and recognizing the serious lack of job opportunities in their local communities, many Hmong families of California's Central Valley responded by seeking job opportunities outside of the state. Through ethnic networks comprised of friends and related family members previously sent to locate work in the areas of destination, Hmong families received information about the types of jobs available in certain areas, how much these jobs pay, where they could find housing and land, etc. The increases in the Hmong populations within states such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina can be attributed in part to the 1996 Welfare Reform. For the tens of thousands of Hmong American families who remain in California, out of choice or out of necessity, they continue to confront an unstable labor market, where job opportunities are few and job competition at all levels of the bifurcated labor market is fierce. They live in low-income or poor neighborhoods where life in dilapidated buildings and overcrowded apartment complexes is part of their everyday experiences. In response to these conditions, Hmong American communities mobilized.

Mobilizing against Welfare Reform

However, the mobilization in Hmong American communities did not occur overnight. Nor did it occur in just one location. Rather, Hmong's mobilization to restore aid cut off by Welfare Reform occurred in multiple states including California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin over a period of time. Furthermore, mobilization involved multiple strategies such as lobbying, demonstrations, appeals, and litigation. Each of these strategies required the participation of

different sets of social actors both inside and outside of Hmong communities: from law firms to church organizations; from mayors to governors; from administrative law judges to district court judges; from members of Congress to the President of the U.S. Significantly, the Hmong mobilization of 1997 occurred alongside suicides, reflecting both Hmong's activism and victimization. Below, I focus on Hmong's mobilization in California during 1997 while keeping in mind the broader contexts in which their mobilization took place.

In California, as many as 20,000 Hmong lost their food stamps as a result of Welfare Reform.²⁵⁶ Prior to participating in mass demonstrations, filing appeals, or taking part in law suits, Hmong community members took part in lobbying the federal legislature in charge of passing and amending the country's policies. For instance, in February 1997, a delegation of Hmong from Fresno traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby members of the U.S. Congress to create an exception for Hmong before Welfare Reform went into full effect. There, they "introduced" Congress to Hmong's history of military service and their plight in the aftermath of Welfare Reform.²⁵⁷ This lobbying effort preceded another set of significant events between May and August 1997 that facilitated the movement to restore benefits to Hmong non-citizens.

This set of events includes the formal recognition of Hmong veterans for their military service to the U.S. and a "sense of Congress" statement that Congress passed three months afterwards. On May 14, 1997, after four years of mobilizing by Hmong and Lao veterans and their allies, some of whom are former CIA officers, about 4,000 Hmong and Lao veterans participated in a formal recognition ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington

²⁵⁶ Virginia Ellis, "Hmong Seek Exemption from Food Stamp Cuts," *ibid.* November 2, 1997.

²⁵⁷ Karla Bruner, "Hmong Pushing Welfare Relief: Fresno Group Hoping to Convince Lawmakers They Need Exemption from Possible Loss of Benefits," *Fresno Bee*, February 22, 1997.

D.C.²⁵⁸ Many of the Hmong men and women in attendance wore army uniforms or traditional costumes. There, Laotian Hmong veterans were recognized for the first time by the U.S. Congress for their military-service to the U.S. On that day, U.S. Congress members, Pentagon officials and former CIA officers presented 2,500 Hmong veterans with the “congressionally-authorized Vietnam Veterans National Medal.”²⁵⁹ A proclamation of support signed by 12 U.S. congress members was also read.²⁶⁰ On May 15th, a granite plaque²⁶¹ with golden texts recognizing Hmong and Lao veterans was installed at the grounds of the Arlington National Cemetery. Then on August 5, 1997, at the urging of Congress members but especially U.S. Representative Bruce Vento (D-MN),²⁶² the U.S. Congress passed and President Clinton signed a “sense of Congress” statement that reads in relevant part,

It is the *sense of the Congress* that Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans who fought on behalf of the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam conflict and have lawfully been admitted to the United States for permanent residence *should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing certain welfare benefits* consistent with the

²⁵⁸ Marc Kaufman, "U.S. Honors Hmong Who Helped American Military During Vietnam War," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 14, 1997.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. See also Ben Barber, "Hmong Veterans to Receive Medals: Laotian People Become Refugees after Helping U.S. Fight Vietnam War," *The Washington Times*, May 14, 1997.

²⁶⁰ The Philadelphia Inquirer, "U.S. Honors Hmong Who Helped American Military During Vietnam War." U.S. Representative Bruce Vento stated: "The Hmong stood by the U.S. at a crucial time, and that service deserves recognition. We should stand with the Lao-Hmong in their struggle to become citizens and to live a good life in America."

²⁶¹ The plaque was funded by members of the Lao Veterans of America, Inc. The plaque reads as follows: "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 the defense of liberty and democracy will never be forgotten. *Yuav tshua txog nej mus ib txhis*. [Shall treasure you forever.]. Lao Veterans of America, May 15, 1997."

²⁶² The Sense of Congress on Hmong veterans that was eventually included as part of Section 5566 of the enacted Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (H.R. 2015) can be traced to Section 407 of the Welfare Reform Technical Corrections Act of 1997 (not enacted) introduced by U.S. Representative Clay Shaw (R-FL). Section 407's supporters included U.S. Representatives Bruce Vento (D-MN), George Radanovich (R-CA), Cal Dooley (D-CA), Kleczka (D-WI), Jim Ramstad (R-MN), and others. Remarks of U.S. Representative Bruce Vento: "I want to thank Human Resources Subcommittee Chairman Shaw, Congressman Kleczka, Congressman Ramstad, and the remaining members of the Ways and Means Committee for including this important language in the bill. I am pleased that my communication with the committee has in some measure contributed to raising awareness about the Hmong and their unique situation." See Congressional Record, 105th Congress (1997-1998), "Welfare Reform Technical Corrections Act of 1997," page H1934-5.

exceptions provided other noncitizen veterans under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (emphasis added).²⁶³

Although this sense of Congress statement did not amend Welfare Reform for Hmong veterans, I hold that it became an instrumental resource at every stage in the mobilization effort to restore food stamps to Hmong veterans and their families.

Mobilization in Northern California

Meanwhile, in California's Central Valley, the 1997 Hmong movement to restore lost public assistance emerged from the efforts of ordinary Hmong persons and activists in the ethnic community. But from early on this movement also depended on the support and efforts of the staff, attorneys and volunteers at two community law organizations: the Asian Law Caucus based in San Francisco and the Central California Legal Services (CCLS) based in Fresno.

On May 28, 1997, thousands of Hmong and Iu Mien demonstrators protested at the California State Capitol, along with about 150 other California organizations.²⁶⁴ Hmong community activist Yee Xiong of the California Statewide Lao/Hmong Coalition helped mobilize Hmong to participate in that demonstration. During that same year, Xiong, then a resident of Chico, also worked with attorneys Victor Hwang and Sally Kinoshita from the San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus to organize a meeting with the Marysville-based Hmong community at the Hmong Alliance Church in Yuba City, California.²⁶⁵ At this meeting, Hwang and Kinoshita provided Hmong community members with information about the changes that welfare reform law enacted and how individuals could file appeals for administrative hearings (Hwang 2002). But, it was at this meeting, in which about 500 Hmong adults and children attended, that "the audience began to question why they were not protected under the military

²⁶³ Balanced Budget Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-33, §5566, 111 Stat. 251, 639-40 (1997).

²⁶⁴ San Jose Mercury News (California), "Immigrants Plan Capitol Protest."

²⁶⁵ The present author, then a high school student, attended the meeting with others in his family.

exemption category [even though they have] served under CIA command in Laos” (2002:100). As Victor Hwang, an attorney with the Asian Law Caucus, explains, “the Hmong were angry about their predicament and viewed this [cuts to their benefits] as yet another instance in a long series of betrayals of their people” (2002:101). The central claims of Hmong’s military-service frame were beginning to emerge.

Despite some initial hesitancy to file legal appeals, members of the audience, once armed with more knowledge of the legal process, saw hope in taking collective action: i.e., filing appeals as part of “a coordinated group action which would tie up the administrative process and force the government to scramble and locate sufficient judges, courtrooms, and Hmong interpreters to deal with the mass of appeals” (Hwang 2002:102). Recognizing that “the real issue [raised by Hmong adults] was as much about honor and recognition as it was about the food stamp subsidy,” members of the panel “reframed the appeal [state hearing process] as a method by which the [Hmong] community would have another opportunity in their ongoing campaign to educate the American people about the Hmong” (2002:102). Out of this meeting was the collective decision “to challenge the spirit behind welfare reform and to attack *the discourse claiming that immigrants were morally undeserving of benefits because they had not contributed enough to the system*” (2002:102, emphasis added). The next step was “to mobilize and empower members of the Hmong community to file individual appeals in mass in order to publicize their claims and stories to the rest of the American community” (2002:102).

This indeed occurred. Across California’s Central Valley, thousands of Hmong households filed for state hearings on their lost benefits. By October 1997, between 1,500 to 2,000 Hmong Californians had filed appeals.²⁶⁶ The staff from the Asian Law Caucus helped the

²⁶⁶ There is no exact information about how many Hmong households filed appeals. Hwang (2002:104) writes, “According to a California Department of Social Services internal memorandum, 3500 immigrant households

Hmong community prepare for their appeals by distributing duplicated videos of the meetings and sample questionnaires and by using Hmong radio shows to inform individuals about their “legal rights and of what to expect from the [appeals] process” (Hwang 2002:105). In addition, the Asian Law Caucus, relying on its team of volunteers—“Hmong American undergraduates and Asian American law students in the Greater Bay Area”—set up “traveling clinics in areas accessible to the community and worked with Hmong veterans to translate and draft declarations outlining their cases” (2002:105). The Caucus also prepared documents that contained the sense of the Congress statement and distributed these to individuals pursuing appeals (2002:105). In one declaration collected by the Asian Law Caucus, a Hmong veteran wrote:

Before coming to the United States, I was a farmer, had my own land and property. I have never ask for support. The only reasons why I came to the United States are as followed. During the Vietnam War many of the CIA from the United States *have cause us to become victims of Communist people*. We were also known to be helpers of the United States CIA Many of my family members were killed by the communist after the retrieval of the U.S. CIA. *Due to the cause of the problems from the CIA I have to come to the United States just to survive. The United States is just trying to eliminate our people but they're not killing us with weapons, but with the society and supreme laws to kill us. They started their plan from the Vietnam war and until now. We feel that these denying of food stamps is their way to eliminate us.* I've been a soldier supporting the U.S. in 1965 until coming to the U.S. (Hwang 2005:106, emphasis added).

It is clear from this declaration that Hmong view the economic exclusion in the U.S. as an extension of the government's past practices of violence and exploitation in Southeast Asia.

Rather than assert the simple rhetoric of “communism” or of “democracy,” this Hmong veteran pinpoints the U.S. role in making Hmong powerless “victims of Communist people” and landless subjects to U.S. “supreme laws.”

His anguish at the government's denial of food stamps to Hmong in post-resettlement is an extension of the anguish that Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugees had to endure during

requested appeals of their food stamp cut-offs under the Welfare Reform Act. Of those appeals, 1335 were filed in Fresno, 200 in Sacramento, 155 in Butte, and 140 in Yuba [counties], which represent the counties with the highest concentrations of Hmong residents.”

the war, during their escape, and in the refugee camps. During war, the U.S.-sanctioned bombing of roads, land and dikes and the burning or spraying of crops and vegetation with chemicals were widespread throughout Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (Herman and Chomsky 2002:169-296). Countless Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian soldiers and civilians, irrespective of political affiliation, died from injuries, diseases and starvation. A 64-year-old Hmong veteran recalls how, during the first four months of their arrival in Thailand from Laos, hundreds of Hmong families were denied food and medical assistance by a Thai official and his Hmong accomplices:

In June of 1975, my wife and I, along with my older brother and sister-in-law, and several hundred Hmong families (at least 1,500-2,000 persons; some from his home village), entered into Thailand near the northeastern border (directly west of Mae Charim district of Nan Province, Thailand). *Pov Lis Muas* was our commander. ... However, at the temporary camp near the border, the Thai official, *Xoom Xav* (approx., Somsat, who was a former T-28 pilot instructor) and his two Hmong subordinates, *Vaj Khab Mib* and *Vaj Xeeb*, brothers who had arrived with other Hmong refugees earlier on, were in charge of food distribution. They sold rice instead of distributing them to us. From June until September 1975, we could not get food.

Faced with starvation, those families with money had to purchase bags of 100-kilogram rice at the cost of eight French silver coins (*nyiaj maj laus*) per bag and the sick had to buy packets of water (intravenous saline solution) at one French coin each (an exorbitant amount of money considering that the average family's life savings totaled 40-50 Francs silver coins and the very poor had only a few coins or none). Because they were starving, many families, including my brother and sister-in-law and an aunt and uncle trekked back to Laos...It was not until *Pov Lis* secretly sent notice to officials that a white reporter/investigator along with a Hmong, *Teev Tsab*, came to our village to take note of the situation...Afterwards, Thai authorities flew in by helicopter and ordered Somsat to return with them. As the helicopter was flying away, Somsat emptied an entire magazine from his M-16 (automatic rifle) in outrage. ... Only when the camp leadership was replaced did we start to receive the food and medical aid.²⁶⁷

Once refugee camps were created for them, Hmong families received meager food rations.

Fighting for basic survival, many households created “*npe poj ntxoog*” (literally “ghost names,”

²⁶⁷ Interview with a 64-year-old Hmong veteran (March 10, 2010, Marysville, CA). The coin referred to in this passage is an *Indo-Chine Francaise Piastre de Commerce*, 2.7 gram, 0.900 fine silver coin (displaying a seated liberty holding fasces) used throughout Southeast Asia during and for some time after French colonialism.

the equivalent of paper sons)²⁶⁸ just to obtain adequate food and in some cases, families even under-reported deaths simply to try to avoid food rations being reduced (Woodward 1981:26).

On the day of the hearings, October 15, 1997, affiliates of both the Asian Law Caucus and the CCLS were on scene to offer legal services to the Hmong persons who were representing themselves in presenting evidence²⁶⁹ and their heart wrenching stories in front of administrative law judges. Given the large number of appeals, some hearings occurred in groups of five to 10 persons at the same time (Hwang 2002:107). According to a media account, in one northern California county alone, “about 60 Hmong and Lao veterans and widows appeared before a Yuba County administrative law judge...to appeal the cutoff of their food stamps.”²⁷⁰ Prior to the hearing, the Asian Law Caucus had also alerted the news media “to the unusual nature of these ongoing legal proceedings”; subsequently, some California press and national media outlets covered the story of the Hmong community’s appeals (2002:108).²⁷¹

In a surprising turn of events, several weeks after the hearings a number of administrative law judges issued favorable decisions which continued some households’ food stamps. These decisions were remarkable in at least two respects: 1) they “defied the advance directive of the U.S. Department of Agriculture,” which had, even before the hearings began, “essentially ordered the [administrative law] judges to deny the Hmong appeals because the sense of Congress ‘[did] not provide the authority to make [the Hmong veterans] eligible for food

²⁶⁸ Interview with a 52-year-old Hmong woman (March 12, 2010, Marysville, CA): In the Ban Vinai refugee camp, a person within each household received roughly a bowl of uncooked rice per week. Rice was supplemented with other food such as fish, green vegetables, chicken, and pork, which was rotated throughout the month.

²⁶⁹ Evidence included personal declarations, photographs, documents from the Lao Veterans of America, Inc. that certified military status, newspaper clippings on Hmong, death certificates, etc. (Hwang 2002:107).

²⁷⁰ Lodi News, "Asian Veterans Protest Food Stamp Cutoff," *Lodi News-Sentinel*, October 16, 1997. The *Lodi News* described the appeals as a “test” of the “sense of Congress” clause and then gave a brief snapshot of Hmong history, as follows: “From 1961 to 1975, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency recruited and trained Hmong and other mountain Lao people to fight the North Vietnamese and rescue downed American pilots. About 150,000 fled Laos at the end of the war and most have immigrated to the United States.”

²⁷¹ John Howard, "Tribesmen Who Fought for CIA Now Cut Off from Food Stamps," *Associated Press*, November 1, 1997.

stamps” (Hwang 2002:106-9); and 2) they, in Victor Hwang’s apt description, “put common sense and the present reality of hunger before a theoretical black-letter reading of the law” (2002:109). The actions suggested that at least some administrative law judges sympathized with the stories and plight of ordinary Hmong and valued Hmong’s military service.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Agriculture later overturned each of these favorable decisions. In response, the Asian Law Caucus collaborated with the Central California Legal Services in Fresno to file a lawsuit²⁷² against the state on behalf of a Hmong veteran, Chong Yia Yang, who and whose two foreign born children lost their food stamp benefits.²⁷³ The lawsuit was also timed to coincide approximately with the Veterans’ Day holiday. Also, days before the filing of the lawsuit, Yang made use of the local news media to publicize his military service during the Laotian war and to “[state] his case for why the Hmong should be exempt from food stamp cuts” (Hwang 2002:110).²⁷⁴ A day after Yang’s *Fresno Bee* article was published, the *Sacramento Bee* also published a front page article²⁷⁵ “which discussed the suicide of a Hmong mother of seven who was angry over the threat of welfare reform [and] hinted at the possibility of additional deaths should further food stamp cuts be implemented” (Hwang 2002:110).

Activating the Media and Political Actors

Taking this media attention and coverage as a window of political opportunity, the Asian Law Caucus “immediately faxed copies of both Chong Yang’s op-ed piece and the article

²⁷² In Yang’s appeal, the Ninth Circuit Court upheld the U.S. District Court’s ruling. Chong Yia Yang, Plaintiff-Appellant, V. State of California Department of Social Services; Eloise Anderson, in her official capacity as Director of Social Services; United States Department of Agriculture, Defendants-Appellees. No. 98-15507. Argued and Submitted February 9, 1999, June 24, 1999. U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit - 183 F.3d 953.

²⁷³ Stephen Schwartz, "Food Stamp Cutoff Upheld: Benefits Denied to Hmong Who Fought for the U.S.," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 7, 1998.

²⁷⁴ Chong Yia Yang, "Hmong Soldiers Are Veterans, Too, Deserve Benefits," *Fresno Bee*, November 8, 1997.

²⁷⁵ Stephen Magagnini, "Suicide Illustrates Welfare Reform's Toll among Hmong," *Sacramento Bee*, November 9, 1997.

regarding the Hmong suicide to dozens of local, state, and federal legislators in order to obtain political support for our legal action” (Hwang 2002:110). This quick action activated an influential political actor to join the political arena. The then-Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis, who is a Vietnam veteran, “took advantage of this opportunity both to promote himself and to attack the incumbent Governor Pete Wilson” (2002:110). In a letter to the director of the California Department of Social Services under Gov. Wilson, Davis wrote: “As a [Vietnam] veteran myself, I am personally offended that the state of California should fail to acknowledge the sacrifices of fellow [Hmong] veterans and their family members” (2002:110). “Copies of [Davis’] letter were widely circulated, and it was covered extensively by the press” (2002:110). As a result of Davis’ actions and the ongoing media scrutiny, “the Department of Social Services quickly softened its tune by attempting to acknowledge the sacrifice of the Hmong veterans while *shifting the blame to the federal government*” (2002:111, emphasis added).

In spite of the efforts of the Asian Law Caucus and the CCLS, the U.S. District judge ruled against Chong Yia Yang based on the judgment that the “sense of Congress” did not carry the weight of law. But the federal judge also expressed sympathy for Hmong’s cause. District Judge Robert E. Coyle stated, among other things, that “the court must decry the inequitable treatment of a class of residents that sacrificed much to serve this nation. (...) It is the court’s sincerest hopes that Congress will take steps to remedy this inequity as soon as possible” (Hwang 2002:111-2). At this point, the only two possible targets that were in the position to grant Hmong’s goals were the U.S. executive and legislative branches.

The Final Stages of Mobilization

Rather than give up the fight, the Asian Law Caucus persisted. During the final stages of the mobilization, the Asian Law Caucus relied on their lobbying office, the National Asian

Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) based in Washington, D.C., which had been working on welfare reform issues for quite some time. The NAPALC, in turn, met with “various federal bureaucrats” and “plied them with the compelling stories of Hmong sacrifice and American betrayal” (Hwang 2002:112). Furthermore, as Hwang points out,

NAPALC “contracted with a well-respected law firm inside the Beltway to issue a favorable legal interpretation analyzing the ‘sense of Congress’ regarding the Hmong. Lawyers from this firm, Hmong grassroots activists, and NAPALC attorneys met with the White House Counsel, the Office of Management and Budget, the White House Domestic Policy Council, and the Undersecretary and General Counsel’s Office of the Department of Agriculture, armed with a legal memorandum in an attempt to obtain a political remedy. We hoped that this memorandum by a ‘political law firm’ might be persuasive political lawyering of a different stripe (2002:112).

Giving weight also to the role of suicides and public opinion, Hwang argues,

Perhaps equally important during this period was the unspoken threat of the pending federal litigation that we had brought. Given the deaths that this politically driven legislation had already caused, the administration would suffer a public relations nightmare should the law ultimately be deemed unconstitutional. Our D.C. advocates worked tirelessly in their attempt to convince the administration to reach some form of compromise on behalf of this class of veterans (2002:112-3).

In the end, after more than a year of sustained, grassroots mobilization, the U.S. Congress finally passed and President Clinton signed the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act on June 23, 1998. This Act included an exception for “certain Hmong and Highland Laotians” to the food stamps ineligibility criteria. Specifically, any U.S. legal permanent resident who “was a member of a Hmong or Highland Laotian tribe at the time that the tribe rendered assistance to United States personnel by taking part in a military or rescue operation during the Vietnam era beginning August 5, 1964 and ending May 7, 1975” as well as his or her spouse and unmarried children could be eligible for food stamps. But as Hwang points out, “This tortured language was apparently the result of intervention by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which threatened to oppose this amendment unless it could be drafted *without*

characterizing the Hmong as veterans” (2002:113).²⁷⁶ Hmong Americans’ year-long mobilization earned them entry into the “deserving” zone of public benefits. However, to earn legal citizenship, Hmong veterans and their allies would have to persist through 10 years of lobbying, especially inside the U.S. Congress.

Lobbying for Citizenship

From some people’s point of view, Hmong veterans’ social movement to become naturalized U.S. citizens was directly and simply connected with their desire to restore public benefits cut off by Welfare Reform. For instance, in reference to the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization bill reintroduced in 1997 (H.R. 371), Mark Krikorian, the executive director for the conservative Center for Immigration Studies, states:

KRIKORIAN: It’s clear that H.R. 371 and other legislation intended to expedite the naturalization of various groups is prompted, at least in part, by the welfare reform law enacted last year, which barred most non-citizens from most federal welfare benefits. The Hmong have a high rate of welfare dependency and a low rate of naturalization (U.S. Congress 1997).

In fact, however, Hmong veterans’ movement to become naturalized citizens had begun in May 1990, at least six years prior to the passage of Welfare Reform in August 1996. Additionally, as we saw above, the U.S. Congress and President Bill Clinton approved an exception to food stamp ineligibility under the Welfare Reform Act for Hmong veterans and their families in June 1998—almost two years prior to approving the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000. As such, the social movement to restore benefits and the movement to become naturalized constitute two related but separate social movements. In the following section, I provide a brief background of the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act (hereinafter HVNA or Hmong naturalization bill) before analyzing the congressional testimonies and debates on the bill. In

²⁷⁶ The U.S. defines a veteran as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” 38 U.S.C. 101 (2002).

analyzing the congressional debates, I am interested in identifying the key state allies and the central claims that were crucial in the passage of the Hmong naturalization bill.

The Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act²⁷⁷ was originally introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 4, 1990 as H.R. 4513 by U.S. Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota and a member of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party. On May 24, 1990, U.S. Senator Rudolph Boschwitz, also of Minnesota, introduced S. 2687, the same bill, in the U.S. Senate. Despite getting some bi-partisan support, both bills failed to pass.²⁷⁸ The HVNA would be re-introduced five times spanning six congressional sessions before it eventually passed into law: in years 1991, 1994, 1995, 1997, and 1999. Representative Bruce Vento introduced all of the bills in the House of Representatives while several U.S. Senators, including Senators David Durenberger (R-MN), Rod Grams (R-MN), and Paul Wellstone (D-MN), introduced similar or exact bills in the Senate. It is significant that all of the leading sponsors of the HVNA were elected from Minnesota. Minnesota is not only the state with second largest population²⁷⁹ of Hmong Americans in the U.S., but the first state to produce a Hmong elected official in the country.²⁸⁰

How were U.S. Representative Bruce Vento and his allies in the U.S. House and Senate able to secure bipartisan support for the Hmong naturalization bill, against others such as Mark Krikorian who claim that “freely handing out citizenship” would “[debase] the meaning of

²⁷⁷ A bill “to expedite the naturalization of aliens who served with special guerrilla units in Laos.” H.R. 4513 introduced in House, 101st Congress.

²⁷⁸ The co-sponsors of H.R. 4513 included Walter Fauntroy [D-DC]; Chester Atkins [D-MA5]; Jim Bates [D-CA44]; Gary Condit [D-CA15]; Robert Dornan [R-CA38]; William Frenzel [R-MN3] Benjamin Gilman [R-NY22]; Frank Horton [R-NY29]; Henry Hyde [R-IL6]; Jill Long Thompson [D-IN4]; Robert Matsui [D-CA3]; Charles Pashayan [R-CA17]; Martin Sabo [D-MN5]; Patricia Schroeder [D-CO1]; Gerald Sikorski [D-MN6]; and Henry Waxman [D-CA24]. The co-sponsors of S. 2687 included William Bradley [D-NJ]; James Jeffords [R-VT]; Frank Murkowski [R-AK]; and James Sanford [D-NC].

²⁷⁹ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1990, 2000, and 2010, Minnesota's Hmong population totaled 17,800 persons (or 19% of the total Hmong U.S. population), 41,800 (24%), and 63,600 (26%) respectively. California's Hmong population was 49,300 (52%) in 1990, 65,100 (38%) in 2000, and 87,000 (35%) in 2010.

²⁸⁰ In 1991, Choua Lee, a 1.5 generation Hmong woman, was elected to the St. Paul School Board.

Americanism”?²⁸¹ I contend that, besides their standing as intelligent, compassionate and courageous statesmen, these leaders were able to do so by advancing key claims of the Hmong military service frame—claims that contest the government’s practice of historical amnesia but do not significantly threaten or delegitimize dominant ideologies. Furthermore, these leaders situated the claims of the military service frame in the context of U.S. national and foreign policies in order to create the moral sentiments needed to achieve collective consensus in both the House and the Senate of the U.S. Congress.

The Congressional Hearing on the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act

Before May 2000, the only Congressional hearing on the HVNA took place on June 26, 1997.²⁸² On that day, members of House Judiciary Subcommittee On Immigration and Claims along with other members and non-members of Congress debated whether or not 45,000 “Hmong people”²⁸³ ought to be provided with a waiver that exempts them from the English language and residency requirements of the U.S. naturalization laws. Specifically, the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1997 would *exempt* legally admitted “persons” who “served with a special guerrilla unit operating from a base in Laos in support of the United States at any time during the period beginning February 28, 1961, and ending September 18, 1978” as well as the spouses of these Hmong persons from two requirements: 1) having to “demonstrate an understanding of the English language” and 2) having a period of residency in the U.S.

²⁸¹ This is language similar to those who argue against “free welfare handouts.” Krikorian made these claims during the Congressional hearing on the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization bill of 1997. See U.S. Congress, “The Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act,” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997.

²⁸² Ibid. The Hmong naturalization bills that were introduced in 1990, 1991, 1994, and 1995 apparently never made it pass the House and Senate Committees or Subcommittees to be included in hearings or debates.

²⁸³ During the congressional hearing, the phrase “Hmong people” was used 6 times and “Hmong refugees” 5 times. Not a single participant used the phrase “Hmong veteran” except Susan Haigh, the Commissioner of Ramsey County in Minnesota. That phrase appeared in Haigh’s statement: “We should be able to understand from this the high incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder and the depression that haunts so many of the Hmong veterans and makes it even more difficult for them to learn the English language so that they can become citizens.” U.S. Representative Smith, who chaired the hearing, used the phrase “veterans of Hmong guerrilla units.” The omission of “Hmong veterans” can only be interpreted as a deliberate attempt on the part of supporters to minimize opposition to the bill and/or participants’ & opponents’ deliberate attempt to exclude Hmong from the definition of “veterans.”

Concerns about the HVNA came from some Congress members but more direct opposition came from a private organization. Expressing slight support, concerns as well as hesitancy, the Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims, U.S. Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX) states:

SMITH: The Hmong people have unquestionably suffered greatly over the latter half of the 20th century. Their taking up arms with American forces in anti-communist guerrilla units during the Vietnam War caused them much loss and hardship, both during and after the war. America does owe the Hmong fighters a debt. *This debt was repaid, thanks to the generosity of the American people*, when more than 100,000 Hmong refugees were evacuated to the United States after the Vietnam War (U.S. Congress 1997:emphasis added).

Representative Smith acknowledges the “anxiety in the Hmong community over the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act.” However, in Smith’s view, even “if Congress decides that this is the situation needing remedy,” the “[easing] of naturalization requirements” for “veterans of Hmong guerrilla units” would mean that “*naturalization standards would be watered down*” (U.S. Congress 1997).

This last statement is consistent with Smith’s view that the “debt” American owes to Hmong “was repaid” with the, presumably, direct and rapid “evacuation” of 100,000 Hmong refugees to the U.S. after the war. Such position espouses views similar to those of President Jimmy Carter who, in 1977, claimed that because “the destruction was mutual” between Vietnam and the U.S., “I don’t feel that we owe a debt, nor that we should be forced to pay reparations at all.”²⁸⁴ Presumably, Hmong veterans, for their military service, for their enduring of a decade of destruction and atrocities and decades longer of life in the total institutions of refugee camps, deserve only that much. From this standpoint, whatever devastation that Hmong (and other

²⁸⁴ Jimmy Carter, “The President’s News Conference,” March 24, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. Retrieved April 7, 2010 from: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7229>.

Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians) had to bear in the decades before their resettlement and whatever happens to them after the point of entry do not merit the government's concern.

Others in the hearing recognized Smith's attempt to associate the HVNA with Welfare Reform and took immediate steps to reframe the social problem. Representative Melvin Watt (D-NC, Ranking Member on the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims), a co-sponsor of the HVNA, opens his statement by recognizing the "significant number of Hmong residents in Western North Carolina, which is my home state." He continues:

WATT: But the more important part is that this is not and should not be characterized as simply a mechanism to ease the provision of welfare benefits. I think that's really secondary. *The more important thing is what commitments have we, as a country, made to these people, either by implication or by precedent.*

A couple of weeks ago, we mocked up a bill and sent it on the floor, basically providing citizenship or waiving some of the naturalization requirements for an individual who saved some documents in Switzerland from being shredded. If we can pass a special bill for that individual, it certainly seems to me that we can honor some of the commitments that we ought to be making to people who fought alongside our troops in Southeast Asia.

And so I'm hopeful that *we can not just look on this bill as a mechanism to debate welfare reform again, or immigration reform again*, but look on it as an opportunity to provide equity to a category of people who certainly deserve it (U.S. Congress 1997).

Introducing his Center for Immigration Studies as a "research organization" that "does not recommend...lawmakers [to] vote for or against any specific piece of legislation," Mark Krikorian begins by informing the audience that "I, too, laud the bravery of the Hmong in defense of their homes and of freedom (...) [M]y own grand parents...survived the first genocide of this bloody century." However, in statements that reinforce Representative Smith's view, Krikorian states:

KRIKORIAN: Providing our former allies with safe haven in the face of an enemy extermination campaign would thus seem to have been the right thing to do. *The bill under consideration, however, carries this responsibility further.* It would eliminate two of the requirements, a minimum period of residency and a knowledge of the English language, which are intended to ensure that new citizens are *sufficiently rooted* and

invested in the United States to be entrusted with a permanent role in our future (U.S. Congress 1997).

Furthermore, Krikorian claims that “the process of minting new Americans” would be “further compromised” by “H.R. 371 and other measures like it” which, in his view, “[promotes] the further cheapening of United States citizenship” and “would also corrupt the immigration law with yet another special interest gimmick” (U.S. Congress 1997). Moreover, Krikorian reinforces his nativist sentiments with a claim against what he calls “affirmative action citizenship.” He claims:

National origins’ quotas were rightly eliminated from the Immigration law in 1965. The principle of a racially and ethnically neutral immigration policy in the national interest, however, cannot be upheld if the immigration law is shaped by the special pleading of the myriad ethnic groups that make up our population.²⁸⁵

Next, Krikorian tries to defend his ‘colorblind’ position by projecting inter-ethnic conflicts and speaking on behalf of imagined Others. According to Krikorian, “the inequity of such legislation [referring to the HVNA] could inflame ethnic grievances and conflict. Mexicans, after all, are the largest national origin group seeking naturalization, and they are expected to meet all the normal requirements, while other groups...would be admitted without meeting many requirements” (U.S. Congress 1997).

Krikorian, however, was not the only one to make claims about the “dilution of standards” and the “assaults on the integrity of the entire immigration and naturalization process.” Others who did not explicitly oppose providing an exemption to Hmong were concerned about the *future benefits* that the passing of the HVNA could have on imagined benefactors. According to Louis Crocetti, the Associate Commissioner for Examinations with

²⁸⁵ In the original Congressional transcript, the phrase “special, fleeting (ph)” appeared in the second sentence. The “ph” in the transcript indicates that a word or phrase was a phonetic spelling or attempted transcription. My further investigation reveals that the phrase Krikorian meant was “special pleading.” See Mark Krikorian, “Statement on H.R. 371: A bill to expedite the naturalization of aliens who served with special guerilla units in Laos,” Center for Immigration Studies, June 1997. Retrieved April 7, 2010 from: <http://www.cis.org/node/511>

the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), “The inclusion of H.R. 371 could set a precedent for other groups attempting to gain waiver categories who do not share the unique situation of the Hmong.”

Despite these oppositions and concerns, Hmong veterans also had strong and empathetic allies in Congress and elsewhere. In response to claims about the “cheapening of citizenship,” Representative Sonny Bono (R-CA) emphasizes mutual obligations and fair social exchanges.

BONO: I feel...that, you know, if it takes a little extra effort and you're talking about people that we had die for us and then the question of us graciously giving them a pittance – I'm not going to use a word like cheapen because I think we need a counter point to that. That's giving them a pittance for dying for us or getting blown up for us or getting killed for us.

It's out of the question. It's not fair in exchange. When this -- I think humanity survives on exchange. If you buy something, you get something. If you ask somebody to do something for you, you pay them. ... So I think *it is absolutely our ethical obligation to make sure that we pay people back when they do especially things of this nature for us*, so I think Mr. Watt's suggestion is very reasonable. It makes total sense. Work out the details (U.S. Congress 1997).

Reinforcing Rep. Bono's claims, Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) emphasizes the country's obligation to fulfill its promise to a loyal ally in order to remain an “honorable country”:

LOFGREN: *The more important question is the policy question of what do we owe, if anything, to this brave group of people?* When the CIA -- I mean, it's one of the most important stories from the Vietnam War and the most inspiring stories, is the bravery of this group of people who stood by us, under unbelievable circumstances, showing tremendous bravery and saving American soldiers and weighing in on us, never wavering from our side, and do we owe these people any kind of thanks? Do we owe them performance on the promises made to them at that time, and *my answer, as Mr. Bono has said, is yes, we do. We do if we are an honorable country. We should live up to the promises that we made back in those days* (U.S. Congress 1997).

While pointing to the bravery and loyalty of Hmong, these statements framed the matter as involving the *honor* of the country.

During the hearing, few persons used the word “veterans” to refer to Hmong soldiers who fought in the war. Susan Haigh, Chair of the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners in

Minnesota, was an exception. Chairwoman Haigh emphasized the academic success of the younger generations of Hmong in St. Paul and their role in restoring economic vitality to an “abandoned... commercial strip” in St. Paul. But, most of all, Haigh emphasized the sacrifices and “lasting and vital contribution” that the Hmong older generation made to America during the war “against the expansion of the Vietnamese communist in Laos.” Haigh points out that “the vast majority of the Hmong generation who grew up fighting in this war for American never became literate in their own language, let alone in the English language. And illiteracy is a daunting barrier for the older Hmong who want to become citizens” (U.S. Congress 1997). Putting “a human face [to] this story,” Haigh tells the stories of who Hmong persons—Pao Yang who was “recruited to fight on behalf of the U.S. when he was 13 years old” and Pia Thao who “is a widow of a Hmong soldier who was killed in the war” who, in the course of trying to escape, witnessed her 5 year-old son “shot as he was running to her arms” (U.S. Congress 1997).

The significance of these claims cannot be understated. They helped achieve what Snow and Benford (1988:199-202) call the three “core framing tasks” which are needed to achieve participant mobilization (i.e., consensus and collective action): “diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing.” Not only did these claims do the crucial work of diagnosing key aspects of the social problem (i.e., Hmong’s sacrifice during the war; their plight in the aftermath of the war; and their ongoing struggles, especially with English literacy, after resettlement), but they also provided a clear prognosis for, or who and what is to be done to alleviate the social problem (i.e., the U.S. should grant naturalization accommodations as a way to alleviate the conditions Hmong veterans face). In these claims, we can also observe the emergence of a motivational frame—that is, claims that elaborate the “rationale for action” in

order to urge or motivate action (Snow and Benford 1988:202). In this case, this rationale for action is framed in terms of national honor; that is, honor that can be had by making accommodations to an ally seeking U.S. citizenship. But I want to argue that, beyond these claims, two other kinds of claims were most crucial in mobilizing consensus and *motivating collective action* within Congress—action that eventually led to the passage of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000.

On one front are the claims of U.S. Representative Bruce Vento, which allude to the U.S.' militarization²⁸⁶ and the militarism of its foreign policy. These claims appeared as allusions in Vento's discussion of why it would be "entirely appropriate" to remain committed to "Hmong patriots" that the U.S. government, through its Central Intelligence Agency, covertly relied on during times of war and global uncertainty:

This legislation [H.R. 371], of course, makes attainment of citizenship possible for these men, women and children. They were in these special guerrilla units. And it follows in line with the fact that for those that dutifully had served in uniform for the U.S., they are, you know, even though not a citizen, are given naturalization for their service. We have reached beyond that to the Filipino scouts and other groups.

This does raise a question of whether or not there is some precedent for what we're doing here. Well, *I would just suggest to you that in the context in which the United States projects its military activity and the context in which we project and act today, it is entirely appropriate*, I might say, especially given the circumstances surrounding this.

The CIA, in fact, went out and hired these individuals, engaged them, encouraged them, made commitments to them, and we kept those commitments. We've kept those commitments. We really have. I mean -- and so I think that one more gesture here -- *this doesn't deal, incidentally, with veterans' benefits.* I keep referring these as the Hmong patriots. We don't want to confuse it. At some particular point, that may be an issue that's addressed beyond that (U.S. Congress 1997).

²⁸⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Third edition, 2002) defines "militarization" as "The action of making military in character or style; spec. transformation to military methods or status, esp. by the provision or expansion of military forces and other resources." It defines "militarism" as "military attitudes or ideals, esp. the belief or policy that a country should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote national interests. Also: a political condition characterized by the predominance of the military in government or administration or a reliance on military force in political or diplomatic matters."

The main thrust of Vento's claims is that a compelling reason (i.e., compelling government interest) to grant a public good (accommodations to citizenship) restricted to Hmong is to maximize the government's ability to count on current and future groups, whoever these may be, during military conflicts. After all, history has made clear that "non-American" allies, whether they are sovereign governments or exploited "tribal groups," have been crucial in America's wars. Furthermore, the years between 1990 and 1998 were turbulent years during which the U.S. military and their allies were engaged in military conflicts in the Middle East, namely in Kuwait and Iraq.²⁸⁷ Moreover, Vento reminds Congress that it is merely granting a "gesture" of support and not actually "veterans' benefits" to Hmong. In other words, Vento suggests as an incentive to Congress that the symbolic recognition of particular allies during particular periods would promote the U.S. national (read military) interest without compelling the government to promote substantive immigrant political incorporation.²⁸⁸

But the relevant claims are not limited to those that appealed to extent or perceived military processes and ideology. Representative Bruce Vento also drew on extant ideologies about national duty and honor to create moral sentiments (sympathy, merit and virtue) within Congress. The attempt to create moral sentiments is found in the following passages, in which Vento emphasized Hmong's suffering along with their "outstanding contributions":

But this is really, I think, *a matter of honor*. It's a matter of -- and as you [referring to Mr. Chairman] suggested, if we alleviate the welfare problem on this end and alleviate the language test because of other reasons, then I think it's a question of what can we do as a nation to recognize the contributions, *the outstanding contributions*, of the Hmong, for this period of history in terms of being an ally of the United States. After all, we had had tens of thousands of Hmong that actually fought side by side. *Twenty thousand of them lost their lives*. We had men, women and children. There are films, U.S. films, on news

²⁸⁷ Just months after the congressional hearing on the HVNA occurred, the crisis in the Middle East intensified; and in December of 1998, the U.S. and Britain were engaged in bombing campaigns against Iraq. This military campaign was known as "Operation Desert Fox," and occurred between December 16-19, 1998.

²⁸⁸ By substantive political incorporation, I mean that a group's interests are frequently articulated and well represented in policymaking.

reports which *showed 10 and 12-year-old children carrying around guns and rifles in Laos at that time that were on the evening news during the '60s and '70s.*

So I think that at the end of the course, the end of the Vietnam War, we lost that conflict. They fled to Thailand. They fled to the United States. A 100,000 Hmong left Laos for *fear of persecution, for fear of genocide.* It wasn't apparent, I suppose, then, in the aftermath of that Vietnam War, but *their contribution,* plus our role there, has led to the new global order and the *role of self-determination and democracy around the globe.*

But I think that you're right. They haven't passed an English language test or a civics test or they haven't done various things, but *they probably have passed the most important test, Mr. Chairman, and that is risking their lives for the values and beliefs that we revere as Americans in saving American lives* (U.S. Congress 1997).

These moral sentiments, I contend, were instrumental in motivating others within Congress to actually act on the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act. Three years later, during the May 2nd and May 18th 2000 Congressional hearings, several Congress members would reiterate Representative Vento's argument that Hmong have passed a more important test than the citizenship tests and as such, they deserve language accommodations in the naturalization law.

Finally, on May 23, 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 2000 and on May 26, 2000, President Clinton signed it into law.²⁸⁹ In the House of Representatives alone, the final bill (H.R. 371) had 108 co-sponsors in addition to U.S. Representative Bruce Vento. Of these 109 sponsors, 65 (60 percent) were affiliated with the Democratic Party while 44 (40 percent) were affiliated with the Republican Party. Forty-eight of the 109 sponsors were elected from California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Michigan—the top five states with the largest concentrations of Hmong Americans. In the Senate, there were 17 co-sponsors of S. 890 (the counterpart to H.R. 371) in addition to U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone who introduced the bill. Of the 18 sponsors, 14 were Democrats and four were Republicans. Six of the 18 sponsors were elected from the top four Hmong states (CA, MN, WI, NC). In some cases, both senators from the same state were co-sponsors:

²⁸⁹ Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-207, May 26, 2000 (114 Stat. 316).

Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein of California; Senators Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye of Hawaii; Senators Robert Kerry and Charles Hagel of Nebraska; and Senators Russell Feingold and Herbert Kohl of Wisconsin.

Hmong veterans' winning of the right to vote is remarkable considering that it took Filipino veterans of World War II over four decades of sustained struggle to finally win that same right. But perhaps it was because groups such as Filipino veterans and their state allies led the way that enabled Hmong veterans and their state allies to persist and eventually win the passage of a legislation. In any case, the right to vote, which the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 made possible for many foreign-born Hmong adults, cannot be taken for granted. As Amenta et al. (2002:72) point out,

[G]ains in democratization of state processes are among the most important that can be won through social movements and have the greatest systemic effects. Winning the right to vote or the protection of that right for low-income or other disfranchised groups increases the productivity of future collective action by such groups. The winning of such rights would increase the likelihood of gaining future pecuniary and other collective benefits through state action.

Mobilization from Below and the State's Compelling Interest

The lessons from these social movements are many but I want to highlight two things: 1) the necessity of mobilizing multiple kinds of social actors to *participate in various reinforcing political activities* over a sustained period of time and 2) the role that the military-service collective action frame played in mobilizing consensus and collective action. As we saw in Hmong Americans' movement to restore food stamp benefits, ordinary Hmong men and women, including veterans, participated in the year-long social movement by engaging in community meetings, filing appeals, telling their stories of war, dislocation and ongoing struggles, engaging in demonstrations, writing letters to newspapers, and working with the staff, law clerks and volunteers from several law firms. Ordinary Hmong men and women also committed suicide or

attempted suicide. These were tragic actions that neither valorization nor empathy can reverse. These actions speak to both the state's victimization of Hmong and Hmong's active struggles to participate in political processes in order to change policies and practices that impact their lives and life chances.

Far from displaying political apathy, hundreds of Hmong came together to speak out against the U.S. government's patterned practices of betrayal and historical amnesia. Against these practices, ordinary Hmong men and women presented physical, written and oral evidence of their experiences with war and violence, forced dislocation and poverty. Instead of silently accepting the state's political and economic exclusion, Hmong women and men sought information from and called upon the help of formal organizations inside and outside of their local communities. In the process, Hmong community members become these organizations' clients, rank-and-file members or volunteers, and/or partners in social movements.

Community activists such as Yee (Vaming) Xiong and Blong Lo helped to mobilize the Hmong community, organize mass protests and act as spokespersons and political brokers between these communities and other organizations or state officials in California. Activists such as Victor Hwang and Sally Kinoshita advocated for the Hmong communities of the Central Valley, convinced the Asian Law Caucus to invest resources toward these communities' struggles for benefits, and served as bridges between Hmong communities and formal organizations. The staff, law clerks, and volunteers of the Asian Law Caucus and the CCLS, in turn, worked tirelessly, investing invaluable resources and time to help inform and educate the community about policies and their implications, to prepare and represent clients during state hearings, to file and carry out individual and class action lawsuits, to mobilize the mass media and cultivate positive public opinion, and to activate influential third parties such as Lt. Gov.

Gray Davis to join in the collective struggle. The year-long efforts of the Asian Law Caucus and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) in grassroots mobilizing as well as in mobilizing support across multiple government agencies were crucial in getting the U.S. Congress and the President to provide a food stamp ineligibility exception for Hmong and highland Laotian veterans.

But in both the mobilization to restore benefits and to obtain accommodations to naturalization requirements, the strategic framing of social problems was an essential, dynamic process of the mobilization effort. By strategic framing, I am referring to strategies of framing a social problem such that corrective action is possible and likely to occur on that social problem. This possibility is increased when claims-makers accomplish all three “core framing tasks” that Snow and Benford (1988) specify: these are “diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing.”²⁹⁰ These three framing tasks are essentially ways or strategies that claims-makers use to try to successfully construct a “social problem” (Loseke 2003). In this context, a social problem refers to *claims that define* a putative condition as problematic and as having a particular kind of *social* cause along with a set of social consequences that require collective action to ameliorate, eradicate or change (Kitsuse and Spector 1973:415).

Within the social movement literature, the three core framing tasks are believed to affect two interrelated but analytically separate processes of mobilization: the mobilization of consensus and the mobilization of collective action (Snow and Benford 1988). While diagnostic and prognostic framing are necessary for mobilizing collective consensus on a social problem, motivational framing is necessary for corrective action to occur on that social problem

²⁹⁰ Admittedly, it is not possible to measure whether or to what extent a framing task has been accomplished—that is, it being successful in creating or achieving consensus among a particular group of people. Consensus can only be gauged indirectly by observing the number of social actors who contribute to or participate in the movement (Snow and Benford 1988:205).

(1988:202). Snow and Benford's main argument is that "variation in the success of participant mobilization, both within and across movements, depends upon the degree to which these three tasks are attended to. The more the three tasks are robust and richly developed and interconnected, the more successful the mobilization effort, *certeris paribus*" (1988:199). But the potential for framing to effect mobilization can also be constrained by ideology external to the social movement. As Snow and Benford point out,

Whatever the substance of any particular framing, its appeal and mobilizing potency are affected by several sets of constraints that are external to it. *One set concerns the internal structure of the larger belief-system or ideology with which the movement seeks to effect some form of alignment.* Another pertains to the extent to which the framing effort is relevant to and resonates within the lifeworld of potential participants (1988:205, emphasis added).

Recognizing that "individuals routinely hold numerous values that not only are arrayed hierarchically but also vary in terms of the intensity with which they are held," Snow and Benford (1988:206) suggest that "if the values or beliefs [that] the movement seeks to promote or defend are of low *hierarchical salience* within the larger belief system, the mobilizing potential is weakened considerably and the task of political education or consciousness raising becomes more central but difficult" (1988:205, emphasis added). I claim that the military service frame was able to invoke ideologies of high hierarchical salience.

The Military Service Frame

In both Hmong's movement to restore benefits and their movement to obtain naturalization accommodations, one collective action frame played an essential role. This frame is the Hmong military service frame (MSF, for short). The MSF was able to mobilize consensus among those capable of granting goals (i.e., Congress & the President) because it enabled the creation of a new, selective subject category that neither contradicted dominant ideologies about race nor challenged immigration policies. But, equally crucial, the MSF motivated collective

action by suggesting that a compelling national interest (political/military interest) was at stake. Given its compatibility with the dominant discourses on race/immigration and war/national security during that particular period, the military service frame helped “maximize the chances of success among those capable of granting goals” (Lipsky 1968:1144). Below, I reflect on the claims of the MSF and on the government’s categorization of Hmong veterans in order to discuss how race, immigration, war, and national security intersect and how social actors strategically used the MSF to mobilize consensus and motivate collective action.

As we have seen, the MSF emerged as part of Hmong’s mobilization against the effects of Welfare Reform. From the standpoint of many Hmong adults,²⁹¹ the MSF includes the following set of inter-related claims: (1) Hmong’s presence in the U.S. is a product of specific historical events, namely the U.S.’ military involvement in Vietnam and Laos. During the Second Indochina War, Laotian Hmong soldiers under General Vang Pao and the Royal Lao Army fought on the side of the United States and died in the tens of thousands protecting U.S. air and ground military forces. (2) When the U.S. lost the (undeclared) war with North Vietnam and pulled out, along with Hmong’s military elites, countless Hmong families and soldiers were left behind to be persecuted or killed by the communists. The more fortunate ones became prolonged political refugees or stateless subjects in Thailand with very limited legal protection.²⁹² (3) Being left behind was an act of great betrayal by the U.S. government because

²⁹¹ I gathered versions of these claims in the course of my observations, informal discussions, interactions, and interviews with ordinary Hmong persons, veterans, leaders, community activists, etc. These claims can also be found in Hmong music and poetry (folk ballads and songs). More recently, they are also found in protest slogans. The mass media also have helped to construct and/or report on some of these claims.

²⁹² Judging by the waves of Hmong immigration to the United States, most Hmong refugees stayed in the refugee camps for a decade or longer; the largest wave arrived in the U.S. after 1985. This is 10 years or greater since Hmong’s mass exodus out of Laos in 1975. During the mid-80s, but especially in the 1990s and 2000s, the Thai government treated many Hmong who crossed the border from Laos into Thailand as illegal immigrants rather than refugees. Deemed illegal immigrants, Hmong seeking refuge could not receive international aid or become Thai citizens; many were forcibly deported. Forced repatriation of Hmong became more prevalent after the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese Refugees, a policy that the U.S., Thailand, Laos, Vietnam,

the U.S. had promised Hmong that they would be taken care of should “we” (U.S. & Hmong) ever lose the war. (4) Because of Hmong soldiers’ and their families’ great sacrifice through military service to the U.S., Hmong refugees deserve legal protection, especially refuge, from the U.S. and they and their U.S.-children deserve to receive the full benefits that its citizenry receive.

During both the social movement for benefits and the movement for citizenship accommodations, mobilizers refined the MSF claims to emphasize the need to recognize the United States’ and Hmong’s joint participation in the secret war in Laos and in the broader American-Vietnam war. As such, mobilizers were directly calling attention to a highly unpopular chapter in U.S. history that the U.S. government has, since the war officially ended, tried to erase through institutionalized forms of forgetting.²⁹³ Arguably, the U.S. government was concerned about its image around the world, and renewed controversy over its past military involvement in Southeast Asia could affect this image. But calling attention to this dark chapter of U.S. history had a slim chance of sparking wide-spread controversy, and even if controversy were to occur, controversy by itself could not have been sufficient to get the government to act in Hmong’s favor. How, then, was it possible that the seemingly unique claims of the MSF were not only shown a level of deference in various public arenas such as the mass media and the court but actually responded to by the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. federal

and 66 other countries adopted in order to monitor and “screen” persons who are refugees from those who are “non-refugees” leaving their home countries in order to resettle the former and repatriate the latter category—in order, ultimately, to rid refugee camps of people and to close them down by 1995. For information on the CPA, see Robinson 2004.

²⁹³ By “institutionalized forms of forgetting,” I am referring to practices within formal institutions (schools, government agencies, etc.) that deliberately mischaracterize past human experiences or events; practices that involve ideological and/or selective distortions of history; simplification and/or monopolization of historical interpretations; consumption and reproduction of simplistic versions of history, etc.).

government during a period of increasing anti-immigrant hostilities, as indicated by practices and policies?²⁹⁴

I contend that the MSF enabled the creation of a new culturally, politically acceptable (read exclusive) subject category and appealed to national interests too important for the government to ignore. First, in the context of the U.S., the government subsumes Hmong under the racial category Asian. Being of one race or another has important implications for whether one is perceived as a victim or a perpetrator of a particular social problem: e.g., “illegal immigration,” “terrorism,” “reverse-discrimination,” etc. Secondly, the government, as is clear in its provision of food stamp exception for Hmong, identify Hmong as a “tribe.” Third, the government, despite providing Hmong with a language accommodation under the HVNA of 2000, never formally recognized Hmong as “veterans” or as an “ally.” Instead, the U.S. considers Hmong merely as aliens “who served with a special guerrilla unit operating from a base in Laos in support of the United States.” Officially then, the U.S. created a new subject category: permanent resident “aliens” or “tribe” of a “special guerrilla unit” who supported the U.S. during a strictly defined place and time.

So categorized, Hmong subjects could be temporarily distinguished from subjects in the racialized category of “illegal immigrants” and from other “ethnic” immigrants, who, in the words of an INS official, “do not share the unique situation of the Hmong”²⁹⁵ and presumably deserve to be excluded by the government. In the end, providing a food stamp exception for Hmong did not fundamentally change the dominant ideology about who is a proper or deserving

²⁹⁴ In 1994, the voting majority in California passed California’s Proposition 187, the so-called “Save Our State” (SOS) initiative, which was intended to stop undocumented immigration by barring undocumented migrants from receiving various social services.

²⁹⁵ Remark of Louis Crocetti, the Associate Commissioner for Examinations with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) during the 1997 congressional hearing on the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 1997.

immigrant or the institutional practices of exclusion and inclusion. For, in practice, the “proper and deserving” immigrant is given token recognition so as to justify the government’s exclusion of the criminalized, racialized immigrant. Being at once a legally admitted “refugee” and a member of the “Asian race,” Hmong could be considered different and “unique” from the subject category of “illegal immigrant”—the category that the government associates with a host of disparate social problems. In truth, Hmong are hardly unique as a group that has provided military service to the U.S., or as one that has been exploited by it.

Secondly, the government had a compelling interest to grant its former Hmong “allies” some limited exceptions. Doing so promoted its national interests which, during that period, included imminent U.S. military involvement in Middle East Asia and the effort to improve market and political relations in Southeast Asia. U.S. Representative Bruce Vento needed to remind Congress only once about this compelling government interest. Paralleling the covert practices of war, in 1998 and 2000, the government granted benefit and naturalization exceptions to an ally without ever making war and its supposed correlates—democracy, nation-state sovereignty and national allegiance (which formal citizenship represents)—the focus of attention. The government, through its temporarily valorization of Hmong’s military service, chose to frame its action in terms of helping Hmong to “become full participants in American society”²⁹⁶ and in terms of “national honor.” To be sure, Hmong veterans were only granted an English language waiver, not automatic naturalization. But the message that the government

²⁹⁶ President Clinton, in his statement on signing the HVNA of 2000, states in part, “They work, pay taxes, and have raised families and made America their home. However, some Hmong[sic] seeking to become American citizens have faced great difficulty meeting the requirements for naturalization *for reasons associated with the unique circumstances of the Hmong culture*. Until recently, the Hmong people had no written language. Without this experience, learning English, a requirement of naturalization, has been much more difficult for some Hmong[sic]. This requirement has prevented many Hmong[sic] from becoming full participants in American society” (emphasis added). See: William J. Clinton: “Statement on Signing the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 2000,” May 26, 2000. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58559>.

sends is that a waiver of the English language requirement to an unassimilated, preliterate people was an exceptional gesture of support and inclusion into the nation.

Indeed, the U.S., for over two centuries now, has had a tendency to recruit or draft other colonized people, non-Americans, “non-whites,” and non-citizens into its covert and overt military forces but hardly absorbs them beyond that regime. The recruitment and absorption of the poor and racial minorities into the military through *promises*²⁹⁷ of college opportunities²⁹⁸ and citizenship reinforces the idea that it is normal for these categories of people to be “incorporated” into the lower rungs of the military, but abnormal for them to expect the same level of incorporation into the higher rungs of the same institution or into any other advantageous arena of the three branches of government. The government’s broken promises to its own veterans and the generations of survivors that returned home from war only to enter prolonged or permanent poverty, homelessness and powerlessness should give us pause (Herbold 1994; Rosenheck, Frisman, and Chung 1994; Applewhite 1997).

This, of course, is not to say that serving one’s country is not honorable or should be avoided. Nor is it to say that non-citizens joining the military ought not to be granted citizenship. Military service is honorable and deserve, at the minimum, citizenship and benefits during and after service. But the problem is that the U.S. government, in its practice of “[multiplying] subject categories” and assigning differential rights and consequences to these subject categories (Nguyen-Vo 2005:163), maintains political inequality. The government and its institutions maintain multiple forms of what Charles Tilly (1998:6) calls “durable inequality”—those “long-lasting, systematic inequalities in life chances [associated with]

²⁹⁷ Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (June 22, 1994), also known as the “G.I. Bill of Rights” for service members. See: <http://www.operationpromiseforservicemembers.com/>

²⁹⁸ Herbold (1994) found that the GI Bill did not result in greater educational opportunities for poor blacks and that the racial segregation in higher education at that time made it impossible for a huge proportion of blacks to earn a college degree.

different socially defined categories of persons.” These socially defined, “distinctly bounded pairs such as female/male, . . . , citizen/foreigner,” non-white/white, terrorist/non-terrorist, etc., operate across multiple institutions as part of the institutional practices of social closure that maintain “[categorical] inequalities that last from one social interaction to the next [and] persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories” (Tilly 1998:6).

The government’s creation of new subject categories is pervasive. Such practice is tied, not to any particular objective condition, but to the government’s construction of new social problems. These social problem claims, in turn, are intertwined with the government’s shifting market and political relations around the world. A clear example of this is the government’s treatment of Hmong refugees and former refugees as terrorists in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. In just one year following the passage of the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000, federal policies such as the U.S.A. Patriot Act of 2001 and the REAL ID Act of 2005 conveniently treated Hmong (and other groups of) political refugees as *terrorists* for having provided “material support” to “terrorist groups” or “terrorist organizations” (Schoenholtz and Hojaiban 2008).²⁹⁹ Deemed terrorists, these refugee groups were denied admission to the U.S. and thousands of naturalization applications submitted by former refugees were placed on hold (Schoenholtz and Hojaiban 2008).³⁰⁰

However, the treatment of Hmong as terrorists cannot be understood merely within the context of changed domestic policies following the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York. Rather, it must be understood within the broader context of the U.S.’ changed market and

²⁹⁹ The U.S. Patriot Act (Public Law 107-56 (115 Stat. 272)) became law on October 26, 2001. The full name of the USA PATRIOT Act is “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001”. The U.S. REAL ID Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-13, Division B (119 Stat. 231)), became law on May 11, 2005.

³⁰⁰ As Schoenholtz and Hojaiban (2008:3) point out, “The material support bar, as expanded by the USA Patriot Act and the REAL ID Act and applied by DHS, uses events associated with the very basis of refugee claims—persecution by an armed group—to deny admission to refugees.”

political relations with the governments of the Lao PDR³⁰¹ and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, beginning *at least in the mid-1990s*, if not earlier.³⁰² I contend that Hmong's classification³⁰³ as terrorists was a direct result of the U.S.' changed relations (from hostile to peaceful) with Lao PDR since the Second Indochina War. Hmong's classification and treatment as terrorists was possible because the U.S. government defined the Lao PDR as a country with which it is at peace and because the Patriot Act defined terrorism activity so broadly.³⁰⁴ It would require yet another collective struggle to eventually get the U.S. government to pass specific legislation that exempts Hmong refugees who "do not pose a threat to the U.S." from the terrorist list.³⁰⁵

Conclusion

I claim that it was the willingness of ordinary Hmong persons to engage in various political activities (demonstrations, hearings, law suits, testimonies) and the roles that they, activists and law organizations played in strategically framing Hmong's military-service claims

³⁰¹ In 1997, the U.S. initiated talks for Normal Trade Relations with Laos. According to the U.S. Department of State, "in December 2004, President George W. Bush signed into law a bill extending normal trade relations to Laos; in February 2005, a Bilateral Trade Agreement between the United States and Laos entered into force." U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Background Note: Laos." June 6, 2011. Retrieved October 1, 2011 from: <http://m.state.gov/md2770.htm>

³⁰² In 1995, full diplomatic relations were restored between the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. November 2000, former president Bill Clinton and the First Lady visited Vietnam during a three-day official visit. In December 2001, the U.S. and Vietnam "implement[ed] a trade agreement which normaliz[ed] the trade status between them." Source: BBC News, "Timeline: Vietnam," *BBC News*, October 1, 2011. Retrieved October 1, 2011 from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1243686.stm

³⁰³ To clarify, Hmong refugees were never explicitly identified in either of the Patriot Act or the REAL ID Act. However, these Acts' definition of "terrorism activity" resulted in Hmong refugees' classification and treatment as terrorists.

³⁰⁴ The Patriot Act defines terrorism activity as "activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the U.S. *or of any state*" (emphasis added). This definition is the same whether the activity is considered "domestic" or "international" terrorism activity. 18 USC Chapter 113B §2331.

³⁰⁵ On December 26, 2007, the passing of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-161, December 26, 2007 (121 Stat. 1844)), waived Hmong refugees and other groups from the category of "terrorists" or "terrorist organizations." These other groups, mostly from Burma, include the "Karen National Union/Karen Liberation Army, the Chin National Front/Chin National Army, the Chin National League for Democracy, the Kayan New Land Party, the Arakan Liberation Party, the Mustangs, the Alzados, the Karenni National Progressive Party, and groups affiliated with the Montagnards." See also: Tsia Xiong, "Bush Signs Law Excluding Hmong from Patriot Act," *AsianWeek*, January 9, 2008.

and activating influential third parties (the mass media, political actors, and government agencies) to join the political arena that led eventually to the positive outcome of the social movement. The military service frame emerged out of ordinary Hmong men and women's stories/testimonies during their struggle against politically motivated economic exclusion. But activists, formal organizations and state allies elaborated upon the military service frame in order to mobilize consensus and motivate collective action.

The military service frame was effective in bringing out the intended outcomes of the social movements because it enabled mobilizers and their target (the federal government) to carve out a new social category that the latter deemed culturally, politically acceptable. This subject category not only posed no significant threat to the government's anti-immigrant policies but it was aligned with dominant discourses on assimilation and national security interests. Granting limited exceptions to Hmong veterans served the government's interest as much as if not more than it served Hmong's.

How successful might the military service frame be if it is used to pursue some other goal related to political inclusion? In the next chapter, I examine how an educated segment of the Hmong American community of Fresno, California used the military service frame during a period of social crisis (teenage suicides) to try to convince the California State Legislature to implement an education bill to encourage the teaching of Hmong history in the social sciences curriculum of the state's public schools. Will this segment follow symbols and claims similar to those used in the movements against Welfare Reform and for U.S. citizenship?

Chapter 6: Movement to Incorporate Hmong History

In this chapter, I examine a case of successful collective mobilization within the Hmong American community. In the sections that follow, I begin by examining the sequence of events that led to the emergence of a socially defined crisis/social problem. Next, I describe how Hmong professionals and ordinary persons, local and federal governments, and the mass media jointly constructed and sought legitimation for or legitimated the social problem. Then I analyze the intent of Assembly Bill 78 and the role that diverse social actors and organizations played in mobilizing collective consensus and collective action. I pay particular attention to mobilizers' use of the military service frame as a means to maximize the impact of influential third parties on the California State Legislature. Finally, I discuss the specific processes of mobilization that were crucial in getting Assembly Bill 78 (hereinafter AB 78) passed into law on July 10, 2003.

I argue that the mobilization for AB 78 was effective because several crucial processes took place. First, a condition (teenage suicides), once it became *defined* and *legitimated* as a "crisis" (read social problem) by insiders as well as influential outsiders, created the crucial "cultural opportunity" for a segment within the Hmong American community to mobilize collective consensus and action around the crisis/problem. Secondly, well-integrated ethnic professionals and activists, along with a sympathetic state ally, were able to use the legitimated social problem and the military service frame³⁰⁶ to effectively mobilize ethnic and non-ethnic community support for Assembly Bill 78. Through explicit and strategic use of the military-service frame, mobilizers were able to eventually convince the California State Legislature and Governor Gray Davis to pass AB 78, which "encourages" the public instruction "on the Vietnam war, including the Secret War in Laos, and the role of Southeast Asians in that war." In this

³⁰⁶ I discuss this military service frame in greater detail in the preceding chapter on Hmong Americans' protests against federal Welfare Reform and in support of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act.

case, successful mobilization rested on three crucial social mechanisms: the construction and legitimation of a social problem, the activation of influential third parties, and the use of non-threatening collective action frames ('cultural collision' and military service) to make claims upon the state.

Teen Suicides in Fresno, California and the Community's Response

Between September 1998 and 2002, eight Hmong American teens in Fresno, California committed suicide, with guns or by hanging, drowning, or poisoning themselves. During this four year period, at least three Hmong teens unsuccessfully committed suicide and over 20 Hmong students were referred by teachers and counselors to the Fresno Unified School District's ad hoc suicide prevention program.³⁰⁷ Some of the young people who killed themselves were born in Thailand refugee camps but immigrated with their parents at a young age and grew up in the United States. The ages of the eight deceased individuals ranged from 15 to 17 years old and most were enrolled in high school during the time of their deaths. Though the Hmong population was just three percent of the county's population, the Hmong teen suicides made up about half of all teen suicides (individuals age 13-17) in Fresno County during that four year period.

The causes and circumstances of the Hmong teen suicides in Fresno are complex and beyond the scope of this chapter. What is clear is that, following these tragic events, Fresno school officials, the Hmong American community and local and federal health department officials responded in a number of ways, including defining the teenage suicides as a cultural *crisis*. Regarding this crisis as a serious social problem, officials sought intervention through schools and mental health departments.

³⁰⁷ Anne Dudley Ellis, "Lost in America," *Fresno Bee*, August 11, 2002.

The U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, for instance, took notice of the Hmong teenage suicides and decided to take action. In an official state letter, the Office of Refugee Resettlement writes,

To prevent further tragedies and to develop a plan of action for suicide prevention, a team composed of staff from the ORR funded Refugee Mental Health Program (RMHP), staff from Substance Abuse and Health Services Administration's Youth Violence and Suicide Prevention Programs, and a Hmong mental health professional from California State University in Sacramento, conducted a limited assessment of the current status and needs of the Hmong teen population. In October 2002 the team spent two days meeting with members of the Hmong refugee community (leaders and youth), Hmong service provider agencies, and school district personnel to learn more about the mental health *needs* of the Hmong youth and to learn more about the type of suicide prevention efforts that were in place in the community (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2002).

As a result of this meeting, the team made a number of recommendations to the Fresno community about how to “help reduce suicide risk factors and enhance protective factors, as well as to promote the emotional well-being of members of the Hmong community.” Three of the several recommendations that the ORR made were that the Fresno community ought to “leverage resources and funding to support training programs in the area of intergenerational and family management and conflict resolution”; “support creative approaches to celebrating Hmong cultural traditions, and using comedy and entertainment to bring understanding to the intergenerational conflicts and other problems of Hmong youth”; and “develop programs for out-of-school youth (...) [and that] school gang prevention and intervention programs should be considered for ‘vulnerable’ youth” (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2002). A fourth recommendation was to “fund at least a part time position for a Hmong Suicide Prevention Task Force coordinator.” This Hmong Suicide Prevention Task Force was formed by a group of “alumni and faculty of a master’s degree program in social work (...) to provide preventative counseling services for Hmong adolescents” (Hardina, Yamaguchi, Moua, Yang, and Moua 2003).

This organized intervention effort was tied in many ways to local officials' diagnosis or collective definition of the underlying causes of this social problem (teenage suicides) and what action ought to be taken to alleviate the problem. Local officials and agencies working with the Hmong community in Fresno as well as the mainstream news media had similar understandings or assumptions about the putative social reality that produced this social problem. As Jesilow and Xiong (2007:1) point out, officials and the media constructed the "spate of suicides by Hmong teenagers in one urban community as an outgrowth of problems brought about by the Hmong immigration to the United States. The clash between Hmong and American cultures was fingered by those favoring change as the cause of the suicides." Consequently, "other explanations were ignored" (2007:1). Nevertheless, the "suicides were depicted in newspaper accounts and elsewhere as a problem that needed addressing and identified the school district and mental health facilities as the appropriate institutions to deal with the problem" (2007:1-2). But in their attempts to deal with the problem, as Jesilow and Xiong point out, the news media "associat[ed] [suicides]...with Hmong's status as immigrants in order to convince the Hmong that they needed to acculturate, in particular to accept and utilize mental health facilities" (2007:2).

The Role of the Mass Media

The title of a series of news articles by the *Fresno Bee* begins to suggest the media's and public authorities' rationale for why accepting and using mental health facilities was presumed as the appropriate intervention. In a series titled "Lost in America," *Fresno Bee* writer Anne Ellis, 39, and photographer, Diana Baldrice, 46, poignantly retell the circumstances that preceded and followed the suicides of the eight Hmong teenagers.³⁰⁸ This series contained about 13 articles, all written by Ellis. Of these articles, eight provided snapshots of the suicide victims

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

and the reactions of their family members, one article covered the “teen challenges” of a Hmong young woman (not one of the suicide victims), while the rest covered the Fresno Unified School District’s intervention in the “Crisis,” “How to Get Help,” and “Breaking the Silence.”³⁰⁹

The journalist, however, was not simply writing to describe the lives of the suicide victims. Ellis’ tone and remarks suggest that she was critical of a number of things: (1) the slow response of the “bureaucratic” county health department to the suicides, (2) the lack of “grants” to support mental health intervention work; but, most critically, of (3) the Hmong community itself and their leaders who presumably “offer[red] no contributions” to help. This is demonstrated by the following paragraphs, in which Ellis compares the “wisdom” of the Hmong in Fresno to those of St. Paul, Minnesota:

St. Paul, Minn., has responded *more logically and aggressively to Hmong mental-health issues*. The area has the nation’s largest Hmong population. Long ago, the Hmong leadership *recognized the need for good mental-health care*, and Hmong leaders assembled a department with four mental health professionals, five drug-and-alcohol counselors and more clients than it can handle. They are funded by grants and private health insurance. / Unfortunately, the wisdom from Minnesota has not travelled to the Hmong community here. Even now, some Hmong community leaders are openly criticizing people who are helping, yet offer no contributions of their own (emphasis added).³¹⁰

According to media then, teenage suicides was not the only social problem that needed mental health intervention. The very organization and cultural values (or perceived lack) of the Hmong community and the actions (or perceived inactions) of their leaders were also presumed social problems in and of themselves that needed outside intervention. These negative assumptions and attitudes about “the Hmong community” (referred to by the news as if it were a monolithic entity) are further demonstrated in the text by the *Fresno Bee* writer.

There are underlying causes for the suicides that also can be mitigated by *the community*. English, gender, equity, conflict resolution, communication are all skills and values that

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

can be learned, making homes more harmonious and healthy for children. / The Hmong parents have great hopes for their children, and many have values that serve the community well. . . . Other traditions such as arranged marriage, parental control, religion, create a *monumental cultural collision* for young people raised in the United States, which *values [sic] personal freedom above all*. / Whatever the underlying cause, *we know* that eight young people *were crushed by the pull of two cultures* (emphasis added).³¹¹

Even though the media appear to concede that there could be some other “underlying cause” of teenage suicide, they resolutely assert that “a monumental cultural collision” harmed the teenagers who eventually took their lives.

Whereas the media portray the United States “culture” as one that “values personal freedom above all,” they portray Hmong culture as flawed and opposite to American culture in almost every respect: from language to gender to communication skills to values and even, learning ability. Although the media emphasized “cultural clash,” and therefore appeared to implicate “American culture” as one of the two causes, this does not sufficiently describe what the media actually did. I argue that what the media actually did was to contrast a presumed monolithic Hmong culture with a presumed monolithic American culture in order to paint the former as ignorant and inferior to the latter. Relying on this myth of inferiority, the media placed the blame exclusively on Hmong culture and individuals within this culture. Hmong culture, rather than American culture, was treated as the suspect and more precisely, the culprit of “cultural collision.” This myth of cultural inferiority and subjugation of Hmong communities, of course, can also be found far and beyond the covers of a single newspaper.³¹² Since at least the 1980s, the American mainstream media has tended to homogenize, de-historicize, and exclude Hmong from American society in order to blame Hmong individuals and “Hmong culture” (1) for presumably causing a whole host of disparate social problems (from crime to gangs; to

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Y. S. Xiong, unpublished manuscript, “Racialization of Hmong in the American Media, 1980s to 2007.” Department of Sociology, UCLA.

teenage marriages, welfare use, male dominance, health issues and diseases, etc.), and (2) for presumably draining under-funded resources from the larger community.³¹³

In spite of this, activists within Hmong American communities often must still utilize or appropriate the dominant vocabulary and ideology (of cultural collision), in order to take action against *these* ideologies and other structurally reproduced social problems. One way that individuals in the Hmong American community responded to the teenage suicides in Fresno was to frame the issues in terms of a generational gap between Hmong parents and children. They employed this dominant narrative in order to make a request upon the state to formally include culturally relevant pedagogy in California's public schools.³¹⁴ But they also made use of another collective action frame: the military-service frame. We now turn to Hmong's request upon the state and the complex processes that followed it.

Introduction of California Assembly Bill 78 and the Main Stakeholders

In mid-2002, Doua Vu, who is Hmong and a resident of Fresno, proposed to Assembly Member Sarah Reyes (District 31, covering Fresno, Selma, and surrounding areas), the idea of a bill that sought to "improve the lives of Hmong children" by helping them know more about Hmong's courage and experiences during the Secret War in Laos, their history, and their heritage. The Fresno Unified School District described Vu as "a resource specialist with the State and Federal Programs Title III Office," who "saw a need for Southeast Asian students to understand their history and the reason they are living in the United States. She determined that low self-esteem stemming from a lack of a sense of belonging may have contributed to a

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ To Hmong activists, ethnic knowledge and history constitutes important components of this culturally relevant pedagogy. However, Hmong, like many other immigrant groups before them, know that California has a long history of systematically excluding, discriminating and sanctioning violence against immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities.

problem with teen suicide in the Southeast Asian Community.”³¹⁵ Vu and her associates’ idea would later be formally introduced, on December 23, 2002, in the California State Legislature as Assembly Bill 78 (hereinafter AB 78).³¹⁶ Assembly Bill 78 would go on to involve several co-authors, undergo at least three major amendments, and pass several rounds of voting in the Assembly and Senate floors before it was signed into law by Governor Gray Davis on July 10, 2003.³¹⁷

The State Sponsors of AB 78

In consultation with Doua Vu and the Fresno-based Hmong Community Education Task Force, Assembly Member Sarah Reyes drafted and introduced Assembly Bill 78 in the State Assembly on December 23, 2002. During the half-year-long life course of AB 78, a few other state legislators would also sign on to co-sponsor it. These include then-Assembly Member Lou Correa of the 69th district of the California State Assembly (cities within Orange County); Assembly Member Ken Maddox of the 68th district (cities within Orange County); and Assembly Member Steven Samuelian of the 29th district (cities within Fresno and Madera Counties).³¹⁸

The Initial Content of AB 78

The main content of AB 78, as originally introduced by Assembly Member Reyes (no co-authors at the time) on December 23, 2002, read as follows:

The Legislature encourages instruction in the area of social sciences, as required pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51220, which may include instruction on the Vietnam War and the role of the **Hmong** people in that war. The Legislature encourages that this instruction include, but not be limited to, a component drawn from personal testimony, especially in the form of oral or video history of **Hmong** people who were involved in the Vietnam War and those men and women who contributed to the war effort on the

³¹⁵ Fresno Unified School District website. Retrieved May 1, 2009, from: <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/stafed/titleiii/page/ab78.htm>

³¹⁶ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information, Complete Bill History, Bill Number A.B. No. 78 (Reyes). Retrieved September 2010 online: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/>

³¹⁷ Assembly Bill 78, July 10, 2003 (Chapter 44, Statutes of 2003).

³¹⁸ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Legislature, 2003-04 Regular Session. Assembly Bill No. 78. Amended in Assembly June 17, 2003.

homefront. The oral histories used as a part of the instruction regarding the role of the **Hmong** people in the Vietnam War shall exemplify the personal sacrifice and courage of the wide range of ordinary citizens who were called upon to participate and provide intelligence for the United States. The oral histories shall contain the views and comments of their subjects regarding the reasons for **Hmong** participation in the war. These oral histories shall also solicit comments from their subjects regarding the aftermath of the war and the immigration of the **Hmong** people to the United States (bolded emphasis mine).³¹⁹

To get a better sense of AB 78's original intent, let us examine three aspects of this bill as it was originally introduced (hereinafter referred to as "AB 78, 1st version"): its similarity to existing statutes, its most immediate stakeholders (or specific beneficiary group), and its proposed method of implementation.

The language of AB 78 (1st ver.) was quite similar to an earlier California bill, Assembly Bill 2709, which was introduced on February 22, 2002 by Assembly Member Mark Wyland.³²⁰ AB 2709 was signed by the Governor on September 20, 2002 and became Chapter 739 (incorporated in the California Education Code) just a few months prior to AB 78's introduction. Specifically, Chapter 739 mandated the "instruction on World War II and the American role in that war." Its main content read as follows:

Instruction in the area of social sciences, as required pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51220, *shall* include instruction on World War II and the American role in that war. The Legislature encourages that this instruction include, but not be limited to, a component drawn from personal testimony, especially in the form of oral or video history, if available, of American soldiers who were involved in World War II and those men and women who contributed to the war effort on the homefront. The oral histories used as part of the instruction regarding World War II shall exemplify the personal sacrifice and courage of the wide range of ordinary citizens who were called upon to participate. The oral histories shall contain the views and comments of their subjects regarding the reasons for American participation in the war and the actions taken to end the war in the Pacific. These oral histories shall also solicit comments from their subjects

³¹⁹ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information, "Bill Number: AB 78 Introduced Bill Text." Online access: ftp://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0051-0100/ab_78_bill_20021223_introduced.html

³²⁰ Assembly Wyland represented District 74, which included Escondido and other areas of San Diego County.

regarding the aftermath of the war in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (emphasis mine).³²¹

Although AB 78 (1st ver.) and AB 2709 shared similar language, two important distinctions exist between them. First, whereas AB 2709 contained mandatory language, AB 78 did not. Second, whereas AB 2709 did not identify any specific ethnic group, AB 78 (1st ver.) identified a specific ethnic group: Hmong.³²²

The Most Proximate Beneficiaries

Based on the background of the supporters and the goal of AB 78 (1st ver.), it is clear that the most proximate beneficiaries of the bill were, at the time of its introduction, Hmong Americans of California and their school-age children in the state's public schools. As we shall discuss in further detail, Hmong American individuals and organizations were also the bill's main supporters from the time it was introduced in December 2002 to the time it became law in July 2003. Assemblywomen Sarah Reyes and the Assembly Members who formally co-authored AB 78 were stakeholders and supporters. As representatives of their respective districts, which are comprised of significant populations of Southeast Asian former refugees and their children, these elected officials took the opportunity to support the bill. Because AB 78 did not require

³²¹ On June 19, 2003 (less than a month before AB 78 became a statute), the language of Chapter 739 was modified by AB 1537, which replaced the first occurrence of the word "shall" in the original statute with "may." California Education Code, §51221.3.

³²² In retrospect, it is unclear whether AB 78 (1st ver.) would have had a greater or lesser chance of passing into law, given its specific identification of "Hmong people." One could speculate that because AB 78 merely "encouraged" rather than "mandated" instruction in 7-12 social science classrooms, it may have gained approval regardless of whether it identified "Hmong people" or "Southeast Asian." After all, identifying "Southeast Asian" is still much more specific than identifying no group at all—as was true in the case of AB 2709. However, one could also argue the opposite: that the label "Southeast Asian" is so broad—like the label "Vietnam War"—that no group can actually receive "political recognition" from it. Nevertheless, if we examine the on-the-ground initial outcomes of post-Chapter 44, especially the curricula-designing efforts by and for Southeast Asian academics and school administrators in Long Beach—especially Vietnamese, and later, Cambodians, Laotians and Hmong—then, we could say that, at least in the minds of supporters and politicians, the label "Southeast Asian" was still quite specific. That is, to outsiders as well as insiders, that label refers to "Southeast Asian groups on the side of the U.S.—that is, visible U.S. allies such as South Vietnamese, CIA-recruited Laotians/Hmong, etc." rather than to all possible Southeast Asian participants of the American-Vietnam War. Taken this way, the larger "hidden" agenda of California Education Code—with respect to both AB 78 and AB 2709—is a perspective that (symbolically) privileges the experiences of U.S. allied forces over those of their enemy.

that districts or schools dedicate any extra resources, whether time or money, to implement the bill, it neither created costs for nor provided funding to school districts or schools. As such, school districts and schools were never real stakeholders. As we shall discuss later on in this chapter, as AB 78 underwent critical revisions, the set of stakeholders also changed: that is, from just Hmong to “Hmong and Southeast Asians” to simply “Southeast Asians.”

As others have pointed out, the language of AB 78 was “carefully crafted to ensure its support in a time of budget shortfall.”³²³ Regarding its implementation, AB 78 (the initial version as well as subsequent versions) “encouraged” but did not mandate that social science classrooms provide instruction about the Vietnam war or about Hmong’s role in the war. Because the legislature merely encouraged the instruction, it also provided no funds that could ensure any type of instruction stated in AB 78. As such, schools and classrooms have the freedom to teach as much or as little about this history as they desired. If school districts chose to include the instruction, they would do so on a voluntary basis and “materials used to comply with this section shall be part of normal curriculum materials purchased by school districts in their normal course of business and purchasing cycles.”³²⁴

AB 78 (1st ver.), however, did make specific suggestions about the types of information to include in classroom instruction about Hmong history. For example, AB 78 suggested that, if and when social science classrooms choose to give instruction about Hmong history, they should try to include individuals’ oral testimonies or video histories. Implicit in this was the recognition that a large part of Hmong history, including the history of their participation in the Secret War

³²³ KimOanh Nguyen-Lam. (no date). “Journey From the Fall.” Curriculum Development Committee. Center for Language Minority Education and Research, College of Education, California State University, Long Beach. Retrieved March 15, 2005: http://www.ocapica.org/documents/JFTF_Curriculum.pdf

³²⁴ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information, “Bill Number: AB 78 Chaptered, Bill Text.” Retrieved June 1, 2010 from: http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_0051-0100/ab_78_bill_20030710_chaptered.html

in Laos and their subsequent forced migration, remains in unwritten form. Furthermore, AB 78 never specified whether the testimonials from guest speakers, if and when they took place in classrooms, ought to be conducted in any particular language or dialect other than English. Given California's strong emphasis on the use of only English in public schools, it was reasonable to assume that all instructions and guest speaker presentations would be conducted in English.

The Bill's Intent and Potential Significance

Based on the above discussion, AB 78's (1st ver.) intent appeared to be to try to create greater public awareness about the role that Hmong played in the American-Vietnam War and Hmong's reasons for immigrating to the United States. Implicit in this was the recognition that most persons, insiders as well as outsiders, are unfamiliar with the Secret War in Laos, about Hmong's (and other groups') military assistance to the U.S. military during the American-Vietnam War, or about the aftermath and consequences of that war. Given this lack of awareness among the general public, some in the public sometimes perceive Hmong and other refugees to be an immigrant group (read economic migrants), rather than as political refugees forced to flee from homeland due to war and persecution. Such misinterpretations, combined with nativist sentiments, stereotype Hmong and other Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian) refugees as people who do not make any contributions to the U.S. and therefore, as undeserving of government assistance.

Given the condition under which AB 78 came to be introduced (i.e., the tragedies of disproportionate Hmong teenage suicides in Fresno), it seemed that part of the bill's intent was also to encourage teachers to incorporate the experiences of Hmong elders in school classrooms. One of the arguments in support of the bill was that, "although many Hmong and other Southeast

Asians have become successful citizens in the U.S., many face discrimination. Including in social sciences classes the sacrifices the Hmong and other Southeast Asians made for the U.S. military may help American pupils understand these people, lessen this discrimination, and help others recognize them as contributing members of society.”³²⁵ Assembly Member Sarah Reyes was quoted as stating, “What I’m most excited about this bill is that it will give Hmong children a chance to know how important their history is to this country.”³²⁶

Although AB 78 did not mandate instruction, it was a unique and significant legislation in at least two respects. First, besides the federal legislation, Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000,³²⁷ California’s AB 78 was, at the time of its introduction, the only other state-sponsored bill in the United States that would have recognized the role of Hmong veterans in the Secret War of Laos. Both legislations invoked the factual claim of Hmong’s military service to the United States and requested that the American government recognize this historic relationship.³²⁸ Secondly, just as the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act required the combined efforts of Hmong individuals, state allies and organizations such as the Lao Veterans of America, Inc., AB 78 emerged out of the efforts of Hmong women and men community activists, including Hmong college students. While the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act provided tangible opportunities for Hmong and Laotian veterans and widowed spouses of veterans to obtain U.S. citizenship, AB 78 represented an important step toward including

³²⁵ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Legislature, 2003-04 Regular Session. Assembly Bill No. 78. Assembly Committee on Education Hearing, March 19, 2003.

³²⁶ The Associated Press, "News in Brief from the San Joaquin Valley," *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*, January 7, 2003.

³²⁷ Officially known as Public Law 106-207. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, “The Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000, which became law on May 26, 2000, provides an exemption from the English language requirement and special consideration for civics testing for certain refugees from Laos applying for naturalization. This benefit is limited to no more than 45,000 eligible refugees from Laos who were admitted to the United States as refugees from Laos pursuant to Section 207 of the INS.” Online access: <http://www.ailec.com/publicaffairs/factsheets/Hmong.htm>

³²⁸ I discussed this military-service frame in the previous chapter on Hmong American protest events, 1980-2010.

Hmong American experiences within California's public schools. As such, both legislations encouraged Hmong adults and young people to become more politically incorporated into American society.

Mobilizing Support for AB 78

The effort to mobilize support for Assembly Bill 78 occurred early on. About a week after introducing AB 78, Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes held a public news conference about the bill at the Fresno Fairgrounds, where the Hmong International New Year celebration was also taking place.³²⁹ Between late December and early January of each year, the Fresno-based Hmong International New Year celebration draws attendees from all over the U.S. On typical days of the week-long event, crowds usually number between 10,000 to 20,000. Although hundreds of business booths and non-profit organizations compete for attention at the festival, the event still serves as a popular place to attract public support. For instance, Hmong candidates running for public office and social movement organizations have made use of the festival to campaign and to fundraise. A *Fresno Bee* article reported that, while at the public news conference, Reyes stated:

Many teachers would be willing to do this, especially in this area and other areas where there are so many Southeast Asians. (...) They're going to teach about Vietnam, so they might as well teach the entire aspect of the Vietnam War.

Furthermore, according to the article, "Reyes said the idea came from discussions with Hmong adults who were concerned that students don't understand the role the Hmong played in helping the United States during the Vietnam War."³³⁰

Secondly, mobilization was a collective, focused effort that involved community activists, ad hoc and formal organizations, ordinary community members, and college students.

³²⁹ Christopher Vang, "Hmong Role in History Must Be in Schoolbooks," *Fresno Bee*, April 26, 2003b.

³³⁰ Felicia Cousart Matlosz, "Bill Urges Teachers to Address Contribution in Vietnam Lessons," *ibid.* December 31, 2002.

Between late December 2002 and July 2003, Peter Vang,³³¹ chairman of the Hmong Community Education Task Force (herein Task Force) and Doua Vu, along with other coordinators organized a number of community meetings and discussions, petition signing campaigns, and rallies at the State Capitol in support of AB 78.³³² According to Kao-ly Yang, a community organizer and supporter of AB 78,

The main supportive organization was *Hmong [Community] Education Task Force* with its President, Peter Vang, and its two very active members, Doua Vu—who proposed the idea of this bill to Assemblymember Sarah Reyes—and Pai Yang, activist. For the support of this Bill, there was a mobilization [of the] Hmong community through radio talk shows, petitions, TV shows, public meetings and lobby[ing]. This organization with numerous supporters and volunteers, well-known leaders and committed students, have strongly organized the support: lobby[ing] at the State Capitol in Sacramento, dialog with Veterans, [and] private fundraising for transportation.³³³

Furthermore, formal organizations such as the Fresno Center for New Americans provided facilities for some community meetings. At these community meetings, members of the Education Task Force discussed the goals of AB 78 and interacted with ordinary community members, encouraging participation from Hmong community leaders, educators, students and parents in letter writing campaigns and rallies in Sacramento.³³⁴

Mobilizers made use of existing community infrastructure, including kinship networks and Hmong-language radio stations, to “get the word out.” By using the Fresno and Sacramento-based Hmong-language radio stations, the Task Force was able to reach Hmong American audiences beyond the Fresno area, such as in northern California—Chico, Oroville, and

³³¹ Mr. Vang’s son was among the eight teenagers who committed suicide.

³³² D. Vu, personal communication, Fresno, California, July 25, 2011.

³³³ Kao-ly Yang. “History of the Assembly Bill 78”. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hmongcontemporaryissues.com/archives/HistoryBill78.html>

³³⁴ Y. Vang, personal communication, Fresno, California, April 2009; also, HSIC e-mail listserv.

Marysville—and, in the Central Valley—Merced, Stockton, and Sacramento.³³⁵ As Christopher Vang reports,

Hmong leaders, educators, parents, college students and community organizations worked hard to gather public support for the bill throughout California. Hmong radio programs on KBIF 900 AM featured guests from the Hmong Community Education Taskforce discussing the nature of the bill. Hmong-Americans in the Central Valley held community meetings to recruit and organize manpower for political action at the capitol. Hmong-Americans are gathering signatures and letters of support to be sent to the state Legislature, asking lawmakers to vote in favor of the bill.

Hmong college students are holding meetings on the University of California and California State University campuses to organize efforts to lobby for the bill. And most importantly, Hmong leaders and veterans are coordinating joint efforts to visit the capitol to meet with state lawmakers. Many are also prepared to give testimony or personal depositions.³³⁶

Several other formal organizations went on the Assembly and Senate Committees on Education record as supporters of AB 78. For instance, on March 19, 2003, the Assembly Committee on Education record showed that the California School Employees Association,³³⁷ the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees,³³⁸ and the Lao Veterans of America, Inc.³³⁹ registered support for AB 78.³⁴⁰ On June 11, 2003, the California Federation of Teachers³⁴¹ appeared on the Senate Committee on Education record as an additional supporter of

³³⁵ Based on reports from my interviewees who live in these cities or know other relatives who live in these cities.

³³⁶ Fresno Bee, "Hmong Role in History Must Be in Schoolbooks."

³³⁷ Formed in 1927, the "California School Employees Association is the largest classified school employees union in the United States, representing nearly 220,000 school support staff throughout California" (CSEA, "About CSEA"). Retrieved January 5, 2009, from

<http://members.csea.com/memberhome/AboutUs/AboutCSEA/tabid/115/Default.aspx>.

³³⁸ Formed in 1932, the "AFSCME is the nation's largest and fastest growing public services employees union with more than 1.6 million active and retired members" (AFSCME, "We Are AFSCME"). Retrieved January 5, 2009, from <http://www.afscme.org/union/about>

³³⁹ Formed in 1998, the membership of the Lao Veterans, Inc. includes significant numbers of Hmong men and women "who served in combat and combat support roles" during the Secret War in Laos. Retrieved January 5, 2009, from: <http://www.laoveterans.com/>

³⁴⁰ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Assembly Committee on Education, Hearing on AB 78 (March 19, 2003).

³⁴¹ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. Senate Rules Committee, Committee Analysis of AB 78 (June 11, 2003). According to its website, "The California Federation of Teachers is the statewide affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers." Founded in 1919, the "CFT represents over 120,000 educational employees working at every level of the education system in California, from Head Start to the University of California." Retrieved August 15, 2011 from: <http://www.cft.org/index.php/at-a-glance.html>

the bill. Of these organizations, the Lao Veterans of America (LVA) is the most recently established (1998). Nevertheless, the endorsement of LVA was especially important because mobilizers were relying on the military-service frame to convince the state to pass AB 78.

Moreover, Hmong college students and members of student organizations at several campuses were also important supporters of AB 78. One such organization was the Hmong Students Inter-Collegiate Coalition (HSIC). Formed in 2001 by Hmong American college students, HSIC was an organization comprised of representatives from about 25 Hmong student associations of college and university campuses throughout California. Its members were mostly Hmong American college students, but its advisory board was comprised of community members and professionals. According to its Constitution, HSIC was formed to “I. Promote higher education; II. Serve as a bridge among students, community leaders, and scholars with the Hmong community and the broader American community; III. Address the concerns and needs of students and the Hmong community; IV. Provide leadership opportunities for aspiring students; V. Serve as a resource for students; VI. Serve as a channel to develop, display and recognize the talents and creativity of the students; [and] VII. Serve as an exemplary, professional, scholarship student coalition for the Hmong.”³⁴²

Through e-mail messages and word of mouth, members of the Hmong Student Inter-Collegiate Coalition kept college students informed about and updated on the meetings on AB 78 that were taking place in the California Assembly and Senate floors. Letter templates were created and distributed to members. Hmong American college students wrote personal letters

³⁴² Hmong Student Intercollegiate Coalition (HSIC), Facebook Website. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204523625>

and made phone calls to state legislators, especially members of the Assembly Education Committee. Many of them also attended the AB 78 hearings held at the State Capitol.³⁴³

The supporters of AB 78 provided various reasons for supporting or becoming involved in the AB 78 campaign. According to an electronically distributed petition in support of AB 78,

For many of the younger and newer Hmong generations, AB 78 will further help us grasp a glimpse of a past so foreign to us, yet very much alive in the pictures and memories of our relatives. By signing this petition, we, as students, parents, and active community members, acknowledge that we want to learn more about the role of the Hmong and other Southeast Asians who risked their lives, their families, and their homes during the Vietnam War, especially during the “Secret War” in Laos.³⁴⁴

Organizers who collected signatures for similar petitions also suggest that supporters varied in their reasons for backing AB 78. According to Kaoly Yang,

When I collected signatures at various markets, many Hmong spontaneously offered to sign the petition, which was surprising to me. Because of my experience as a researcher working within minority communities, I know that it used to be difficult to involve people. This discovery made me suppose that the bill AB78 is important for Hmong people. It answers to Hmong people’s expectations from American politicians and leaders. The reasons why they supported the bill were:

*AB78 will decrease gaps between Hmong parents and children; AB78 will decrease racism and cultural misunderstanding at school; AB78 will increase self-esteem of Hmong students towards teachers and outsiders, and participation of parents towards schools so that children will feel confident to succeed; AB78 will increase better understanding of each other’s culture for better respecting each other; AB78 will increase the awareness of sharing the same values of peace and of mutual support because of knowing each other’s contribution to this American Nation. AB78 is important for children to remember the past so that they will know better how to build the future by not repeating the same mistakes (emphasis added).*³⁴⁵

³⁴³ The information in this paragraph was gathered through the author’s own observations as he was part of the e-mail list-servers (means of communicating and dissemination information) of the HSIC and other Hmong college student organizations.

³⁴⁴ Moua, Srida. Members of Hmong Student Inter-collegiate Coalition (HSIC). Petition to Senator John Vasconcellos and the California Senate Education Committee: “Support Assembly Bill 78 (Reyes) – Hmong Curriculum.” Retrieved June 1, 2003, from: <http://www.PetitionOnline.com/s12m34/petition.html>.

³⁴⁵ I made slight modifications to punctuation and grammar, to increase readability. Original source: Kaoly Yang. “History of the Assembly Bill 78”. Retrieved April 7, 2009 from: <http://www.hmongcontemporaryissues.com/archives/HistoryBill78.html>

Despite some differences, Hmong social actors appeared quite concerned about their shared experiences with “discrimination”³⁴⁶—a practice that they link, explicitly or implicitly, to racial prejudice³⁴⁷ and to selective historical amnesia.³⁴⁸ As I shall return to in the discussion section, ordinary Hmong persons’ shared experiences with racial discrimination and prejudice probably united them in support of Assembly Bill 78. In the end, what mattered was that many in the community lent their support through signing petitions, calling or writing state representatives, writing about the effort in the local newspaper, or participating in the lobbying at the State Capitol.

The Definition of Cultural Opportunities and Elaboration of the Military Service Frame

I argue that the mobilization for AB 78 was effective because several crucial processes took place. Essentially, these processes are the successful construction and legitimation of a social problem; the activation of influential third parties; and the use of non-threatening collective action frames (‘cultural collision’ and military service) to make claims upon the state. I discuss each of these processes in turn.

First, the social problem emerged when a condition (teenage suicides) was socially defined as a “crisis” (read social problem) by ethnic community professionals and by local and federal government agencies. The emergence of this social problem created the crucial *cultural opportunity* for ethnic professionals to seek services for the ethnic community. But the social

³⁴⁶ The Legislative Office (Official California Legislative Information) record mentions “discrimination,” but makes no mention of *racial discrimination*. Based on the context, however, supporters of AB 78 probably mean racial or ethnic discrimination as opposed to other types of discrimination: discrimination based on sex, sexuality, age, disability, language, etc.

³⁴⁷ Many of my interviewees share about having encountered racial prejudice in public places and public institutions: i.e., being unfairly judged by outsiders before they know them personally, or inquire about Hmong’s complex history or how they ended up as refugees in the U.S.

³⁴⁸ Other scholars have used the term “historical amnesia” to refer to the government’s or public’s purposeful forgetting of past political events or histories of particular groups of people. They forget in order to support certain political agendas: anti-affirmative action or colorblind policies; etc. and to perpetuate certain myths: equal opportunity exists for all regardless of race, class, gender, etc. I wish to emphasize that public schools, especially at lower grades, also engage in and reproduce the practice of selective historical amnesia.

problem had to acquire a level of legitimacy before other parties, such as the federal and local government institutions, were willing to invest resources and services (i.e., providing and encouraging greater utilization of mental health services and counseling), to the social problem. I want to suggest that, besides the ethnic professionals and local authorities, the mass media served as an important legitimizer of the social problem. Local institutional support combined with public media legitimation of the social problem created a crucial window of opportunity for ethnic mobilizers to pursue other forms of collective action.

The mass media as an institution played an important role in framing and legitimizing the social problem. Through their relatively detailed coverage of the social problem, the mass media framed the teenage suicides in terms of a “cultural clash.” The media motivated collective action in two ways. First, the media attributed the cultural crisis to the lack of government funding and called for more funding and intervention. Second, the publicity and the discourse that the media created gave peculiar legitimacy to and encouraged government intervention for the social problem. The media specifically blamed the Hmong community of Fresno, for having, presumably, failed to take “*more [logical] and [aggressive] [steps] to Hmong mental-health issues.*” Underlying the media’s message was the claim that “Hmong culture” not only remains static and backward, but that it is in need of government intervention. Such diagnostic framing supports rather than threatens the dominant discourse about and public sentiments toward immigrants, their cultures and their purported lack of assimilation. Relying on the legitimated social problem that they and the media helped create, local government institutions were able to secure funding from federal government institutions to provide assistance in the form of mental health services to Hmong. What local institutions and the media probably did not foresee was

that mobilizers in the Hmong community would recognize the legitimated social problem *as a political opportunity* and use that opportunity to make other kinds of claims upon the state.

Obtaining legitimacy for the social problem was a necessary condition for other concerted action on the social problem to follow. In Fresno, ethnic professionals and activists, many of whom are well-educated, integrated women, were able to activate a sympathetic state ally, Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, to sponsor, introduce and help mobilize support for Assembly Bill 78. Several factors probably facilitated the activation of this influential third party. I want to suggest that, just as a perceived political opportunity was necessary for social actors to initiate the bill, the potential to catch the attention and interest of state representatives—and therefore the potential that they will be activated to enter the political arena in ways beneficial to the mobilizers—depended on perceived political opportunities operating outside of the immediate situation or social problem. I do not doubt that some or even many elected officials act out of altruism; many have supported social movements in which they themselves are not the direct victims. Simply put, human beings are capable of altruistic action. But it would be naïve to assume that no interests are at play, especially when we are dealing in the highly contentious political arena. In the case of ethnic minority communities, I suggest that ethnic actors' potential to attract elected officials' attention and interest is made greater when the ethnic community comprises or is perceived as comprising a significant and mobilizable electoral constituency. I discuss what this might entail in the case of the Hmong community of Fresno, California.

Hmong's significant ethnic concentration in Fresno and their recent history of political activism at the local and federal levels mark them as a potentially important, mobilizable constituency. In a city of nearly 428,000, Hmong comprise about 22,500 or about 5.3 percent of

the population in Fresno (based on U.S. Census 2000).³⁴⁹ The Hmong of Fresno made up about 41.4 percent of all Asians in that city. Secondly, AB 78 was introduced (December 2002) shortly after the Hmong of Fresno helped elect into the Fresno Unified School Board one of their co-ethnics: Tony Vang. Thirdly, AB 78 was introduced just two years after the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000³⁵⁰ became federal law. This Act was the successful outcome of the combined, sustained decade-long efforts of Hmong Americans and their multiple state allies, especially U.S. Representative Bruce Vento and U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota who sponsored the bills.³⁵¹ Since 1995, this Act has seen relatively wide coverage in both the mainstream media and in law review journals.³⁵² Taken together, Vang's election into local public office and the recent passage of the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act are indicators that the Hmong constituency could be mobilized politically.

I suggest that while the first factor (a mobilizable electoral constituency) facilitated state attention on the "AB 78 case," it was Hmong's double-edged visibility that provided the needed moral rationale for including Hmong in California's public schools. Hmong possess a double-edged visibility in that they are often made invisible by the dominant myth of Asian American

³⁴⁹ Based on Census 2000 enumeration, the total number of Hmong in Fresno, California (MSA) was 22,456. The total population in Fresno, California (city) was 427,652. Of this number, non-Hispanic whites comprised 30.0 percent; blacks comprised 8.3 percent; American Indians/Alaska Natives comprised 1.7 percent; Asians and Pacific Islander comprised 12.8 percent; and Hispanics/Latinos comprised 46.9 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, State and County QuickFacts, Retrieved January 1, 2011, from: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0627000.html>).

³⁵⁰ "Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000," Public Law 106-207, May 26, 2000 (114 Stat. 316).

³⁵¹ The Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act was first introduced on April 4, 1990 during the 101st Congress (1989-1990) as H.R. 4513 by U.S. Representative Bruce Vento (D-Minnesota, 4th District). It was referred to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and International Law and never made it pass that stage.

³⁵² A quick search using Lexis-Nexis reveals that, between June 1995 and May 2011, about 150 published news articles have made reference to the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, the *Associated Press*, and the *Star Tribune* (all of Minnesota) each published 23, 20, and 12 news articles, respectively, that made reference to this Act. Three California newspapers (*Fresno Bee*, *Modesto Bee*, and *Orange County Register*), published a total of 8 news articles that made reference to this Act. Between 2002 and 2005, at least 10 law review journals have made reference to this Act.

minority success³⁵³ but made hyper-visible by the government's and the media's attention to Hmong as an impoverished 'immigrant' group with multiple social problems presumed to be unique to them: mental health, gang and crime, gender inequality, chronic generational conflicts, cultural and legal collisions, etc.

Thus far I have discussed the social construction and legitimation of the social problem and the activation of an influential third party to join the political arena. But there are two other facets of the AB 78 movement that deserve discussion in order to illuminate the mobilization process. These aspects are: 1) the mobilization of ethnic solidarity; and 2) Hmong social actors' appropriation of dominant discourses or ideologies in order to try to bring about a positive outcome.

Solidarity among members of a social community is not something that can be observed directly. Nevertheless, as I alluded to above, Hmong persons' shared experiences with racial discrimination and prejudice probably united them in support of Assembly Bill 78. The arguments (cited above) that supporters of AB 78 presented to the state suggest that Hmong were reacting to marginalization in public institutions. For instance, Hmong persons/organizers linked the experiences with discrimination to public schools' inattention to Hmong history.

Above, I described the mass media's diagnostic framing of the social problem in terms of a cultural clash. I suggested that the media were drawing upon a dominant American narrative, which emphasizes the need for immigrants to shed their cultural behaviors and identities in order to assimilate. Ethnic mobilizers in the AB 78 case appropriated this dominant narrative by emphasizing the intergenerational gap between Hmong parents and their children. In doing so,

³⁵³ This Model Minority Myth is the myth that all Asians are doing exceptionally well especially in terms of educational attainment compared to other racial categories and whites. Furthermore, this myth holds that other racial minorities should imitate or use Asians as a model. In effect, this myth tries to erase the historical effects of racism, hide contemporary conditions and consequences of racial and class stratification, and sustain the dominant myth of America as a colorblind society.

they explicitly or implicitly suggest that intergenerational conflict was the underlying cause behind the teenage suicides in Fresno. This particular way of diagnosing the social problem posed no threat to the state or its institutions, for it blamed the family institution, and along with it, “Hmong culture,” for causing the teenage suicides.

But in order to maximize the chances that the state legislature would grant their goal (i.e., pass AB 78), ethnic mobilizers also strategically relied on another collective action frame, the military-service frame. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Hmong’s identity in the U.S. has been circumscribed by Hmong’s unique military relationship to the United States government. This relationship is re-stated explicitly in the AB 78 and framed as a central argument in support of the bill. It is this argument, which I am calling the military-service frame, that probably played the most important role in morally persuading representatives of the state to offer symbolic support to Hmong. Specifically, the main arguments that sponsors of the bill used in support of AB 78, included the following:

*During the Vietnam War the Hmong and other Southeast Asians were U. S. allies; many Hmong and other Southeast Asians served as guerilla forces during the “Secret War” in Laos (part of the Vietnam War), rescuing downed U. S. pilots, gathering information, and defending frontiers against the enemy. According to the Lao Veterans of America, Inc. 35,000 to 40,000 Hmong and other Southeast Asians³⁵⁴ were killed in the war.
(...)*

*Although many Hmong and other Southeast Asians have become successful citizens in the U.S., many face discrimination. According to the author, *including in social sciences classes the sacrifices the Hmong and other Southeast Asians made for the U.S. military may help American pupils understand these people, lessen this discrimination, and help others recognize them as contributing members of society* (emphasis added).³⁵⁵*

³⁵⁴ The true number of Hmong killed or injured in the wars in Laos is unknown and unknowable. The number of Hmong killed alone probably numbered in the tens of thousands. The total number of “other Southeast Asians” killed, in both Laos and Vietnam, was exponentially greater. What is worth noting here is that the state displayed little concern about the actual number of *any* Southeast Asian ethnic group who participated in and became casualties of various sides of the multiple wars in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Instead, to the state, “Southeast Asian” was just another generic term much like “Asians” or “Africans.”

³⁵⁵ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Assembly Committee on Education, Hearing on AB 78 (March 19, 2003), pp. 1-2.

In the AB 78 case, the military service frame served two functions of mobilization. First, it helped to create ethnic solidarity by appealing to the ethnic community's sense of shared identity, history and struggles. Second, and most crucially, it helped to maximize the impact of the influential third parties on the State Legislature. After all, Assemblywoman Reyes and her co-sponsors (Assemblyman Ken Maddox of the 68th district in Orange County; and Assemblyman Steven Samuelian of the 29th district in Fresno and Madera Counties), served sizable Hmong and Vietnamese communities. Within the context of the United States, the complex histories of these communities have often been simplified, through historical amnesia, to simply focus on their involvement, in one way or another, with the United States government's fight to "contain communism" or to "spread democracy."

The effectiveness of the military-service frame in this case demonstrates two things: that the military-service frame is relatively elaborative (because Hmong took a disparate issue, teenage suicides, and 'transformed' it using the M-S frame, to an issue of discrimination and marginalization in public schools); and that a state government is responsive—at least symbolically—to some of Hmong Americans' concerns so long as Hmong and their supporters frame disparate social problems in terms of the military-service frame.

A Rival Explanation and Reply

A rival explanation might claim that the military service frame made no difference in the outcome of AB 78. AB 78 passed because it did not mandate public instruction on Southeast Asian history. It therefore did not cost the state anything substantial, except time to debate, pass the bill, and get it to the governor. To be sure, mobilizers were well aware of the economic context—i.e., state-mandated budget cuts across various institutions, including public

education—and designed AB 78 so that it could pass. Supporters of the bill hoped that AB 78 could serve as a stepping stone for some future legislation.³⁵⁶

However, given the specific contents and goals of AB 78 (its focus on the inclusion of history), it must depend on some claim that could persuade the state to recognize the legitimacy of the bill's contents. Secondly, it still takes time and money to debate and pass the bill in the Legislative. Third, symbolic recognition (including formal resolutions) by the Legislature is not easy to achieve. AB 78 was not simply a resolution to recognize Southeast Asians; it became a chapter in the educational codes. Moreover, the governor, if he/she decides to, could veto bills that he/she deems to be contrary to his/her political views or agendas. But in this case, Governor Gray Davis' past identification with Vietnam veterans was probably a crucial factor in his approval of the bill.³⁵⁷

Conclusion

Social movement actors and organizations were able, through direct lobbying and the use of the military-service frame, to convince the California State Legislature and a Vietnam veteran governor to pass Assembly Bill 78. Unfortunately, the bill that actually passed into law was not what supporters of AB 78 had originally intended. Before AB 78 became law on July 10, 2003, it underwent several changes that, from the community's point of view, were quite disappointing. In the version that finally became law, all references to "Hmong" and "Hmong history" were

³⁵⁶ Interview with a supporter of the bill

³⁵⁷ According to Victor Hwang (2002), during the California Hmong community's protests against the Welfare Reform Act, "Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis, a Vietnam veteran and the underdog gubernatorial candidate at the time, took advantage of this opportunity both to promote himself and to attack the incumbent Governor Pete Wilson. Davis drafted a letter to Eloise Anderson, the director of the Department of Social Services (DSS) under Governor Pete Wilson, which cited the Sacramento Bee article and stated, "As a [Vietnam] veteran myself, I am personally offended that the state of California should fail to acknowledge the sacrifices of fellow [Hmong] veterans and their family members." n108 Copies of this letter were widely circulated, and it was covered extensively by the press."

deleted, leaving only the references “Southeast Asians” and “Southeast Asian history.”³⁵⁸ This change resulted from earlier amendments to the bill.

Specifically, on March 10, 2003, AB 78 was amended for the first time to add the phrases “Secret War in Laos” and “other Southeast Asians”:

The Legislature encourages instruction in the area of social sciences, as required pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51220, which may include instruction on the Vietnam war *including the “Secret War” in Laos* and the role of the Hmong ~~people~~ *and other Southeast Asians* in that war. The Legislature encourages that this instruction include, but not be limited to, a component drawn from personal testimony, especially in the form of oral or video history of Hmong ~~people~~ *and other Southeast Asians* who were involved in the Vietnam war and those men and women who contributed to the war effort on the homefront. The oral histories used as a part of the instruction regarding the role of the Hmong ~~people~~ *and other Southeast Asians* in the Vietnam war and the “Secret War” in Laos shall exemplify the personal sacrifice and courage of the wide range of ordinary citizens who were called upon to participate and provide intelligence for the United States. The oral histories shall contain the views and comments of their subjects regarding the reasons for Hmong participation in the war. These oral histories shall also solicit comments from their subjects regarding the aftermath of the war and the immigration of the Hmong ~~people~~ *and other Southeast Asians* to the United States (strikeouts and italics are in original).³⁵⁹

On March 17, 2003, AB 78 was amended a second time; this amendment added the specific clause which stated, in part, that the bill “shall be carried out in a manner that does not result in any new duties or programs being imposed on the school district.”³⁶⁰ Then on June 17, 2003, AB 78 was amended for the third and final time to:

51221.4. (a) The Legislature encourages instruction in the area of social sciences, as required pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 51220, which may include instruction on the Vietnam war including the “Secret War” in Laos and the role of ~~the Hmong and other~~ Southeast Asians in that war. The Legislature encourages that this instruction include, but not be limited to, a component drawn from personal testimony, especially in the form of oral or video history of ~~Hmong and other~~ Southeast Asians who were

³⁵⁸ In a later chapter, I return to a discussion of the vagueness of the term “Southeast Asian” and how this term makes invisible the many ethnic groups that participated and died in the Second Indochina War. This is in contrast to an article in the *McGeorge Law Review* by Denise Pereira which is entitled, “Forgotten No Longer: The Southeast Asians’ Role in the Vietnam War.”

³⁵⁹ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Legislature, 2003-04 Regular Session. Assembly Bill No. 78. Amended in Assembly March 10, 2003.

³⁶⁰ Ibid. Amended in Assembly March 17, 2003.

involved in the Vietnam war and those men and women who contributed to the war effort on the homefront. The oral histories used as a part of the instruction regarding the role of ~~the Hmong and other~~ Southeast Asians in the Vietnam war and the “Secret War” in Laos shall exemplify the personal sacrifice and courage of the wide range of ordinary citizens who were called upon to participate and provide intelligence for the United States. The oral histories shall contain the views and comments of their subjects regarding the reasons for ~~Hmong~~ *their* participation in the war. These oral histories shall also solicit comments from their subjects regarding the aftermath of the war and the immigration of ~~the Hmong and other~~ Southeast Asians to the United States (strikeouts and italics are in original).³⁶¹

Ironically, through legislative erasure, Hmong committed a second kind of suicide. Only this time, it was not the loss of individual lives, but the disappearance of the reference to an entire ethnic group whose members have spent months rallying community support and lobbying the state to seek inclusion in its public schools. Just as the Hmong teenage suicides that preceded the drafting of AB 78 were linked to self-destructive actions, the cause of Hmong’s erasure from the final bill seemed, to many in the Hmong community, directly linked to intra-ethnic conflict.

Who were involved and what occurred that led to this unexpected turn of events? The next chapter addresses this and other questions.

³⁶¹ Ibid. Amended in Assembly June 17, 2003.

Chapter 7: The Mong Federation's Counter-Movement

In this chapter, I analyze a case of ethnic protest movement that occurred in California's Central Valley during 2003 and try to explain how the social actors in that movement, in spite of their organized protest and lobbying activities, were unable to get the state to fulfill their primary demand. My analysis is based on data I collected from 45 personal interviews with Hmong women and men who were movement participants, informants or bystanders, over 200 primary written sources, and a small number of newspaper accounts.

Between March 2003 and July 2003 and for several months after AB 78 became law, ethnic actors engaged in one of the most emotionally intense confrontations since Hmong refugees' arrival to the United States in the late 1970s. This protest movement involved a year-long conflict between, on the one hand, members of a non-profit organization called the Mong Federation, Inc. and on the other hand, members of the Hmong Community Education Task Force, a highly educated segment of Hmong society, and numerous other "Hmong laypersons."³⁶² This intense struggle involved the disagreement over the use of the label "Hmong"³⁶³ in an education bill, California Assembly Bill 78. The state (i.e., government representatives) was both the sponsor of Assembly Bill 78 and the target of the challenger's³⁶⁴ protest movement. This 2003 ethnic protest movement gave rise to a broader social movement (post-2003) to preserve Mong Leng language and culture. In this chapter, I focus mainly on the 2003 protest movement when discussing the intra-group conflict; I will discuss the broader social

³⁶² By "Hmong laypersons," I mean persons who do not hold leadership or professional positions or formal degrees. I describe other segments later on below.

³⁶³ In general, throughout this dissertation, I use the ethnic label "Hmong" to refer to all members of the ethnic group irrespective of individual members' primary language, heritage dialect, religion, regional or national-origin. In Part II of this specific chapter, I switch to using two separate ethnic labels, "Hmong" and "Mong," to be consistent with the Mong Federation's usage.

³⁶⁴ Amenta, Caren, Fetner, and Young (2002) define "challengers" as "politically disadvantaged groups engaged in sustained collective action to secure their claims" (p. 49).

movement in the later part of this chapter when I consider the specific impacts that this protest movement has had.

Although the 2003 struggle originated in the Hmong American communities of Fresno and Sacramento, California, it quickly spilled over to other cities and states. Even Hmong individuals from as far as Australia participated in the intense debates. In short, this struggle quickly became a national controversy. Although the most active participants were members of the formally-educated segment³⁶⁵ within Hmong communities, members of various other segments (political leaders/public figures, laypersons, etc.) also participated in this national controversy. Although the most intense episodes of this controversy occurred during the months preceding and following the passing of AB 78 (May – August 2003), opposing discourses on this dormant ethnicized conflict can be found up to the present day.

Members of the Mong Federation Inc. (hereinafter the MFI or challenger) claimed that objective social and linguistic inequities exist within the ethnic population (i.e., Mong/Hmong American society), that these conditions negatively affect at least half of the ethnic population (Mong), and that collective action ought to be taken to alter these conditions. One of the challenger's main claims was that the ethnic term "Hmong," rather than being an all-inclusive ethnic label, has always referred to only persons of Hmong Der *language* at the exclusion of persons of Mong Leng *language*.³⁶⁶ Members of the Mong Federation prefer to call themselves and other Mong Leng speakers by the term "Mong," and they argue that "Mong" and "Hmong"

³⁶⁵ The formally educated segment includes college students, college graduates, community professionals, advanced degree holders, etc. Here and throughout this chapter, I use the word "segment" to refer to collectivities of people who have something in common, such as formal education background, generational status, etc. Segment is not meant to suggest bounded identity.

³⁶⁶ The MFI refers explicitly to Hmong Der and Mong Leng as languages rather than as dialects. However, most scholarly publications categorize/discuss Hmong Der and Mong Leng as "dialects." Hmong Der is also known as White Hmong (*lus Hmoob Dawb*) dialect; Mong Leng (*Moob Leeg*) is also known as Green Hmong (*Moob Ntsuab*) dialect. To be consistent, I will use "Hmong Der" and "Mong Leng" unless participants themselves use "White Hmong" or "Green Hmong." The Hmong Roman Popular Alphabets is capable of expressing words and sentences in both dialects.

make up two “linguistically and culturally distinct groups” that have coexisted since “time immemorial.” As such, the MFI demanded specifically that Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, the official sponsor of Assembly Bill 78 (hereinafter AB 78), include the term Mong “side by side” with the term Hmong wherever Hmong appeared in the text of AB 78.

The MFI and their claims were met with a wide range of responses from the community at large, but they were met with especially intense opposition from some segments of the ethnic community. Hmong ethnic identity was a conspicuous issue in this debate. However, underlying this issue were much more complex struggles. A “new” group identity was being asserted by the MFI in order to bring to the state’s attention certain perceived injustices within the ethnic community. Secondly, the MFI sought equal rights, resources and representation for a segment of the population that it claimed to represent: Mong speakers. Against the MFI’s movement, a counter-movement emerged to prevent perceived ethnic disintegration and to assert a “united” ethnic voice. This chapter is an attempt to explain these complex struggles.

Specifically, I try to answer the following sets of questions:

1. How did the social problem emerge? What political opportunity(ies) did the challengers—members of the Mong Federation—define in order to present their grievance? How did the state respond to the challengers’ direct action tactic and what effects did this state action have on the career of the emergent social problem?
2. How did members of the Mong Federation construct and try to seek legitimacy for the social problem? What was the role of the mainstream media in the construction and legitimation of the social problem?
3. How did various segments of the ethnic community respond to the MFI protest movement? What processes accounted for the neutralization of the intra-ethnic conflict?

What, if any, impact has the MFI protest movement had on participants' attitudes/actions and institutional practices?

Given the complexity of this case, each of these sets of questions will require separate treatment; therefore, I divide this chapter into three parts. Part I tries to address the first set of questions in order to explain how the MFI's protest movement emerged and how the state initially responded to the movement. Part II tries to address the second set of questions in order to explain how, in response to the state's initial actions, social actors engaged in the dynamic process of "transforming" a social problem into a public social movement. Finally, Part III tries to address the third set of questions in order to explain how contentious framing processes operated to neutralize the intra-ethnic conflict and to consider the impact that the MFI movement has had. I intend for each part of this chapter to illuminate different aspects of the joint mobilization-political incorporation process.

Part I of this chapter will proceed as follows. I will begin by highlighting the key theoretical concepts used in this chapter and briefly explain my analytical approach. Next, I identify the field of social actors in the social movement, including the main opponents of AB 78 and their social base. I also briefly describe the most proximate social context³⁶⁷ (much of which has been covered in the preceding chapter), surrounding the conflict between the Mong Federation and their opponents. Understanding this context is crucial for understanding the other contexts and social problems that I will be analyzing in this chapter.³⁶⁸ Then, I examine the initial political opportunities that members of the MFI defined in order to present their grievance to the state. Finally, I discuss the initial community and state responses to the MFI's tactics and

³⁶⁷ I examine the more remote but consequential political contexts later on in the chapter.

³⁶⁸ These interactions are the contentious, collective definitional processes that were responsible for the emergence of the dialect-based social problem.

claims. I will focus on the state's response to the MFI's actions and explain how it was a critical juncture in the MFI's protest movement.

I claim that the social problem emerged, not because of the existence of any particular objective condition, but because the Mong Federation claimed that Mong Leng as a group experience disadvantages, and took the introduction of AB 78 as a political opportunity to call upon the state to alleviate the putative conditions by adding the term "Mong" onto AB 78. By engaging directly with state representatives, the MFI was trying to activate or request, first of all, state representatives' recognition of the social problem. However, in response to the MFI, state representatives defined the language inequality issue as an *ethnic* problem rather than a *state* problem—i.e., not a problem that warrants the state's direct intervention. In spite of this, the MFI pushed forward with the social problem without the blessing (legitimation) of the "state."³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the state's decision not to get involved had critical negative consequences for the career of the social problem. *I argue specifically that the state representatives' definition of the problem as an ethnic problem rather than a state problem relegated the social problem to the ethnic public arena, effectively excluding the social problem from the state's political agenda. This state decision was probably influenced by the political context and the challenging group's relative lack of legitimate authority.*

Part I: The Social Problem and Mobilization by the Mong Federation

Given the complexity of the events, both inside and outside of the social movement as they unfolded, I will try to isolate and describe the events in an approximately sequential order.

My main reason for presenting the events in approximately sequential order is based on my

³⁶⁹ In discussing the state, Jenkins (1995) distinguishes between "the *state* itself that attempts to enforce [the institutionalized claim to a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence within a specified territory], the *regime* or the structure of rule and the legitimizing myths used to sustain that claim, and the *government* that is, the personnel who actually make authoritative or binding decisions" (p. 15). In this paper, I use the phrase "state representatives" interchangeably with the term "government."

assumption that, on the ground, events, persons, actions and ideas, far from being isolated or self-contained processes, actually are quite interdependent and intertwined with each other and with their broader environments (Meyer and Whittier 1994). An earlier set of actions or ideas potentially leads to, sets the condition for, or produces change in another set of social actions or ideas, through some channel or media. This process has been referred to in the social problem and social movement literature as a “diffusion” process (McAdam and Rucht 1993:59; Minkoff 1997; Soule 1999; Best 2001; Oliver and Myers 2002; Andrews and Biggs 2006). According to Best (2001:8), “diffusion...involves the spread of some innovation from transmitters to adopters via particular channels.” Innovations that get diffused can be things such as “practices, information, material objects,” or, in the case of social problem diffusion, claims about the social problem (Best 2001:8). Innovations can be transmitted through “relational channels” (i.e., ‘direct, inter-personal contact between transmitters and adopters’) or “nonrelational channels such as [the] mass media, that do not involve personal ties” (Best 2001:8).

The major events of the Mong Federation movement occurred according to the following sequence: 1) In early March 2003, the MFI began presenting their grievances to the state, but the state responded by refusing to fulfill their stated goal. 2) The MFI then sought media attention for the social problem and on May 24, 2003, the media responded, albeit, in mixed ways. The publication of the May 24th *Los Angeles Times* article generated intense debates and interactions in the ethnic community and the MFI actively constructed and tried to seek legitimacy for the social problem; 3) On June 11, 2003, the MFI engaged in a public protest at the state capitol, and on June 17, 2003, the state decided to replace “Hmong” with “Southeast Asian” in Assembly Bill 78. The state’s decision to erase “Hmong” from the bill generated a second wave of debates and interactions. 4) After AB 78 passed into law on July 10, 2003, a third wave of intense reactions

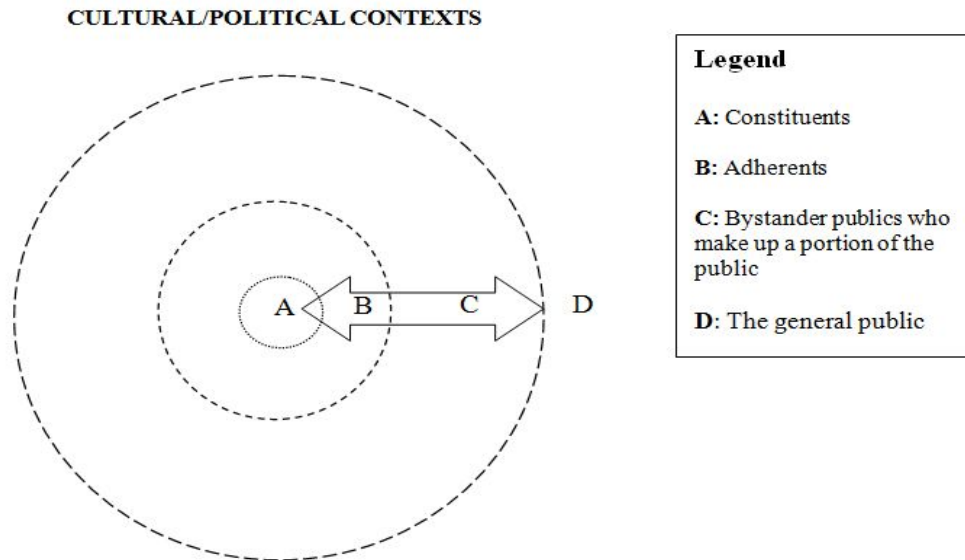
and interactions occurred. The debates and reactions died down after about December 2003; but they resurfaced seven years later, in March 2010, during the pre-approval stage of a Sacramento-based Hmong charter school.

The Field of Social Actors in a Social Movement

The social actors in a social movement (or counter-movement) are situated in a field of actors. Borrowing from McCarthy and Zald (1977) and Turner (1970), I distinguish between four categories of actors: *constituents* or those individuals or organization(s) that actively participate and invest resources in support of the social movement (as challengers) or counter-movement (as antagonists); *adherents* or those individuals or organizations that believe in the goals of the social movement as can be seen from their occasional expressions but are not (yet) actively involved; *bystander publics* or those who do not oppose the social movement but their participation is limited to observing the movement; and finally, those who make up the general public who may be oblivious to the emergent social movement. In Diagram 1, these categories of social actors are respectively in the A, B, C, and D rings. All actors are embedded in nested cultural and political contexts.

In this chapter, I privilege the existing state policies and the mass media as two key components of the political context. Amenta et al. (2002:67) define state policies as the “authoritative and consistent lines of action undertaken by states, backed by laws and the legitimacy of states.” I hold that state policies and the mass media express both political and cultural ideologies. An ideology refers to “the set of beliefs that are used to *justify* or *challenge* a given social-political order and are used to interpret the political world” (Zald 1996:262, emphasis added). Ideologies provide resources for the creation of frames but they can also constrain mobilization strategies (Snow and Benford 2000).

Diagram 1. The Field of Actors in a Social Movement



In the AB 78 case, the main challengers include members the Mong Federation, Inc. and their adherents. The main antagonists include some members of the Fresno Community Education Task Force and their adherents. Constituents, adherents, and bystander publics were comprised of persons from one or more of the following segments: the formally-educated segment, the leadership segment, or the “laypersons” segment. By the formally-educated segment, I mean persons who hold a formal education degree.³⁷⁰ Leaders include persons who are regarded within the ethnic community as traditional-charismatic leaders or legal-rational leaders. Laypersons include persons who do not hold leadership positions or have formal degrees. Compared to laypersons, the degree holders and leaders constitute smaller segments of Hmong American society. In Diagram 1, the bidirectional arrow represents *ongoing interaction* among social actors situated in the same ring and between social actors of different rings. Interactions include claims making activities or framing activities, shifting membership, etc.

³⁷⁰ E.g., a high school diploma, associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, professional, or doctorate degree.

Most Proximate Context

Much of the most proximate social context has been described in the preceding chapter, which analyzes the Hmong Californian community's efforts to initiate and mobilize support for Assembly Bill 78. In that chapter, I suggested that it was social actors' successful construction and legitimation of teenage suicides as a social problem that culminated in Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes' introduction of AB 78.³⁷¹ I also suggested that AB 78, at the time of its introduction, appeared to have Hmong school-age children as the primary beneficiaries of the bill. Moreover, well-integrated ethnic professionals as well as college students helped mobilize support from ordinary individuals and from formal organizations for the bill. As I pointed out, AB 78's main intent appeared to be to try to create greater public awareness about the role that the Hmong played in the Vietnam War and their reasons for immigrating to the United States. Finally, although supporters gave unique reasons for supporting AB 78, much of their responses emphasized their shared experiences with discrimination, which they link to prejudice and the absence of instruction on Hmong history in public school curricula.

The introduction of AB 78 in the California State Legislature forms the most proximate context leading up to the Mong Federation protest movement. The introduction of AB 78 led inadvertently to a newly constructed social problem: the perceived exclusion of a significant segment of the ethnic population. The rest of this chapter focuses on explaining this social

³⁷¹ I argue that the passage of AB 78 was due more to Hmong's use of the military-service frame than to the construction of teenage suicides as a social problem. The military-service frame is a type of social problem. [Key idea: *a collective action frame expresses a social problem. For a collective action frame to be able to effectively mobilize collective consensus, it must successfully construct a social problem* (diagnosis and call to action)]. When and only when Hmong Americans, *with the help of influential state allies*, have been able to successfully construct a *set of putative conditions* (their alliances with the U.S.; their victimization as a group after the war; their illegal and ill treatment by Lao and Thai governments; their abandonment by the U.S.), construct the U.S. government as the appropriate target/perpetrator (for the U.S. role in Laos during the Second Indochina War), and present a recognized, legitimated, clear plan of action [e.g., they want veterans to be able to take the citizenship test with special considerations], Hmong Americans have been able to bring about particular, limited outcomes, such as the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000.

problem and the contentious struggles that resulted from it. Next, I describe the social base of the MFI before proceeding to discuss their protest against AB 78.

The Mong Federation's Social Base

Little public information exists about the history, mission statement, or membership base of the Mong Federation, Inc. (real name, hereinafter, the MFI). The websites³⁷² that appear to be created by persons affiliated with the MFI do not describe either the organization's history or its goal(s).³⁷³ Based on a public online catalog of registered organizations in the *Business Profiles LLC* the Mong Federation, Inc. was registered in Illinois as a not-for-profit organization on November 9, 1987.³⁷⁴ One of its websites lists the headquarter of the MFI as located in Dixon, Illinois with a California office in Merced, California.³⁷⁵

The leadership of the MFI is publicly known. The leaders and identified members of the Mong Federation, Inc. operate mainly out of California's Central Valley. The backgrounds of the leaders of the Mong Federation are worth noting. Paoze Thao,³⁷⁶ the president of the MFI, works in the city of Monterey Bay, California. Txer Paul Vang (chairman of the MFI) and Chimeng Yang reside in the Sacramento region. The leadership of the Mong Federation is comprised mostly of highly educated, well-integrated, fluent multilingual persons. Paoze Thao

³⁷² Online and accessible as of May 10, 2011: <http://mong.ws/> and www.mongfederation.org. The Homepage of mong.ws describes its goal as follows: "This web page came as a way to educate, promote, and preserve our language, history, and culture. It was also created to debunk some of the charges and criticisms others made against the name Mong."

³⁷³ In 2010, I contacted a leader of the MFI through email to ask for a description of the Mong Federation's history but did not receive a reply.

³⁷⁴ Retrieved March 1, 2010 from: http://businessprofiles.com/details/MONG_FEDERATION_INC/IL-54863926

³⁷⁵ Retrieved May 10, 2011 from: mongfederation.org/contact.html

³⁷⁶ These are real names and real cities. I will consider changing these names to pseudonyms in the final drafts. Prior to being affiliated with the Mong Federation, Inc., Paoze Thao, its current president, appears to be affiliated with the Mong Development, Inc., a non-profit organization that was registered in Illinois from 1984 through 1994. The publically available *Business Profiles* (<http://businessprofiles.com/>) shows that the Mong Development, Inc. was registered in Illinois as a non-profit organization by Paoze Thao on August 23, 1984, but indicates that an "involuntary dissolution" occurred on January 3, 1994. The same website shows a "Mong Alliance Fellowship of Ottawa" as registered as a non-profit organization by Lue Thao on October 19, 1984, but indicates that an "involuntary dissolution" occurred on March 1, 1993.

is a professor at a state university and Chimeng Yang is “a former teacher and current administrator in the Sacramento City Unified School District.”³⁷⁷ According to the *Sacramento Bee*, Txer Paul Vang, chairman of the MFI, is a reverend “of the 130-member Hmong Calvary Evangelism Center.”³⁷⁸ Paoze Thao reports that he “speaks, reads, and writes Mong, Hmong, Lao, Thai, French and English,” while Chimeng Yang reports that he “speaks, reads, and writes Mong, Hmong, Lao, Thai, and English” (P. Thao and Yang 2004:14).

Beyond its leadership, the actual membership base and size of the Mong Federation is unknown. Because key leaders of the Mong Federation were unable to meet in person or provide information about certain aspects of the organization, I was not able to obtain direct information about the size of the MFI’s membership, their rules of membership, or how far outside of California’s Central Valley this membership stretches.³⁷⁹ Nevertheless, certain comments by the leaders suggest that the membership of the MFI may include persons of Paoze Thao’s lineage and/or subclan. This is suggested by Thao in one of his replies to other people’s inquiry.

Ntawm lwm xeeb Moob mas kuv tsis paub, tabsis ntawm peb cov kwvtij Moob Thoj Moob Leeg hab Moob Dlawb taagnrho tuabsi, mas peb cov thawjcoj tau coglug suamnpe ca rua huv ntaubntawv meej lawm. Tejzag [A] tseem ncu tau meej. (Approximate translation: With respect to other Mong clans, I do not know, but with respect to our Mong Thao lineage of Mong Leng and Hmong Der background inclusive, our leaders have entered into a clear written agreement. Perhaps [A] still remembers well).³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ Romney, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2003a.

³⁷⁸ Stephen Magagnini, "Sacramento's Hmong Community Divided over Charter School," *Sacramento Bee*, March 2, 2010.

³⁷⁹ Between 2009 and 2011, I made written, informal requests to meet with two key leaders of the MFI (Paoze Thao and Chimeng Yang). However, Thao replied that, given his schedule and workload at the time, he would not be able to meet during either of 2009 or 2010. Nonetheless, I am especially grateful to Thao for providing me with the references to about five journal articles and book chapters and referred me to the *Mong Journal* for further assistance with my inquiry. I send a follow-up e-mail in late 2010 to ask Thao for information about the background of the Mong Federation; however, I did not receive a reply. Upon my request to meet with him, Yang initially showed some interest in responding to my inquiry regarding AB 78 and the Mong Leng/Hmong Der issues: he suggested that he might provide written information related to the issues I raised in my email. I waited several weeks but Yang did not comment; I wrote an e-mail to follow-up with him but received no further reply.

³⁸⁰ Message in *Kev Cai*, June 18, 2003.

Although Thao never made clear whether or not the “written agreement” meant that these lineage members are members of the MFI, his comment suggests that the Mong Federation drew support from lineage or subclan members. Besides these potential members, no other formal organization (non-profit organizations, churches, businesses, etc.) or college student organization publicly declared affiliation with the MFI during the 2003 protest movement.

In retrospect, it appears that keeping the information about membership private rather than putting it out in the open may have been part of the MFI’s tactic of protecting the organization, its goals and/or its members from unwelcomed solicitation or attention. Furthermore, it appears that the leaders of the MFI movement were not actively trying to expand their membership base, perhaps because membership expansion poses its own set of potential vulnerabilities for the movement. These potential vulnerabilities include depersonalization and the difficulty in maintaining strong core group values and a united front.³⁸¹ I return to a discussion of these vulnerabilities in terms of mobilizing supporters and cultivating core group values when I discuss the MFI’s framing activities later on.

Members of the Mong Federation were the most active opponents of AB 78, but they were not the only ones calling for greater equality between Mong Leng and Hmong Der. Other individuals unaffiliated with the MFI who preferred to call themselves Mong also participated in the debates over the terms “Mong” and “Hmong.” Several individuals, during writing or personal interviews, expressed strong or moderate support for at least some of the claims that members of the MFI made. Most of these supporters appear to reside in California’s Central Valley, but some were from other cities and states. These included cities with significant

³⁸¹ According to Wilson (1973), depersonalization results from a large membership base and the need to structurally differentiate roles (i.e., division of labor).

concentrations of Hmong Americans such as Fresno, Merced, Stockton, and Sacramento. As we shall get to later on, their opponents also appear to reside in these cities.

Interest Group or Humanitarian Group?

Given their relatively privileged positions (vis-à-vis the majority of the ethnic community), it seems plausible that the *leaders* (as opposed to followers/other members) of the MFI are not themselves victims of the conditions they are trying to ameliorate. In other words, it would seem that they constitute what Kitsuse and Spector (1973) calls a value-oriented group instead of an “interest group.” Distinguishing between humanitarian or “valued-oriented” groups and interest groups, Kitsuse and Spector (1973:415) point out that “humanitarian crusaders by definition set out to improve the lot of more disadvantaged others...[and therefore] they are not, themselves, victims of the conditions they seek to ameliorate” (1973:415). In contrast, “interest groups are those who have something to gain or lose, not just as everyone else would be affected, but over and above the way everyone in a society would be affected by a given change in law or policy” (1973:415). Although Kitsuse and Spector recognize that groups who define conditions as social problems “may be kept going [they mean motivated] by interests or values, or any mixture or combination of them” (1973:415), they make this distinction because they recognize that there are “differences between those affected by the condition and those participating in the social problems enterprise for some other reasons” (1973:418). As they point out, on one hand, groups driven by interest may “participate in the process of definition [of a social problem]...in order to pursue or protect their own social, political, economic, and other interests” (1973:418).³⁸² On the other hand, groups driven by values or “moral indignation” may “attempt

³⁸² In other words, having interests means that a group has “real and material advantages or stakes in the outcome of a given line of activity” (1973:415). An “interest,” according to Kitsuse and Spector, refers to “any social arrangement upon which some individuals or groups claim to depend, rely, use, or need in the conduct of their daily activities” (1973:417).

to define a condition as a social problem *because it offends their sense of values; it seems wrong to them that the condition exists at all*" (1973:418, emphasis added).

Whether or not the Mong Federation as a whole is an interest group may matter less than the impression that others have of them. As we shall examine later on, the mass media and many opponents of the MFI implicitly defined the MFI as an "interest group." Being defined as an interest group instead of a humanitarian group contributed to the delegitimization (rather than legitimization) for the MFI's social problem claims.

The Mong Federation's Protest against Assembly Bill 78

The Initial Political Opportunity

In an article published in the *Mong Journal*, Paoze Thao (2004:17), president of the Mong Federation, Inc., describes the initial actions that the MFI took toward the state regarding AB 78. Thao (2004:17) writes,

First, the Mong Federation, Inc. and the Mong Americans wrote letters to Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes on March 8, 2003 (Mong Federation, 2003, Mar 8). Secondly, since AB 78 was scheduled at the State Assembly Education Committee for consent agenda only for March 19, 2003, representatives of the Mong Federation, Inc. went to the State Capitol to request the State Assembly Committee on Education to add and amend the term "Mong" side by side to the term "Hmong" in the bill, but it was denied, ignored and rejected.

Based on Thao's account, I take March 8, 2003 to be the initial window of political opportunity that members of the Mong Federation defined in order to present their grievance to the state or, more specifically, a segment of California's State Legislature. I take March 19, 2003 to be the second recognized opportunity during which the MFI presented their grievance. Between March 19th and June 11th, the MFI defined a third crucial opportunity to present their grievance. As we shall examine shortly, that opportunity was opened up by the *Los Angeles Times* when it published a May 24, 2003 article covering the issue. Finally, the fourth and probably most

crucial political opportunity that the MFI defined was on June 11, 2003. I return to these third and fourth opportunities later on in the chapter. But first, let us examine how the state responded to the MFI's grievances between March 8th and March 19th.

A Crucial Conjunction: The State's Initial Response

Based on the available evidence, the state's initial response³⁸³ to the Mong Federation's actions between March 8th and March 19th was to suggest that the Mong Federation "seek a separate ethnic designation through federal channels."³⁸⁴ Representatives of the MFI confirmed that this state response occurred, and the *Los Angeles Times* further corroborated this when it reported direct quotes from Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes. As Thao recalls,

Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes explained to the representatives of the Mong Federation, Inc. that, "all Hmong are classified under that term" and directed the representatives of the Mong Federation, Inc. "to seek a separate ethnic designation through federal channels" (Reyes, 2003, March 19). Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes also confirmed this statement to the *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Lee Romney³⁸⁵ as well (P. Thao 2004:17).

The *Los Angeles Times* reported the same state response but provided a more revealing quote from Assemblywoman Reyes. On May 24, 2003, Lee Romney of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote,

Reyes said she explained to the group that all Hmong in the United States are classified under that term and directed the Mong to seek a separate ethnic designation through federal channels. The bill neither favors one dialect over another nor mandates the creation of curricular materials, she said. / "If I put Mong in there, are the Black Hmong going to come to me? Are the Red Hmong going to come to me?" the assemblywoman asked. "We as a Legislature decided not to get into this fight." / Still, Reyes -- who has seen Latinos bicker similarly over self-identifying terms -- is sympathetic. "It's the struggle of a new community," she said (emphasis added).³⁸⁶

In addition to referring them to "federal channels," the state framed the conflict between the MFI and sponsors of AB 78 as "the struggle of a new community." But the manner in which the state

³⁸³ The state's second major response that followed this initial response was the Senate Committee on Education's suggestion to erase Hmong from the bill. The final state response was actual erasure of Hmong from AB 78.

³⁸⁴ Lee Romney, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2003a.

³⁸⁵ Apparently, Thao was referring to the May 24, 2003 LA Times article, *ibid.*

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* The forward slash [/] indicates a new paragraph.

did this was dramatic. First, the state manufactured resource scarcity. It did this in two ways: (1) by speculating about the effects or benefits of AB 78, and (2) by engaging in a purely hypothetical scenario in which other *imagined categories* of Hmong might make unwarranted AB 78-like claims upon the state. Through the manufacturing of resource scarcity, the state could “rationally” justify its decision “not to get into this fight.” In essence, the state refused to hear the “MFI case” beyond the testimonies given at the Senate Committee on Education hearing. Moreover, by defining the social problem as “the struggle of a new community,” the state showed indifference to the MFI’s concerns about linguistic inequality *and* implicitly located the *cause* of linguistic inequality *in the ethnic community* rather than in state institutional practices. Finally, by redirecting the challenger to seek corrective action at “federal channels,” the state conveniently released itself of responsibility as the proper target of the social movement. The state’s refusal to take responsibility for the social problem or to help correct it severely curtailed the MFI movement’s impact on state practices; yet, both the state and federally funded government agencies are largely responsible for maintaining Hmong Der as the predominant dialect in most government publications (see Appendix C, for Tables of Government Publications and a discussion).

As I will discuss in greater detail below, this set of state actions (refusing to hear the ‘MFI case’ and ‘remanding’ it to the ethnic community) constituted a critical conjuncture in the MFI’s social-problem movement. These actions powerfully circumscribed the MFI’s opportunity to make claims upon the state and their ability to operate as a *legitimate* political broker—that is, as somebody who can operate legitimately as an intermediary between the ethnic community and outside groups, especially the state. On one front, the MFI faced a state that refused to be defined as the target of the MFI’s social movement. On another front, the MFI

faced an “ethnic community” whose segments were parties to the conflict but not necessarily the target capable of granting the MFI’s primary goal. Both situations would prove detrimental to the MFI’s efforts to seek ameliorative action on the social problem.³⁸⁷

The Fresno Community Education Task Force’s Initial Response

Almost immediately after the members of the Task Force learned about the MFI’s opposition at the Capitol, they tried to engage the leaders of the MFI in dialog.³⁸⁸ According to a participant,

I did not know anything about the Mong Federation’s opposition to AB 78 until the day I went to lobby for the bill in early March [2003] and was told that they [state members of the Education Committee] have received letters of opposition from a group in our community. However, the only contact person I ha[d] at that time was [A] (a member of MFI). I visited [A] immediately after the visit at the Capitol to resolve this issue but there was no success.³⁸⁹

At least two key supporters of the AB 78 bill met with a key opponent of the bill in Sacramento and both sides engaged in an intense discussion about the issues surrounding the two dialects: Mong Leng and Hmong Der.³⁹⁰ However, according to Pang, an observer who was “pulled in” to join the meeting, the two sides of the debate could not reach any resolution.³⁹¹ According to one of the participants, the members of the Task Force asked that the MFI withdraw its opposition to AB 78 and offered to “address many of [the MFI’s] concerns during the implementation stages and that the Success for Hmong/Mong Students Advisory Committee is the first step toward addressing these issues”,³⁹² however, in the end, no compromise was reached.

³⁸⁷ This does not mean that the MFI’s leaders or their members were incapable of making claims (about ethnic representation) upon the state. To be sure, members of the MFI continued to make a variety of claims upon the state.

³⁸⁸ D. Vu, personal communication, July 25, 2011, Fresno, California.

³⁸⁹ Email correspondence, June 23, 2003.

³⁹⁰ Pang (pseudonym), personal communication, November 20, 2011, Sacramento, California.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Email correspondence, August 4, 2003.

Furthermore, in a message that expressed surprise, frustration and hurt feelings, Lee, a supporter of AB 78, wrote,

I didn't know about [B's] position until I was contacted by *L.A. Times*. We are not only professionals in our own line of work, but we are also professionals collaborating together in the Success for Hmong/Mong Students Advisory Committee.³⁹³ I feel that we need to trust each other and treat one another as professionals when attention needs to be given to such critical issues in our Hmong/Mong community. I wish B and A had raised this issue at our February [20th, 2003] meeting when I talked about AB 78 and asked everyone to endorse this bill. I was doing so under the impression that everyone supported the bill in its original language.

What I don't understand was why they didn't mention a single thing to me about their views at the meeting but went ahead and wrote letters to oppose the bill immediately after that. *I am deeply hurt by their actions. Had this issue been raised and we had a discussion on it, perhaps we might have been able to [resolve] it already, even having Mong included in the bill if that was the consensus* (emphasis added).³⁹⁴

The above passages provide important clues for understanding how the conflict between the MFI and supporters of AB 78 emerged. It suggests that the MFI never consulted with the drafters and closest supporters of AB 78 prior to writing letters to the state legislature to request an amendment to the bill. It also suggests that the activists who were most closely involved in supporting the bill were not aware of the MFI's desire to add "Mong" into the bill until the MFI had already written to the state. Instead of engaging with the ethnic community, the MFI went straight to the state with their grievance, bypassing all regular channels of ethnic communication. In retrospect, this direct-to-state action produced unintended consequences for the MFI. One of these consequences is that the MFI missed a possible opportunity—one alluded to by Lee in the

³⁹³ The "Success for Hmong/Mong Students Advisory Committee" was formed following a state-wide educational conference convened by California's Office of the Secretary of Education, leaders of the Hmong/Mong Central Valley, and the Pacific Institute for Community Organization on May 28, 2002. The purpose of the Committee was "to work with the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), the Office of the Secretary for Education (OSE), and local school districts to resolve and improve the Mong/Hmong student achievement" (cited in P. Thao 2004:16).

³⁹⁴ Email correspondence, June 23, 2003.

message above—to negotiate directly with the Hmong sponsors of the bill for a possible resolution before approaching the state.

But could this conflict have been avoided had leaders of MFI consulted with the Hmong initiators of the bill before going to the state? There is no certain answer to this. However, given the unique political opportunity that AB 78 presented to the leaders of the MFI, I contend that it was improbable that they would have chosen to mobilize “public consensus” from the ethnic community beforehand.³⁹⁵ The risk of getting delayed over internal disagreements was high and the window of opportunity to present their claim to the state was brief.

Mobilization Tactics and the State’s Response

Before we proceed to examine how the MFI constructed a social problem (Part II), a discussion about the MFI’s tactics up to this point and the state’s response to these tactics is in order. This discussion is critical for three reasons: (1) it tries to identify the nested political contexts in which the challenger and the target (state legislators) were embedded; (2) it tries to explain how nested political contexts shaped the tactics of the challengers as well as the tactics of the state; and (3) it tries to explain why the credibility/legitimacy of social actors matters for mobilizing consensus prior to collective action. Below, I briefly summarize the MFI’s initial protest tactic and discuss how it intersects with the local and national political contexts. Then I discuss the state’s response to the MFI and consider how that response may have been influenced by the state’s political context.

Local Political Contexts: Ethnic Representation and Visibility

Before their public demonstration on June 11, 2003, the MFI used a variety of tactics such as writing letters to Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes and members of the legislatures who

³⁹⁵ The common sense understanding of many people in the ethnic community is that ‘public consensus’ is difficult to obtain and could delay action indefinitely. As such, if anybody wanted something done in or for the ethnic community, the assumption was that they ought to go ahead, alone or with consensus from a smaller group.

comprised the Education Committee that oversaw AB 78 and making testimonies during at least one state hearing. Above, I have established that the MFI used the introduction of AB 78 in the California Legislature as a political opportunity to present their grievance directly to the state. However, I have yet to explain how this sophisticated MFI tactic and AB 78 itself were mediated by the ethnic political context.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the introduction of AB 78 resulted from the collective mobilization efforts of various segments of the Hmong American community. More specifically, Hmong and non-Hmong professionals associated with the Fresno Hmong community successfully constructed a social problem (teenage suicides) and strategically used the Hmong military-service frame to motivate collective action, resulting in the introduction of AB 78. But even before AB 78 was drafted, the idea that something like AB 78 would stand a chance of becoming state law depended on its potential to catch the attention and maintain the interest of state representatives such as Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes. This potential was made greater by the fact that foreign-born individuals, as well as citizens of Hmong descent, comprised a significant and more importantly, mobilizable constituency in Fresno, California.

By using AB 78 as an opportunity to voice their grievance, the MFI was indirectly relying on some of these antecedent factors—political visibility and legitimacy; a mobilizable ethnic constituency—in their campaign to get the state to recognize Mong as an ‘ethno-linguistic’ group. By going directly to the state with their grievance, the MFI leadership avoided potential problems such as disagreements, opposition and delays from the ethnic community that could occur had they let the ethnic community mediate them or their grievance. They temporarily circumvented all usual channels of communication and negotiation within the ethnic community. However, I argue that this tactic—despite or because of its sophistication—had

unanticipated consequences for the MFI and their perceived credibility/legitimacy *because of how the state responded to it.*

The state's refusal to hear or decide the "MFI case"³⁹⁶ was a critical juncture in the MFI campaign. Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes, as mentioned above, redirected the Mong Federation "to seek a separate ethnic designation through federal channels." However, at the same time, Reyes made clear that the "[California] legislature decided not to get into this fight." In effect, Reyes implied that the issue raised by the MFI was an ethnic issue that ought to be resolved within and by the ethnic community. In retrospect, the MFI probably did not anticipate this response from the state. Put differently, the MFI probably overestimated the potential success of direct action with the state. They probably assumed, incorrectly, that state-mediated confrontation (i.e., bypassing the ethnic community) would be an effective tactic. In any case, the state's refusal to hear the MFI case left them with two difficult options: petitioning the federal government to seek a separate ethnic designation and/or engaging directly with the ethnic community to present their grievance. The available evidence suggests that MFI hesitantly took the latter option.

However, by that time, the ethnic community had seen what the MFI did—i.e., they tried to circumvent regular channels of ethnic communication—and many within the community were more furious at the MFI and were less ready to sit down with the MFI to discuss "reconciliation" or "compromise" of the issues. As Part III of this chapter will describe, many members of the

³⁹⁶ Just to be clear, the MFI never filed any lawsuits against anybody or the state during the course of AB 78. When I refer to the "MFI case," I am referring to the MFI's claim that Mong Leng and Hmong Der constitute two distinct groups. I am also simply using the word "case" to draw the analogy that state policy makers within designated committees, like judges of superior courts, have relatively wide discretion on whether or not to hold hearings on certain proposed policies (or pending cases, in the court context). Not all proposed policies get a hearing; and among those that do get heard, only some ever become law. Within the context of courts, superior courts or court of appeals may choose to hear a case or not, and they can decide to refer a case back to the lower courts for final resolution. Moreover, the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, for many clear and unclear reasons, often choose to not hear cases brought to its attention.

ethnic community were angry at the MFI, both for their “hijacking” of AB 78 and their claims about the cultural and linguistic distinction of Mong. This strong ethnic response made the MFI’s efforts at mobilizing collective consensus within the ethnic community quite difficult.

But attending to only Assemblywomen Reyes’ direct response to the MFI presents an incomplete picture of the state’s indirect but mediated involvement in this conflict. It begs the question, Why did the state, instead of directly addressing the Mong Federations’ concerns with respect to AB 78, choose to ‘refer’ the MFI case to “federal channels” and to the ethnic community (for deliberation, resolution, etc)? Put differently, why did the state decide to define the disagreement between the MFI and their opponents as an ethnic specific problem instead of a state problem? The answer to this question requires us to identify the broader political contexts in which state representatives were embedded. By identifying this political context (existing state policies and sentiments), perhaps we can better understand why the state took the action that it did toward the MFI in particular and Hmong Californians more generally.

Broader Political Contexts: State Policies and Extant Sentiments

Why did the state define the Mong v. Hmong issue as an *ethnic problem*, but refuse to fulfill the MFI’s demand to add “Mong” onto AB 78? I contend that the state may have been influenced to do so because of three factors: (1) the existing political context encouraged it to do so; (2) the state has an interest in providing public goods, but usually only to groups that it regards as powerful or legitimate political brokers; and (3) the state recognized the logic behind various groups’ pursuit of *ethnic* claims upon the nation-state and refused to officiate the Mong as an ethnic or national-origins group in order to prevent them from making future claims on the state. I discuss each of these factors in turn.

First, California's political context has been shaped, most recently, by a set of mutually reinforcing laws. This set of laws reflects the anti-immigrant, anti-affirmative action, and anti-bilingual education sentiments and positions of policy makers as well as that of the state's majority voters. These sentiments are found, respectively, in California's Proposition 187 (which passed in 1994),³⁹⁷ Proposition 209 (passed in 1996),³⁹⁸ and Proposition 227 (passed in 1998).³⁹⁹ Each of these highly controversial propositions passed by a majority vote. According to California Secretary of State records, Prop. 187, Prop. 209, and Prop. 227 won 58.9 percent, 54.6 percent, and 60.9 percent of the voters' votes, respectively (Jones 1994, 1996, 1998).⁴⁰⁰ The state and the majority of the general population constitute and operate under this political context. Under this context, the most plausible action of the state would be to define any issue that challenges these policies and sentiments as deviant, or to refuse to hear the issue altogether by defining it as a non-state issue. On the other hand, if an issue serves or upholds the status quo, it probably would most be considered a "compelling government interest." The MFI's request to be recognized as a separate ethno-linguistic group in an education bill would probably be read by the rest of the state as an attempt to promote bilingual education.

But the state does, under certain circumstances, choose to hear or listen to particular groups who raise certain issues that go against the status quo. The state is interested, at least in theory,

³⁹⁷ According to the American Civil Liberties Union, "Proposition 187 sought, among other things, to require police, health care professionals and teachers to verify and report the immigration status of all individuals, including children." In June of 1999, California's Governor Gray Davis "initiat[ed] a request for mediation to resolve the appeal of Proposition 187." This mediation resulted in the voiding of major parts of Prop. 187. Source: American Civil Liberties Union, "CA's Anti-Immigrant Proposition 187 is Voided, Ending State's Five-Year Battle with ACLU, Rights Groups," July 29, 1999. Retrieved March 1, 2010 from: <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/cas-anti-immigrant-proposition-187-voided-ending-states-five-year-battle-aclu-righ>

³⁹⁸ Proposition 209 amended the California Constitution by added Section 31 to Article I of the state's Constitution. Section 31 read, in part, "The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting." (California Constitution, Article I, § 31 (a)).

³⁹⁹ Proposition 227 is formally titled "English Language Education for Immigrant Children." California Education Code Chapter 3 §§ 300–340.

⁴⁰⁰ Within Fresno county, the percent who voted for Prop. 187, Prop. 209, and Prop. 227 were 66 percent, 61 percent, and 63 percent, respectively (Jones 1994:109; 1996:34; 1998:84).

in providing a “public good”—that is, in providing a valued resource that serves the “greatest good.” However, in practice most of the time, the state caters to or provides rewards and goods to powerful groups whose programs or interests uphold the state’s “compelling government interests.” The compelling government interests in a given circumstance or period, in turn, are determined interactively by the influential representatives of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of the government and by the representatives of powerful interest groups, such as corporations and other administrative governmental agencies. As the work of legal scholars show, each of these government branches rely on, reinforce, validate, and influence one another more often than is usually acknowledged (Abourezk 1977; Crain and Tollison 1979; Kang 2004).⁴⁰¹ Given the limited direct access that less powerful groups have to these branches of the government, they encounter difficulties when the state chooses not to define their issue as one that warrants state attention or state action.

But I want to suggest that there is an even more compelling reason for the state to refuse to meet the MFI’s demand to include “Mong” on a state law. This is the state’s unstated desire *not* to set any legal precedent that could allow Mong to make future claims upon the state as an *ethnic or national-origins* group. For under state and federal law, ethnic/national-origins group are entitled to certain legal protections against discrimination in various public institutions. The state probably refused to add “Mong” alongside “Hmong” on a state bill as a way to avoid officiating the Mong as an ethnic or national-origins group. In essence, the state’s response to the MFI was an attempt to prevent them from carrying out ethnic- or linguistic-based social movements in the future.

⁴⁰¹ The goal—and assumption—underlying the principle of the “separation of power” is that each of these branches operate independently and that they serve as checks and balances on each other’s power (see pp. 327-30 of James Abourezk. 1977. "The Congressional Veto: A Contemporary Response to Executive Encroachment on Legislative Prerogatives." *Indiana Law Journal* 52:323-343.)

As a direct response to the state's refusal to fulfill their demand, the members of the MFI turned to the mainstream media. The *Los Angeles Times*, by publishing an article containing some of the MFI's claims, provided the MFI with another crucial political opportunity not only to raise awareness about their grievances but also to formulate a social problem. We turn to the media's actions and the MFI's construction of a social problem next.

Part II: The Mong Federation Constructs a Social Problem

For over 25 years, our federal, state, local governments, our community-based organizations, and public and private foundations and/or entities have grossly failed to recognize the inequality in the distribution of resources to the Mong; they have been misinformed by certain Hmong who feel compelled to speak for the Mong in as much as our significance and identity is of little or no value to boldly claim that "Hmong" is the "official dialect" of the Hmong/Mong people. This notion has gone too far and for too long. *AB 78 was the golden opportunity to say "enough is enough."*

—Excerpt from an individual opposed to AB 78 for not including "Mong" in the bill's language (July 13, 2003, emphasis added).

The above excerpt was written and posted by a member of the Mong Federation, Inc. in an Internet message forum just three days after AB 78 was signed into law by California's Governor Gray Davis. It most clearly expresses the MFI's underlying grievances. But, as I will discuss below, economic-material disparity was not the only condition that members of the MFI and their supporters resented. Beneath material disparity, members of MFI perceived and believed that there were larger, longer-standing problems of cultural and political disparity that needed collective action to resolve.

In this part of the chapter, I focus on explaining how the members of the Mong Federation engaged in the construction of a social problem and attempted to gain legitimacy for it. Toward that end, I pay particular attention to how the MFI's claims making activities developed and intensified during the months prior to AB 78 becoming law and afterwards. In

the MFI case, claims making activities intensified *after* the publication of a *Los Angeles Times* article on May 24, 2003.⁴⁰² As such, I spend some time examining the mainstream media's role in re-constructing and publicizing the social problem before analyzing how the MFI constructs the social problem. However, as I hope to show, it was members of the MFI, rather than the media, who played the most active role in defining the social problem, engaging in group boundary construction, and seeking corrective action for the social problem. The rest of this chapter will proceed as follows. I will begin by introducing the general form of the social problem construction process⁴⁰³ and my main argument. Next, I examine how the mainstream news media publicized but also engaged in the construction of the social problem. Then I examine the MFI's central claims as its leaders engaged in the construction of the social problem and tried to seek legitimacy for it. Finally, I discuss the mixed role that the mass media as a political actor and institution played in the legitimation of the MFI's social problem.

Social Problem Construction and the Central Argument

Members of Mong Federation made several claims which suggest that they believe Mong Leng speakers remain in a subordinated position relative to Hmong Der speakers *as a result of* prevailing conditions and practices in Hmong American society. Hereinafter, I use the MFI's terminologies of "Mong" and "Hmong" to refer to Mong Leng and Hmong Der dialect speakers, respectively, in order to be consistent with their usage. Defining these conditions and practices as an injustice, the MFI protested these conditions. Given their concerns, the MFI engaged in the construction of a social problem. But in order to construct a social problem, the

⁴⁰² In claiming that the conflict intensified after the media publication, I am not suggesting that the media indoctrinated readers—that is, they “[injected] ideas into a passive and defenseless public” (Schudson 2002:265). To be sure, many readers questioned both the claims that the media reported on and the media's own interpretation of the emergent conflict. Rather, what I want to suggest is that the conflict intensified because the issue went public.

⁴⁰³ I reviewed the relevant literature on the construction of social problems in the theoretical chapter [Chapter 2].

MFI must engage in a set of social problem claims or claims-making activities (Kitsuse and Spector 1973). These claims making activities entail the following set of intertwined activities:

1. Defining some putative condition or set of putative conditions as problematic. Rendering subjective interpretations of the negative effects of these putative conditions and identifying the victims.
2. Defining the perpetrators (social causes) of these putative conditions. This process also entails the contentious work of group identity construction (victims v. perpetrators), which involves the more specific work of boundary sharpening and boundary blurring.
3. Calling on some defined target group to take action to ameliorate or change the putative objective conditions.

In the sections that follow, I discuss how the MFI engaged in these claims making activities.

In their attempt to construct a social problem, members of the MFI and their supporters presented a number of claims alleging that Mong as a group have been and continue to be disadvantaged as a result of several objective historical and contemporary conditions. These putative conditions can be categorized as historical-political, contemporary-social/material, and cultural disparities. Members of the MFI also defined the victims and perpetrators of the conditions along with the target and audience groups: 1) Mong Leng as the victim and challenger; 2) Hmong Der as the perpetrators; and 3) the state as the target and authority to make change; and 4) the imagined public as both the population in need of education as well as jury to the unfolding events.

But once the social problem has emerged, “it must acquire social endorsement if it is to be taken seriously and move forward in its career” (Blumer 1971:303). That is, the social problem must acquire “a necessary degree of respectability which entitles it to consideration in

the recognized arenas of public discussion” (Blumer 1971:302-3). Responding directly to the state’s refusal to intervene in the social problem, the MFI turned to the mainstream media, seeking their help to publicize their grievances and implicitly to bestow legitimacy on the social problem. But the mass media, rather than simply reporting on a social problem, play an important role in framing and legitimizing a social problem. Infrequent and localized media coverage, as opposed to wide and sustained media coverage, serve to further delegitimize a social problem. *I argue specifically that although the Los Angeles Times helped to represent and make public the MFI’s claims of disparity, it ultimately delegitimized the MFI’s status as a group by portraying them as a small interest group. I suggest that the lack of wide and sustained media coverage about the social problem contributed to the social problem’s decline.*

The Mong Federation’s Rationale for Opposing AB 78

Referring to how the California legislature responded to their demands on March 8th and March 19th 2003, the president of the MFI states that on both occasions the MFI and its request were “denied, ignored and rejected” (P. Thao 2004:17). Underlying these words were strong emotions, including a strong sense of injustice, about specific, complex issues. One of these issues is about the right to self-identify. Members of the MFI felt that the state’s blatant dismissal of their claim was done out of a lack of understanding about the differences between Mong and Hmong. These feelings were expressed by the president of the MFI, as follows,

Without consideration for self-identification and understanding of the Mong and Hmong people, Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes decided not to add the term “Mong” side by side to the term “Hmong” in the bill as requested. Instead, a new term “Southeast Asians” was added and amended to the bill (AB 78 amended as of March 17, 2003) and her staff Daniel Ross insisted to representatives of the Mong Federation, Inc. that the Mong were already included in the Southeast Asians. Therefore, *the Mong Federation, Inc. and the Mong Americans in California did not have a choice, except to oppose AB 78 since the bill did not include the “Mong” Americans* (Thao 2004:17, emphasis added).

The MFI's strong sense of denial and neglect by the state became a catalyst in what they saw as their rightful struggle for "self-determination" and "equal representation." Given the state's initial responses, the MFI felt that they had no other choice other than to oppose AB 78.

According to Thao, the MFI took their concerns to the mainstream media. "[T]he Mong Federation, Inc. appealed to the various major newspapers in the nation" (P.P. Thao 2004:17).

Next, we turn to the media's actions in order to clarify their role in publicizing the MFI's claims.

The Media's Mixed Role in Re-Constructing and Legitimizing the Social Problem

On May 24, 2003, the *Los Angeles Times* answered the MFI's call. Less than two months before AB 78 became a statute, Lee Romney⁴⁰⁴ published the article, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity" in the *L.A. Times*.⁴⁰⁵ The publication of this article triggered a tidal wave of intense, emotional claims, counter-claims, and responses to counter-claims during the months of June 2003 and several months afterward. The number of Internet message board discussions, e-mail correspondences, and personal conversations about AB 78 (especially about Mong Leng versus Hmong Der) soared through the roof. Let us examine what Romney wrote.

The Stakeholders

In this May 24th article, Romney included brief quotes from multiple stakeholders and an observer. These stakeholders included two persons identified as members of the Mong Federation and opponents of AB 78 (Paoze Thao and Chimeng Yang); three persons who were

⁴⁰⁴ A search in the *Los Angeles Times* shows that between late 1999 and 2003, Romney had been a very active reporter of the financial troubles of the federally funded, city-run Los Angeles Community Development Bank and its legal struggles with other business firms in Los Angeles that borrow money from it. The article "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity" is reminiscent of one of Romney's articles, "A Bank's Bitter Lesson" (Dec. 9, 1999, *L.A. Times*), which recapped how the "4-year old" Community Development Bank (CDB) "was a belated but generous federal response to the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The Department of Housing and Urban Development provided a total of \$430 million for loans to businesses that had been turned down by commercial lenders and to create jobs in some of the city's poorest neighborhoods." Just as AB 78 was initiated after tragic teen suicides hit Hmong Fresno communities, the CDB bank was created in response to the tragic 1992 LA "Rodney King" riots/uprisings in which 53 people died and thousands were injured.

⁴⁰⁵ Los Angeles Times, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity."

identified as supporters of the bill (Peter Vang, Christopher Vang, Doua Vu); two state officials (Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes of Fresno; California Education Secretary Kerry Mazzone); one observer/bystander (Mark Pfeifer of the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul); and some unidentified “Hmong scholars,” “Mong Leng,” and “Hmong Der leaders.” However, neither the *Los Angeles Times* nor the Mong Federation identified any state actor or any formal organization besides the MFI as an opponent of the AB 78 bill. As such, the only clearly identified opponent of AB 78 was the Mong Federation and its key spokespersons.

Outlining the Social Problem Claims

It appears that Romney’s article tried to identify the main stakeholders and to concisely represent their different positions in order to suggest their points of disagreement. For instance, the mainstream media represented and amplified some of the Mong Federation’s central claims of injustice. Toward the top of the article, Romney pointed out,

Members of a small culturally and linguistically distinct group – Mong Leng, or Blue Mong – have come forward to demand that they be recognized separately in the bill, *as a way to reverse* what they say is long-standing subordination to the more dominant Hmong Der, or White Hmong (emphasis added).

(...)

The Mong Leng, who prefer the spelling with no ‘H’ - say they have seized on the legislation by the Fresno Democrat [Assemblywoman Reyes] as a way to make their voices heard *after decades of silence. If the bill passes as is, they fear, resources will flow disproportionately to the Hmong Der* (emphasis added).⁴⁰⁶

Two lines below this, Romney provided a direct quote from “Paoze Thao, a professor of linguistics at Cal State Monterey Bay and president of the nonprofit Mong Federation,”⁴⁰⁷ as follows:

Of the two Hmong groups, our group was the *least educated and the least sophisticated* when we got to this country. But *our group has always disputed the fact that the group Hmong includes Mong*. The public has been misinformed (emphasis added).⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Los Angeles Times, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity."

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

But Romney also presented some of the claims of the MFI's opponents. For instance, he provided a quote from "Christopher Vang, assistant professor of teacher education at Cal State Stanislaus-Stockton [sic] and a supporter of the bill," as follows:

We have White and Blue and Green. Traditionally and culturally the dialects are different and the cultures are different, but the ethnicity is Hmong. (...) Somebody has taken this opportunity to publicize a personal quest for linguistic equality... We need to say: Enough is enough."⁴⁰⁹

Identifying Vang as a "Hmong Der," Romney remarked, "Vang... says he knows many Mong Leng who use their dialects [sic] at home but have adapted to Hmong Der in the workplace."⁴¹⁰

Without going into detail about what Vang's observation about Mong Leng's dialect switching or adaptation implies, Romney contrasted Vang's claims with those of "Thao and other Mong Leng activists" who "say they have suffered inequality and a stereotype of inferiority for years."⁴¹¹ Finally, Romney cited from Chimeng Yang, whom he described as a member of the "younger generation" who has "[taken] the reins of the Mong Federation," and is "a former teacher and current administrator in the Sacramento City Unified School District." According to Romney,

Yang said he has seen the disparities affect self-esteem in the classroom. "The Mong kids will not comprehend the story," he said. "They are shy. They don't want to raise their hands, because of the teasing."

The above passages begin to outline the social problem claims of the two sides, especially those of the Mong Federation. As the passages convey, members of the MFI feel that Mong as a group have been "subordinated," "less sophisticated," and involuntarily silenced. Chimeng Yang's claim suggested another element of the social problem: the conditions (i.e., dialect disparities) and their consequences on Mong students (i.e., self-esteem).

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

Putative Conditions and Alleged Consequences

The media helped to represent the MFI's claims about the putative objective conditions and their alleged consequences on Mong persons. Specifically, these claims about the putative objective conditions and their consequences appear toward the middle of Romney's two-page article. For instance, after claiming that "one measure of the battle is the fight over the spelling "Hmong," devised more than three decades ago by a Western academic to describe the diverse hill tribes of Southeast Asia," Romney made the following assertions:

As many as 40,000 Hmong were killed fighting on the U.S. side in the CIA's secret war against Laotian communists in the 1960s and 1970s. Survivors settled in the United States as refugees, congregating largely in Minnesota, Wisconsin and California's Central Valley. / *The more impoverished Mong Leng say their people died or were injured in greater numbers. The Hmong Der were generally more educated, more affluent and consequently more influential,* Hmong scholars say.

As a result, dictionaries, written translations and other literature are skewed to Hmong Der. State officials in Minnesota, for example, only recently began translating children's books into both Mong Leng and Hmong Der, said Mark Pfeifer, resource center director at the Hmong Cultural Center in St. Paul.

But whether *the dominance of Hmong Der* has scarred the community is a matter of debate. Many Hmong Der leaders say tensions have been minimal. They point to *intermarriages with Mong Leng*. (emphasis added).⁴¹²

What is also relevant in this quote is that the *L.A. Times* presented several claims simply as facts or borrowed facts: (1) The claim that the term "Hmong" was devised by an unnamed "Western academic"; (2) the claim that Mong Leng, who are presumed to be an identifiable, monolithic group, were "more impoverished" and "died or injured in greater numbers" [compared to Hmong Der] during the Laotian war; (3) that Hmong Der, also presumed to be an identifiable, monolithic group, are "more educated, more affluent and consequently more influential." Furthermore, in language reminiscent of those who cite interracial marriage between whites and blacks to argue that racism has declined significantly within American

⁴¹² Los Angeles Times, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity."

society, the *L.A. Times* cited unidentified “Hmong Der leaders” as proponents of the claim that “intermarriages with Mong Leng” occur. In doing so, the *L.A. Times* gave off the impression that there was actually segregation between Hmong Der and Mong Leng and that this segregation is comparable to that of white and black segregation within American society.

The Media’s Diagnosis of the Conditions

But Romney did more than formulate claims about the objective conditions surrounding the AB 78 controversy. Early on in his article, Romney presented his diagnosis of the conditions. The first two opening paragraphs of Romney’s news article are worth a close reading, because they (1) suggested the limited context in which the reporter situated the “bitter debate,” (2) summarized the reporter’s understanding about what the debate really involves, and (3) hinted at the reporter’s underlying assumption about the real cause of teenage suicide in Hmong American communities. Romney wrote,

It stemmed from tragedy. After eight teenage suicides scarred the Central Valley’s Hmong community, Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes (D-Fresno) convened a group of the Hmong to seek solutions to the youth *crisis of poor self-esteem and cultural confusion*. The legislation born that day has been praised by leaders of the people with Southeast Asian roots. But Reyes’ seemingly innocuous bill — which would encourage California schools to teach the history of Hmong involvement and sacrifice in the secret war in Laos — has triggered a bitter debate *on the very nature of Hmong identity* (emphasis added).⁴¹³

These passages suggest that Romney situated the debate within the context of the “tragedy” and “teenage suicides [that] scarred” the “Hmong community” of California’s Central Valley. He characterized the event as a “bitter debate” on a “seemingly innocuous bill.” Moreover, Romney does what communication scholars have referred to as “setting the agenda” (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Entman 2007), by suggesting that the main point of contention is over “the very nature of Hmong identity.” Bracketing the topic in this way made sense to the journalist, because he

⁴¹³ Ibid.

seemed to have uncritically accepted the assumption that the *cause* of Hmong teenage suicides has to do with “poor self-esteem” and “cultural confusion.”

This assumption about cultural confusion, in turn, is linked to the media’s other longer-standing, deep-seated public assumptions regarding “immigrants.” As Romney proclaimed,

The dispute taps into *centuries-old divisions among a tribal people. Like other battles among recent immigrants* lumped together under one ethnic umbrella, it is about class, culture and language as an anchor to identity (emphasis added).⁴¹⁴

In this quote, “centuries-old divisions” are being attributed to “recent immigrants” in general and Hmong “tribal people” in particular. Even though Romney seemed to understand that ethnic disagreements are a product of being “lumped together under one ethnic umbrella,” he implied that these disagreements are unique to recent immigrant groups.⁴¹⁵ In essence, the media reframed the more specific, *injustice-against-Mong Americans* problem into a generic *recent immigrant* battle or “problem.” In this way, the “real” social problem became, by the media’s definition, Hmong’s status as a recent immigrant (read their under- or lack of assimilation). Consequently, the material disparities, political disadvantages, and lack of political representation in the United States—which were the focus of the Mong Federation protest—were deemphasized.

Taken together, the media helped to convey MFI’s grievance and strong sense of injustice about various alleged disparities between Mong Leng and Hmong Der in the military and in the school systems. By making public the MFI’s claims, the mainstream media lent some needed legitimacy to the emergent social problem. Most crucially, the media, by putting the claims of the MFI on the public agenda, helped the MFI create the *impression that the objective conditions have worsened over time*. However, the media also associated the social problem with Hmong’s

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. Such belief perpetuates the assumption that ethnic identity politics have little to do with the conditions of political inequality produced in and by the modern state.

recent immigrant status and portrayed the MFI as an interest group. As I shall return to in the discussion, this latter action worked to delegitimize the social problem. In the next section, I turn to the Mong Federation's own claims making activities.

The MFI's Central Claims in the Social Problem

Between March and June 2003, the members of the Mong Federation were actively engaged in constructing a specific social problem. Below, I draw on several sources to examine the components of this social problem.

The Alleged Situation

Historical-Political Disparity

Members of the MFI claimed that they and "other Mong Leng" individuals have experienced multiple forms of political disparity, by which they appear to mean differential access to political representation and influence. This claim was expressed in a number of places by members of the MFI. For instance, in an internet message forum, a member of the MFI wrote,

AB 78 is about the Hmong's and Mong's involvement in the Vietnam War. It is about the history of the Hmong/Mong and the sacrifices they had made by helping the United States fight against the Communists during the Vietnam War. The Mong were at the frontline fighting side-by-side with the Hmong against the Communists. Many of them died and they all deserve to be recognized just like any other Hmong. (...)

According to the Lao Veterans of America, Inc., 35,000 to 40,000 Mong, Hmong and other Southeast Asian soldiers in Laos were killed in the war. *Based on the information provided by many Mong veterans, it is believed that the majority of those soldiers who were killed in the war belong to the Mong group because they were the low ranking officers who were sent to the frontline more often.* With all the sacrifices and contributions they made to the war, the Mong are excluded from AB 78.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁶ Email in message forum, June 8, 2003.

In their article titled “The Mong and The Hmong,” P. Thao and Yang (2004) claim that, in Laos, persons of Hmong Der background acquired certain privileges and that these privileges carried over to the United States context. Specifically, they claim,

Back in Laos, *more Hmong* had the opportunities to receive formal education, so they had more *political influence in the Lao government*. Many of them knew French and some of them already learned English in Laos and in the refugee camps in Thailand. When they came to the United States, many have worked for the school systems, social service agencies and private sectors. *They have educated the systems*, Western scholars, and the American public about the Hmong, *but neglected the Mong* (P. Thao and Yang 2004:11, emphasis added).

Moreover, according to Thao and Yang, “The Mong had been marginalized during the U.S. Secret War in Laos and today they continue to be marginalized in the United States” (2004:12). It bears repeating that by the term “Hmong,” Thao and Yang are referring exclusively to persons who they presume to be native speakers of the Hmong Der “language.” In this excerpt, it is clear that Thao and Yang define “Hmong” as the perpetrators for their alleged exclusive role in “educat[ing] the [Western and American] systems...about the Hmong.” Conversely, they portray Mong as the “neglected” group. Thao and Yang claim that the political disparity between Mong Leng and Hmong Der has been long-standing. Because more Hmong Der relative to Mong Leng had the opportunity to obtain formal education and learn French or English, the claim suggests, Hmong Der individuals generally had a head start both in Laos and after emigrating to the United States.

At the most fundamental level, however, the MFI’s claims were not about historical “discrimination” but about contemporary “discrimination.” It is contemporary discrimination that has or could have consequences for present and future social and material conditions. When the members of the MFI expressed discontent with the ways that they or others whom they represent have been treated, they referred mostly to contemporary material conditions. When

they made references to historical discrimination, they did so, in large part, to express the view that there is historical continuity with respect to certain aspects of Hmong society such as social actors' practices, attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, patterned relations, culture, forms of leadership, etc. It is to this complex set of *contemporary* social and material conditions that we now turn.

Contemporary, Social-Material Disparity

In addition to political disparity, leaders of the MFI claim that Mong Leng speakers in the U.S. have experienced serious material disparities in various private and public institutions.

These material disparities, rather than existing independently of social relations, are linked to social disparities. Paoze Thao, president of the MFI, writes:

Due to the lack of knowledge and the consequences of misinformation and miseducation of [sic] the Mong, the term 'Hmong' has been widely used by the general public, particularly in the United States, to represent both the Hmong and the Mong. The misrepresentation of the Mong is evidenced by the already huge disparity between the educational programs, material development, informational materials, and services in the various public and private entities, local school districts, and colleges and universities in the United States between the Mong and the Hmong. *As a consequence, resources and funding have not been allocated to address the needs of the Mong. When data are collected for funding purposes, the Mong are included with the Hmong; however, when funds are received, they are usually used to benefit the Hmong.* Through the use of state and federal funds, curricula, informational materials, tests, and literature have been developed and have been translated into the Hmong language to serve the Hmong-speaking population. *None of the materials have been translated into the Mong language to serve the Mong-speaking population. For these reasons, the term 'Hmong' does not include the Mong* (P. Thao 2008:47, emphasis added).

This passage is crucial for understanding the MFI's claim about the contemporary conditions of social and material disparity, the people responsible for creating such conditions, and the consequences that such conditions could have for Mong Leng. Let us discuss the putative conditions in more detail before proceeding to discuss the MFI's interpretation of their sources and consequences.

Thao contended that services and materials, such as “curricula, informational materials, tests, and literature” have been translated exclusively into Hmong Der language “to serve the [White] Hmong-speaking population.” Furthermore, Thao argued that the most important resources—state and federal funds—“have not been allocated to address the needs of the Mong [Leng].” Where does this material disparity take place? Without specifying actual places or establishments, Thao identified “public and private entities” as sites wherein these financial and material disparities have taken place. His emphasis, however, was on “local school districts...colleges and universities” as key sites of disparity.⁴¹⁷

Although Thao’s statement did not point out specific persons⁴¹⁸ or entities who carried out the purported decisions that negatively affected Mong Leng, it implicated both the state and the Hmong Der “public” in the alleged act. That the state is implicated is suggested by the phrase, “resources and funding have not been allocated to address the needs of the Mong.” Relative to the ethnic group as a whole, the state has far greater access to socially valuable resources and greater authority over allocation decisions. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of this sentence combined with the sentence that immediately followed also implicated the Hmong Der public in the material disparity between Mong Leng and Hmong Der. By claiming that “[w]hen data are collected for funding purposes, the Mong are included with the Hmong; however, when

⁴¹⁷ As my later discussion will clarify, the main focus of the MFI social movement has been on altering curricula at the level of public schools and school districts. The issue-specific political opportunities that members of the MFI construct have been consistent with this focus.

⁴¹⁸ The MFI never made public the names of persons they deemed were perpetrators. However, a participant in the debates made the following claim: “Prof. PaoZe may at this time [be] holding a letter written by a suppose to be Hmong Der in the name of Neng [Yang] from MN to an Iowa University (who knows how many universities he wrote to) as saying that Mong Leng Language is mere slang and is not a Mong official language.” ... “Mr. Neng Yang of MN actually [wrote] to an Iowa University saying that the Mong Leng language is slang and is not a Mong official language. This [amounts] to character [assassination]. If he is an educated Mong/community leader and practice radical discrimination.... [he] has no place in the Mong society and must be dealt with.” In a follow up to these claims, another participant wrote: “I have heard about Neng’s attitude toward *Hmoobleeg*’s dialect. I was quite disturbed. It is important for us *Hmoobleeg* to stand on our own feet. When anyone has the evidence at hand he/she must take the appropriate action. [Continuing] to complain behind Neng’s back does not do any good, in my opinion. If Neng has such view, let him live in his own cocoon.” Messages in *Central Place*, May 28 and 29, 2003.

funds are received, they are usually used to benefit the Hmong,” the MFI suggested that Hmong Der use Mong Leng for their own gains. In short, the MFI portrayed Hmong Der as perpetrators while it portrayed Mong Leng as victims.

Not surprisingly, the MFI’s claims about political and material disparities were accompanied by claims of “cultural disparity.” By looking at claims of cultural disparity, we can further clarify the crucial role that moral or evaluative claims play in the construction of a social problem, independent of objective conditions. However, the issue of cultural disparity, unlike material disparity, is more difficult to disentangle for two reasons. First, cultural disparity, a form of symbolic inequality, is not quantifiable. Second, although the members of the MFI recognized that claims of cultural inferiority were being waged against “Green Hmong,” they tried to distance themselves from Green Hmong rather than directly contest these claims. In simply disassociating themselves from Green Hmong, and in claiming their primacy over the Hmong, the MFI indirectly affirmed the cultural inferiority ascribed to Green Hmong while asserting the cultural ‘superiority’ of Mong Leng over Hmong Der.

During my research, I found several claims that expressed cultural stereotyping, prejudices and/or cultural subordination against Mong Leng and against Hmong Der. However, claims that express the cultural prejudices and/or moral inferiority of Green Hmong or *Moob Ntsuab* exist with even greater frequency. Such claims are expressed in subtle ways from time to time in casual conversations as well as in folktales such as the one below:

The Elders described a situation when two best friends (*phooj ywg*) went hunting. One was a White Hmong and one a Mong Leng. The Mong Leng said to his friend who was White Hmong that tonight we would use your rice grain (*ntsab*) to cook dinner and tomorrow they would use my rice (*ntsab*) to cook for breakfast. The White Hmong misinterpreted the word his friend used for rice grain (*ntsab*) and he thought his Mong Leng friend would grab him and cook him for dinner so he ran home. The word *ntsab* to White Hmong means grab (Y. Y.J. Thao 2006:38).

The plot of this brief tale is that a Hmong Der friend mistook his good friend's usage of a benign, ordinary Mong Leng word, *ntsab* (rice), for something quite different: *ntsiab*, a Hmong Der word that means to pinch or to seize suddenly. The usual lesson/interpretation of this folktale is that ignorance of each other's dialect could lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

However, that the Hmong Der character so readily feared his best friend cannot be explained solely by his ignorance of Mong Leng vocabulary. Rather, his fear must be situated within a longer-standing ethnic myth (or variants of this myth); that is, the myth⁴¹⁹ about a small group among the ethnic people, Green Hmong, that historically practiced a cult of human sacrifice/cannibalism as part of their religious rituals. Only when the characters are understood in this context would it become possible or believable for the Hmong Der character to mistake the Mong Leng character for a Green Hmong, and to mistake the Mong Leng word for *rice* (a staple food that sustains life) with the Hmong Der word for to *pinch* (a sneaky act that harms). In other words, it is because the Hmong Der character held negative stereotypes against Green Hmong that he was easily prone to prejudge his Mong Leng friend as a potential Green Hmong cannibal (*Hmoob Ntsuab Hmoob noj neeg*). Analyzed in this way, the above folktale functions not only to affirm that dialect differences exist between Mong Leng and Hmong Der, but also to sustain the myth of Green Hmong cannibalism and deviance. The act of associating any group with cannibalism is tantamount to labeling them as evil, subhuman, immoral, etc.⁴²⁰ These labels, in turn, are often used to justify discrimination or exclusion against the group so labeled.

⁴¹⁹ Hmong elders make a distinction between folktales believed to be true (*kwv huam*) and tales recognized as fictitious (*dab neeg*). Here, I am subsuming both kinds of tales under the general category of "myth."

⁴²⁰ Within Hmong society, myths of cannibalism—much like myths of witchcraft or sorcery—have surfaced or resurfaced according to historical periods. For instance, during the Hmong refugee period (between 1975 and the mid-1990s in Thailand refugee camps), the stories of "*Nyav noj neeg*" (Giants based in the U.S. that fed on people) were frequently told and expressed as facts. These stories or myths of cannibalism become a regular part of the Hmong refugee and repatriation experience. These stories and myths intensified and faded away according to specific social/political processes. This is a highly interesting topic in need of more systematic study.

The belief that there was once a group who practiced religious cannibalism is still held by some foreign-born Hmong adults and elders, irrespective of dialect background.⁴²¹ However, in the context of the U.S., many adults and seniors who call themselves Green Hmong do not associate the term with the negative myth. Nevertheless, there are persons who wish to be referred to only as Mong Leng. For instance, Chimeng Yang, a member of the MFI, pointed out that there are negative connotations associated with the label “Green Hmong.” He wrote,

“Green Hmong” or “Green Mong,” “Hmong Njua,” or “*Hmoob Ntsuab*” or “*Moob Ntsuab*” are other terms used by the Hmong Der (White Hmong) and Westerners to refer to the Mong Leng. These terms have negative connotations. Those identified by these terms find them objectionable and offensive, and are intimidated by their use. According to the Mong and the Hmong elders and religious leaders, historically the Green Hmong, or *Hmoob Ntsuab*, was a small group of people who anachronistically practiced a cult of cannibalism in their religious ceremony (C. Yang 2008:219, emphasis added).

Except for their statement that “[it] is believed that this particular group may no longer be in existence” (P. Thao and Yang 2004:8; C. Yang 2008:219), the members of the MFI made no other effort to contest the ethnic society’s assumptions about Green Hmong’s cultural or moral inferiority, which are embedded in and reproduced through the myth of Green Hmong’s cult of cannibalism.

Instead, members of the MFI emphasized their difference from the Green Hmong and their primacy over the Hmong Der. That some supporters of the MFI movement regard Mong culture in high esteem is illustrated by the following example. In an article titled “The Mong

⁴²¹ C. Xiong, personal communication, July 1, 2008, Sacramento, California. Xiong, 73 years old, described himself as a Mong Leng of *sab Moos Loob teb* (Luang Prabang, Laos); he speaks fluent Mong Leng and Hmong Der. When I inquired about the ‘folktale’ of Green Hmong, Xiong told me that a small group of Green Hmong used to practice human sacrifice as part of their annual new year celebration and that some may still practice it, albeit symbolically through the use of doll offerings (made of tofu) instead of human offerings. Original fieldnotes: *Kwv huam txog Hmoob Ntsuab: Ib xyoos twg ces ib yig (ib cuab kwv tij) sau ib tug menyuam noj rau lub caij tsiab peb caug. ... Txhua xyoo sau ib tug tub (yog muaj tub ntau) lossis ib tug ntshais. ... Muaj ib xyoo, sau txog ib niam txiv uas nkawd muaj ib tug tub xwb, xyoo ntawv poob nkawd xyoo. Nkawd tsis pub tua li vim nkawd tsis muaj noob li. Sawv daws thiaj li ua tsis tau licas lawm. Thiaj li mus zom ib txaum taum paj coj los puab zoo li ib tug neeg. Puab ib tug qau rau. Sawv daws tias kom “Txhob hais lus li. Txog lub sijhawm ntawd thaum tsiab 30, peb mam li tuaj noj. ” Txij li ntawd los thiaj li tsis noj neeg lawm, thiaj li noj taum lawm xwb. ... Paub ib tug taum, zom mos mos, teev qaub, puab ua ib tug menyuam tib neeg. Laig dab tag kis thaum tsis pub leej twg pom. Pom cov tseem laig taum ces yog ntag.*

Traditional Wedding,” Y.J. Thao (2005) examines the “origin of the Mong traditional wedding” by relating a Hmong folktale in which *Yawm Saub*⁴²² instructs the Mong on how to conduct a wedding ceremony in order to establish the marriage between a man and a woman. Y.J. Thao goes on to discuss important cultural symbols, such as the wedding umbrella and the chicken, along with their general meanings and ceremonial functions. He then compares and contrasts some of the “similarities and differences” between Mong Leng and Hmong Der with respect to their traditional wedding practices. During his discussion of the differences between the two types of weddings, Y.J. Thao introduces, in two paragraphs, (1) some views about Mong Leng and Hmong Der from several sources and (2) a conjecture which suggests that Hmong Der ‘dialect’ derived from Mong Leng ‘language.’⁴²³ Specifically, he writes,

The Mong elders that the author dialogued with indicated that *most of the Hmong were from the Mong*. Thao (citing Y.J. Thao (1999)) conducted a study on the Mong community in northern California and found that, “Many Hmong (White Hmong) admitted that their ancestors were Mong (Blue Mong)” (p. 109). *The Mong language is beautiful and it is much more difficult to learn than the Hmong’s*. Those Mong who lost their language quickly pick up the Hmong language. *The Hmong language has more slangs and is easier to learn*. This is also true when applied to the rituals and chanting songs. *The Mong rituals are richer in terms of their language, much more rigorous, and more complex than the Hmong’s* (e.g. wedding chanting songs and funeral chanting songs). On the issue between the Mong and the Hmong, Thao’s (citing Y.J. Thao (2002)) research confirmed that even though there is a language difference between the Mong and the Hmong, they have cross married between these two groups and have lived in a peaceful society together at the turn of century. (...)

In addition, the elders also indicated that some of the wordings in the Hmong’s chanting songs came from the Mong language. When listening to the Hmong’s chanting songs, there are mixed words, which are Mong. According to Thao’s research, the ‘*Mong Leng are ‘Veins of the Mong,’ implying that the Mong Leng carry the life blood of all Mong* (citing P. Thao (1999:3)). This information helps us understand that *in early history, the Mong language was the proto or main language* (Y.J. Thao 2005:4, emphasis added).

⁴²² In Hmong cosmology, *Yawm Saub* is the god of knowledge; human often sought help from *Yawm Saub* during times of crisis or hardships.

⁴²³ J. Thao is not the only one to have presented this conjecture. Some academics and laypersons have also presented it.

Several interpretations can be rendered of these passages, but what is most immediately relevant for our analysis is the claim of language and group primacy. Suggesting that he is summarizing his informants' views, Y.J. Thao asserts that Mong Leng "language" preceded Hmong Der (Y.J. Thao calls it White Hmong) "language." This assertion is suggested by the phrase, "Those Mong who lost their language quickly pick up [sic] the Hmong language." Likewise, Y.J. Thao asserts the primacy of the "Mong" when he uncritically accepts Paoze Thao's assertion that "Mong Leng are 'Veins of the Mong,' ...[which] carry the life blood of all Mong." These assertions, in turn, are reinforced by Y.J. Thao's discussion of the "richness," "rigor" and "complexity" of Mong rituals and the greater complexity of Mong Leng "language" compared to Hmong Der "language."

However, the relative absence of a cultural inferiority claim does not mean that sentiments of cultural exclusion, marginalization or alienation are completely absent from the minds of members of the MFI. In other words, cultural inferiority occurs in degrees rather than in absolute terms. This is demonstrated in a comment by the chairman of the MFI, Txer Paul Vang, who a *Sacramento Bee* article identified as a reverend "of the 130-member Hmong Calvary Evangelism Center."⁴²⁴ "Vang, 55, said about 40 percent of the district's 3,000 Hmong children are Mong Leng, and if the Hmong language teachers speak Hmong Der dialect, 'it will be confusing for our Mong Leng children, and we do not feel comfortable to study the Hmong Der Language.'"⁴²⁵ Vang's suggestion that Hmong children will be "confused" or "uncomfortable" suggest another kind of emotion: alienation. This claim of alienation is directly related to MFI's claims about the negative effects that the imposition of Hmong Der could have on a segment of the Mong population, especially Mong students. I turn to this issue next.

⁴²⁴ Sacramento Bee, "Sacramento's Hmong Community Divided over Charter School."

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

MFI's Interpretation of the Effects of the Conditions

As alluded to in Txer Paul Vang's excerpt above, the members of the MFI alleged that the putative objective conditions could have negative effects on Mong Leng students. One of the MFI's central claims was that the prevailing conditions of inequality between Mong Leng and Hmong Der speakers impact the "self-esteem" of the former. This perspective was expressed by Chimeng Yang in the following passage:

Expressing through emails, many people have repeatedly said that the Mong should not touch AB 78 because it is not about the Mong/Hmong issues. If AB 78 is not about the Mong/Hmong issues, then what is it about? You are wrong, very wrong. *AB 78 is about Mong and Hmong. It is the core of Mong's and Hmong's issues. It is about the Mong's and Hmong's identity, self-esteem and lives* (emphasis added).⁴²⁶

C. Yang also claimed that there are more complex consequences of "identity crisis," especially the possibility of identity loss through identity switching or self denial, betrayal or envy for some other identity. Specifically, C. Yang claimed,

We know that there are some Mong who are "Hmong Wannabe" and many Mong who already changed their identities completely from Mong to Hmong. If you are one of these Mong, you can choose to deny your existence, your root, your language, your culture, your parents and grandparents, your ancestors and your heritage all you want; that's your choice, *but please do yourself a favor and speak for yourself and do not speak against us or for us* (emphasis added).⁴²⁷

C. Yang's assertion that "Hmong Wannabe" should "speak for yourself and do not speak against us or for us" appears to be consistent with the view of P. Thao when the latter criticized the "misinformation and miseducation" about Mong Leng speakers. According to P. Thao,

Due to the lack of knowledge and the consequences of misinformation and miseducation of [sic] the Mong, the term 'Hmong' has been widely used by the general public, particularly in the United States, to represent both the Hmong and the Mong. (P. P. Thao 2008:47, emphasis added).

Moreover, C. Yang claimed,

⁴²⁶ Chimeng Yang. "Email Response." June 8, 2003. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from: http://www.mong.ws/email_response.htm

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

Due to the lack of knowledge about the two Mong/Hmong groups and the result from the misinformation and miseducation, the spelling term “Hmong” has been widely used to represent all Mong and Hmong since 1975. However, the term “Hmong” only represents the Hmong group who are Hmong Der. The spelling term “Hmong” has misrepresented the Mong who are Mong Leng for almost 30 years.⁴²⁸

In a recent published work, Chimeng Yang restated the claim of Mong Leng misrepresentation as follows:

Due to the misinformation, miseducation, and lack of knowledge about Mong, scholars, the general public, and the Hmong lump the Mong under the Hmong. This is clearly a misrepresentation of the Mong. Currently, the general public does not know the cultural and linguistic differences between the Mong and the Hmong people. Consequently, the Mong are misrepresented in many aspects, such as in print media and publications in English and French (C. Yang 2008:219).

According to C. Yang and P. Thao, the *misrepresentation* of Mong Leng constituted both the main consequence and the main source of the inequality between Mong Leng and Hmong Der speakers. As we will see next, the Mong Federation’s call for action speaks directly to the need for fair representation within Hmong and American society.

Call for Action

Given the MFI’s claims about the political, economic and cultural inequalities that Mong faced and still face, what course of action did they propose for changing these conditions?

Before AB 78 became law, the MFI’s stated demand was that the term “Mong” be added side by side with the term “Hmong” wherever this latter term appeared in the Assembly Bill 78 (Thao 2004:17). This demand implicitly asked the state to recognize that Mong “co-exist” with Hmong as a “culturally and linguistically distinct” group. The available evidence indicates that the state understood this demand. In a section labeled “Staff Comments” in the June 11th legislative record,⁴²⁹ a state staff consultant posed a question and answered it:

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ The June 11th legislative record lists Marlene L. Garcia as the Consultant but no preparer was listed. Most other legislative records that analyzed the AB 78 bill show that they were prepared by Dee Brennick.

Does the term Hmong appropriately represent the entire community? The official federal government designation of Hmong is spelled H-M-O-N-G and is reported as such on the U.S. Census reports and other official documents. This is what is referenced in the bill. However, there is significant opposition to limiting the reference in the bill to just Hmong. There are members of this community who spell their name M-O-N-G and argue that they are culturally and linguistically different than the H-M-O-N-G group. They want all reference to the Hmong community in the bill to be Hmong/Mong to reflect these differences. The sponsors of the bill, who use Hmong, do not want to reference the two spellings for fear of creating a division within their community.⁴³⁰

Based on this official view, the state defined the MFI opposition as a “significant opposition.”

The state understood that this opposition was directed at the term “Hmong” in the bill rather than at the bill’s overall goal (to include instruction on the ethnic community). And the state understood the MFI demand as meaning that “they want all reference to the Hmong community in the bill to be Hmong/Mong to reflect these differences.” Finally, the state appeared to understand the reaction of the sponsors of the bill to the MFI’s opposition; namely, their “fear of creating a division within their community.”⁴³¹

This demand seemed simple enough. However, as we shall see in Part III, various segments of the Hmong American community and several individuals outside of the country immediately opposed this demand. These counter-opponents raised a number of questions about the MFI’s intentions and many of them bluntly condemned the leaders of the MFI. The MFI, as we will see, fought back by reframing and re-amplifying some of their claims.

The Media’s Role: Trivialization of Claims and Group

In claiming that the conflict intensified after the media publicity, I am not suggesting that the media’s framing of the issues resulted in the indoctrination of readers—that is, that they “[injected] ideas into a passive and defenseless public” (Schudson 2002:265). Nor am I suggesting that the media was the only factor that intensified the conflict. For, rather than

⁴³⁰ Legislative Counsel of California. Official California Legislative Information. California Senate Committee on Education, Hearing on AB 78 (June 11, 2003) at p. 3.

⁴³¹ Ibid at p. 3.

passively accept the media's accounts, many readers questioned both the claims that the media reported on and the media's own interpretation of the emergent conflict. Secondly, the conflict had started to build momentum during the face-to-face discussions between members of the Task Force and members of the MFI following the March 19th hearing in Sacramento. What I want to suggest is that the conflict intensified because the issue and their proponents went public and readers took seriously the media's diagnostic framing of this issue. In the words of a reader and participant in the debate,

[N]ow that the issue has clearly [surfaced] in the media it is no longer an issue we can afford to ignore. Anyone or any group that seeks services and programs for the Hmong community will now have to contend [with] the Mong [community's] protest and political response if they exclude MONG.⁴³²

Had the issue not gone public, it is likely that only the most involved constituents on both sides of the debate would come to know about the conflict between the MFI and the Task Force. But members of the MFI chose to make the issue public in order to bring attention to their cause.

The mass media, in spite of their role in publicizing the MFI's grievances, trivialized the MFI's claims and delegitimized their status as a representative of Mong Americans in three ways. First, as I have pointed out above, the media reframed the social problem as a problem that is, presumably, unique to tribal peoples or, at best, recent immigrants. In doing so, the mass media displayed their common practice: to write about something perceived to be different, unique or dramatic (tribal divisions), yet not completely foreign or novel (recent immigrants' battles for ethnic labels). Such stories attract more attention than a completely unfamiliar or non-dramatic one. But by emphasizing that it is a "recent immigrant" problem, the media, rather than encourage positive attention to the problem, invited negative attention and reaction from both the state and the Californian majority. Given that both of these groups generally hold negative

⁴³² Email in message forum, May 30, 2003.

attitudes against particular groups of immigrants, especially Latin American and Asian immigrants, the media's explicit reference to recent immigrants was more likely to incite negative reactions than positive ones.

Consistent with Romney's implicit view that the conflict was unique to "immigrants," Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes expressed similar views about the source of the conflict. According to Romney's account,

Reyes said she explained to the group that all Hmong in the United States are classified under that term and directed the Mong to seek a separate ethnic designation through federal channels. The bill neither favors one dialect over another nor mandates the creation of curricular materials, she said.

"If I put Mong in there, are the Black Hmong going to come to me? Are the Red Hmong going to come to me?" the assemblywoman asked. "We as a Legislature decided not to get into this fight."

Still, Reyes -- who has seen Latinos bicker similarly over self-identifying terms -- is sympathetic. "It's the struggle of a new community," she said.⁴³³

As these quotes illustrate, rather than simply expressing indifference or concern, Reyes raised hypothetical questions. Reyes' reference to "Black Hmong" and "Red Hmong"—groups that are not found in the United States⁴³⁴—served as an affirmation of the Mong Federation's claim that "the public has been misinformed" with respect to the ethnic community.

But the state representative did something more than just simply raise questions. By imagining an impending condition, Reyes justified the state legislature's decision "not to get into this fight." Indirectly, Reyes expressed the state's refusal to be the *target* of the MFI's demands—that is, the source held responsible for addressing the inequities that the MFI raised.

Furthermore, the media's decision to simply report on Assemblywoman Reyes' remarks rather than hold her or the state accountable for her/its dismissal of the MFI's demands shifted attention

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Black Hmong and Red Hmong are groups that are found mainly in Vietnam rather than in Laos (the country of origin of most adult Hmong refugees).

away from the state as the target of the MFI's protest. In the end, the mass media trivialized the MFI's social problem claims by characterizing them as bickering behavior.

Secondly, in his May 24th article, Romney characterized the MFI as "members of a *small culturally and linguistically distinct group* – Mong Leng, or Blue Mong."⁴³⁵ By representing the group for which the MFI was fighting as a "small...distinct group," the media downplayed the MFI's claim that the Mong represent about one-half, if not more, of the Hmong American population. That this characterization was seen by some readers as a misrepresentation is illustrated by the following. Just a day after the original version of the *L.A. Times* article was published, a "For the Record" correction message was posted as an addendum to the *L.A. Times* article. The correction message read,

In an article in Saturday's California section about a Hmong community dispute triggered by a bill in the state Assembly, the Mong Leng were incorrectly described as "a small culturally and linguistically distinct group." Of all Hmong in the United States, the Mong Leng are believed to exist in about equal numbers to Hmong Der, or White Hmong. It is a small group of Mong Leng that has voiced concerns about the Assembly bill.⁴³⁶

The correction, however, did little to improve the image of the challengers, because it characterized them as "a small group of Mong Leng." Although it is not known who initiated the request for correction, it is plausible that members of the MFI may have been involved in getting the correction made. This error revealed the mainstream media's susceptibility to misrepresentations. Furthermore, the media's decision to correct the error suggests that they recognized the contentious nature of the politics of representation more generally.

Third, throughout the months of June and July 2003, the AB 78 "controversy" received relatively little mass media coverage. A search using the online catalog *Lexis-Nexis Academic* found only a total of three mainstream news articles that covered the controversy in some way.

⁴³⁵ Los Angeles Times, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity."

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

Of these, two were published by the *Los Angeles Times*⁴³⁷ and one was published by the *Fresno Bee*.⁴³⁸ Indeed, even prior to the Assembly Bill 78 controversy, there were only a few news articles that described AB 78 or its content in some way. The *Associated Press* published one article in January 2003⁴³⁹ while the *Fresno Bee* published two articles in December 2002⁴⁴⁰ and April 2003.⁴⁴¹ I argue that infrequent and localized media coverage, as opposed to sustained and wide-spread media coverage, can serve to delegitimize a social problem.⁴⁴² In the AB 78 case, getting coverage from the *Los Angeles Times*, a major media outlet, was important in terms of creating attention and obtaining limited legitimacy for the MFI's claims. However, very few other media outlets covered the AB 78 controversy or the MFI's claims about linguistic and materials disparities. This localized coverage did little to legitimize the social problem because it created the impression that the social problem was a "local" issue rather than a national issue with national implications.

Nevertheless, the *L.A. Times* article of May 24th triggered a range of complex and varied responses from the Hmong American community. These responses emerged mainly in California's Central Valley but quickly reverberated across the country. In a matter of days, the ethnic label "Hmong" became one of the most hotly contested term in the history of this label. We examine these responses next.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. Also Los Angeles Times, "What's in a Name? For Hmong Disappointed by Bill, Everything."

⁴³⁸ Christopher Vang, "Hmong Resolve Their Differences the Difficult Way," *Fresno Bee*, July 26, 2003a.

⁴³⁹ The Associated Press, "News in Brief from the San Joaquin Valley," *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*, January 7, 2003.

⁴⁴⁰ Fresno Bee, "Bill Urges Teachers to Address Contribution in Vietnam Lessons."

⁴⁴¹ Christopher Vang, "Hmong Role in History Must Be in Schoolbooks," *ibid.* April 26, 2003b.

⁴⁴² This is based on my assumption (there might already be studies out there) that, in deciding whether or not to write or publish a similar story, media outlets look to other media outlets. They probably follow other media outlets' lead: if there is wide coverage and a story becomes very popular (due to audience reactions), then media outlets will likely continue to follow-up on the story, which means writing more articles about it. On the flip side, if a story is covered by only 1 or 2 outlets, other media outlets will likely not be interested.

Part III: Counter-Movement and Outcomes

In the preceding part of this chapter, I discussed the perspectives and claims making activities of the challenging group, the Mong Federation, Inc. (MFI). I examined how members of the MFI attempted to construct a social problem and tried to obtain legitimacy for it by accessing the mass media. Prior to that, in Part I, we examined the state's response to the MFI's claims. This last part of the chapter will examine how the MFI's claims were met with a wide range of counter responses from social actors of various ages and social standings within and outside of Hmong American communities of California.

Specifically, I attempt to address three questions: 1) How did different *segments* of the ethnic community respond to or counter the MFI's protest movement? 2) What processes account for the neutralization of the social problem? 3) What, if any, impact has the MFI protest movement had on individuals' discourses and practices? In the following paragraphs, I will describe and analyze the ways that different social actors and segments of the ethnic community responded to the MFI's claims.⁴⁴³ First, I examine the claims of the closest supporters of AB 78 in response to the MFI's demand. Next, I examine the loosely organized counter-movement that emerged in response to the MFI's social problem movement. More specifically, I analyze the various claims making activities⁴⁴⁴ by different segments of the Hmong American community as they tried to influence the direction and outcome of the ethnicized conflict. I also examine how the MFI and other segments of the community responded to this counter-movement. Finally, I discuss the factors that were most crucial in neutralizing the ethnicized conflict. I conclude by

⁴⁴³ The majority was not merely reacting to any claim; rather, they reacted firmly to the MFI's claim that Mong Leng and Hmong Der constituted two separate *groups*. More precisely, the majority was reacting to what they perceived as a potential *ethnic fissure* that could make the ethnic community vulnerable to both inside and outside exploitation.

⁴⁴⁴ By "claims making activities," I mean any communication (verbal or written) put forth to support a particular assertion or demand.

discussing some of the impact that the MFI movement has had on participants as well as institutional practices.

Responses from Close Supporters of AB 78

As we saw previously, almost immediately after learning of the MFI's opposition in mid-March 2003, some of the members of the Hmong Community Education Task Force (the lead supporter of AB 78), visited and contacted leaders of the MFI to try to engage in dialog. However, as participants and observers reported, the meetings did not result in any resolution or compromise. The contention between supporters and opponents of AB 78 would only flare up after the *Los Angeles Times* published its article, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate Over Hmong Identity."⁴⁴⁵ In the AB 78 case, the initial social interactions between opponents took place face-to-face but the bulk of the interactions, including the most intense episodes, took place over the Internet.

The Internet as a Public Arena

When Assembly Bill 78 became a nation-wide controversy in May 2003, Internet message forums⁴⁴⁶ served as the primary social spaces for some of the most intense and sustained debates on AB 78. These debates continued almost non-stop through September 2003. To borrow the concepts of Hilgartner and Bosk (1988:59-61), the "carrying capacity" of the Internet as a "public arena" for the dissemination and competition of various social problem claims proved to be immense. The efficiency of the Internet enabled hundreds of internet users situated in similar networks to interact frequently and seamlessly throughout several months across city, state, and country boundaries—something that would not have been possible had the discussion been held at physical locations. But even prior to the AB 78 controversy, many of

⁴⁴⁵ Los Angeles Times, "Bill Spurs Bitter Debate over Hmong Identity."

⁴⁴⁶ These included message boards, news groups, e-mail listservs, and other social networking websites (Myspace and Facebook were not yet available).

these Internet message forums were already providing virtually limitless space for social actors to engage in written discussions about everyday routines, drama, past and current events and certain social problems.

In the case of the AB 78 controversy, the relative anonymity of some Internet forums allowed for spontaneous, intense, wide-ranging thoughts and emotions to be expressed; but these virtual spaces also helped maintain conflicts at a level that could not spiral out of control. Whether in person or over the Internet, many participants knew each other or knew about each other through their extended social networks. Interactions involved exchanges of words and sometimes intense emotions (rejection, resentment, grief, anger, shame, etc.). Emotions, in turn, influenced the framing of claims. As persons on each side of the debate asserted their own versions of social reality in order to frame or amplify social problem claims, they were met with rival versions of reality and rival claims. Sometimes, disagreements about the “facts” quickly turned into allegations, ‘character assassinations,’ condemnations, and/or shaming. Many responses were followed by counter-responses and many claims followed by counter-claims, resulting in intensified mutual discord or, as the communication scholar William Wilmot calls it, a “degenerative [communication] spiral” (2002:474). It was through this kind of interactive, contentious exchange that frames and framing strategies changed.

The written exchanges between a key supporter of AB 78, a leader of the MFI, and a participant that occurred within days following the May 24th *LA Times* article exemplified this dynamic contentious interaction. On May 30, 2003, K. Yang posted onto an Internet message forum an essay that she had previously written for reporters of the *Fresno Bee*. In that message, K. Yang, who identified herself as a sociolinguist and anthropologist, began,

Among the [criteria] taken in consideration to choose a name to name an ethnic group, there are the historical criteria, the linguistic appropriateness, the scope of use, the

representative appropriateness of the word for the whole group. Here are the various points of view that you may need to know.

From the anthropological and historical points of view, the term "Hmong" used to be used by researchers and administrators to call the whole ethnic group calling "Hmong". Under this ethnonym** "*hmoob*" (HMONG), you have different ethnic sub groups that used different sub-ethnonyms to call themselves: "*Moob*" for Green Hmong or otherwise called "Mong Leng" (it is not Blue) (*Moob lees* or/and *Moob ntsuab*), "*Hmoob*" for striped Hmong (*Hmoob txaij* or *Hmong quas npab*), "*Hmoob*" for black Hmong (*Hmoob dub*), "*Hmoob*" for Hmong Shee (*Hmoob sib*) and "*Hmoob*" for white Hmong (*Hmoob dawb*). HMONG is the standard term legally used in the US in existing bill (see bill citizenship) to refer to the Hmong group; it is also the word the most used by dictionaries and by people (Hmong as well outsiders) to identify the Hmong group.

(** Definition of "ethnonym": an ethnonym is word that native people use to name themselves).⁴⁴⁷

In this excerpt, K. Yang apparently was referring to the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000. It is factually accurate that that Act uses the term "Hmong" and makes no distinction between dialect (or any other marker of difference) within the ethnic group. She goes on to describe how the "ethnonym" has been used in different countries during different periods. For instance, she describes the use of "Miao" and its variants in China; the use of "Meo" in Vietnam; and the use of "Meo, H'mong, and Hmong" in Laos. Before concluding her essay, K. Yang raises a number of questions and speculates on the motive of the Mong Federation:

From the ideological point of view, what [are] Dr. Pao Ze Thao and his group - which is not the position of the whole sub group of Green Hmong in the US, [trying] to do? This is the question that you, journalist may need to find out? [Were] [him] [and] his group... trying to add only a word to represent...the whole group Hmong? Or [were] they [planning] to divide the group? Did they act in such verbally violent way because of this deep feeling of unfairness that most of green Hmong would have towards White Hmong? By adding "Mong", what would be the cost regarding psychological consequences on Hmong identity as an ethnic group? What would be the consequences on the recognition of the whole group by outsider politicians, and so their support to this group? What would be the consequences on this Bill AB78 if Mong was added? (emphasis added).

⁴⁴⁷ Message in *Central Place*, May 30, 2003. The original message does not contain italics or underlines. Here and elsewhere in this paper, I italicize words/phrases that are written according to the Hmong Roman Popular Alphabet (Hmong RPA) writing system. I underline words/phrases that I wish to emphasize.

For this Bill AB78, as you guess, nobody is going to speak in green or white dialect to talk about history. The only language that will be used at school in front of any student will be English. So you guess that AB78 is just a tool for this minority group to fight for something that has nothing to do with the Bill AB78. They may just want a precedent in the legal system to assert other purposes which have nothing to do with this Bill AB78 (emphasis added).⁴⁴⁸

As is clear from these excerpts, K. Yang characterized the actions of members of the Mong Federation as “verbally violent.” She also made several assertions. For instance, she asserted that the position held by the MFI, which she left unspecified, is “not the position of the whole sub group of Green Hmong in the U.S.” Furthermore, K. Yang emphasized that negative consequences could result from the Mong Federation’s actions. These assertions could be read as attempts to arouse emotions (e.g., anxiety, shock) among potential participants or to persuade bystander observers (readers), to take a side on the debate. K. Yang’s message was circulated to at least one other public Internet forum and it generated further discussions on the issue.

Within days, Paoze Thao, president of the MFI, responded directly to K. Yang’s claims.

After a brief self-introduction, Thao began,

I firmly disagree with Dr. [K.] Yang’s critical information provided to you with respect to the fact that I operate based on my ideological point of view. Please be aware that the information that she discussed with you in her email about the spelling terms "Hmong" and "Mong" are not accurate. Since her information is not based on sound research, it is biased and misleading (emphasis added).

The purpose of this response is two-fold: 1. As a scholar, I want to respond to your inquiry and Dr. [K.] Yang’s critical information posted on the Internet group discussion about the spelling term "Mong" and her notion that I operate based on my ideological point of view; 2. As the Mong Federation, Inc., we oppose AB 78 (Reyes) because it discriminates against the Mong Americans (emphasis added).⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Email in a message forum, June 1, 2003. June 1st was about a month and a half before AB 78 became law.

This was a pivotal moment and warrants a discussion about the role of “emotions”⁴⁵⁰ in social interactions before going further. In this specific context, what is more immediately relevant to my analysis is Thao’s interpretation of and reaction to Yang’s claims. More specifically, let us try to understand Thao’s *account* of the situation: what he perceived as happening in the situation and whether that happening was usual or unusual (Emerson 1970:208-9).

In the above excerpt, Thao was responding to what he regarded as Yang’s unfair allegation that he and the Mong Federation operated based on “ideology.” Whatever Yang may have meant by the phrase “ideological point of view” is unclear because she never elaborated on it. But even if she had defined it, as sophisticated social actors, both sides of the debate must have known that “ideology” has both normative and negative connotations. As Bockman (1991:459) points out in his discussion of the different meanings of ideology,

[On one hand, ideology has been defined as] “a set of general and abstract beliefs or assumptions about the correct or proper state of things, particularly with respect to the moral order and political arrangements, which serve to shape one’s position on specific issues” (Miller 1973:297-8, cited in Bockman 1991:459).

(....)

[However], initially, ideology was used as a disparaging term to denote that an opponent’s social philosophy or political opinions were naive, idealistic, and fraught with error due to bias, prejudice, and emotion, a system of belief based on circumstance rather than reason (Bockman 1991:459).

Apparently, one of Thao’s primary concerns was Yang’s pointed question, “From the ideological point of view, what [are] Dr. Pao Ze Thao and his group - which is not the position of the whole sub group of Green Hmong in the US, try[ing] to do?” But Thao probably was also reacting to Yang’s claim that “[t]hey may just want a precedent in the legal system to assert other purposes which have nothing to do with this Bill AB78.” These claims, along with the claim that the

⁴⁵⁰ Jasper (2011:286-7) distinguishes between several types of emotions/feelings “based on how long they typically last and how they are felt.” He distinguishes between 1) urges; 2) reflex emotions or “reactions to our immediate physical and social environments, usually quick to appear and to subside, and accompanied by a package of facial expressions and bodily changes” (e.g., “fear, anger, joy, surprise, disgust, shock,” etc.); 3) moods; 4) affective loyalties; and 5) moral emotions. In this paper, I mean reflex emotions when I use the word emotion(s).

members of the MFI were “verbally violent,” intentionally or unintentionally give off a number of impressions: that Thao and the Mong Federation had ulterior motives; that they were acting irrationally; that they were planning to “divide” the ethnic group; etc. Secondly, Yang’s claim that the MFI’s position “is not the position of the whole subgroup of Green Hmong in the U.S.” directly questions the credibility and legitimacy of the MFI to act as an authority on or representative of the group they claim to represent: Mong in the U.S.

On the face of it, Yang’s claims disparaged more so than they offered encouragement for the Mong Federation. However, instead of expressing anger, resentment, disgust or shock, Thao simply characterized the latter’s “information” as “critical” and “biased and misleading” and proceeded to elaborate on his views. In this specific context, Thao’s downplaying of reflex emotions helped to create the impression of calm and seriousness. These, in turn, operated to restore his and the MFI’s reputation and self-image which Yang’s previous claims threatened. But the gender and social status of these participants probably also influenced Thao’s downplaying of reflex emotions. Both Thao and Yang hold doctorate degrees but Yang is a woman and Thao a man. It is plausible that Yang’s claims that members of the MFI acted violently influenced Thao to downplay emotions in order to emphasize a professional and rational composure.

Nevertheless, the implicit accusation that the MFI was self-interested triggered anger from other participants in the AB 78 debate. One participant wrote,

I admire those of you who try to push to get AB 78 for Mong/Hmong, but please mind your own business and do not say things that are damaging to the name of the entire Mong/Hmong community. ... I totally [disagree] with Dr. [K.] Yang that the Term Mong without "H" and without any other attach[ment] of "GREEN" or "BLUE" or "LENG" is recently introduced by Dr. Paoze Thao. I am not trying to debate this issue with you, but if you go to China, Thailand and even in Laos, you would hear people use the Term "Mong" and not Hmong. Foreigners too use the Term "Mong". (...) So, Dr. [K.], you are an [Anthropologist], you should select your wording more carefully and that

those words are not divisive to the Mong/Hmong community. I am not an Anthropologist and am not trying to convince or encourage our own people or foreigners to use only the Term "Hmong" or "Mong". What I am trying to say here is that **Both** Terms "Hmong" and "Mong" are equally important because if you are a White Hmong, you use the Term Hmong. I am a Blue or Green Mong, I use the Term Mong. I think this is fair for everyone.⁴⁵¹

In the above interactions, the allegations of divisiveness were emergent. The claims of the MFI only deepened the allegations.

Although they accepted that “the Mong and the Hmong are from the same ethnic group” (P. Thao and Yang 2004:5), members of the Mong Federation challenged the claim that “Hmong” was an all-inclusive label for the entire ethnic group. Thao took offense to K. Yang’s claim that “Green Hmong” and “Mong Leng” comprise *sub-groups*, along with Hmong Der, Striped Hmong, and Black Hmong of the “whole ethnic group...called Hmong.” Specifically, Thao claimed,

The difference between the White Hmong and the Blue Mong languages may be compared to the difference between the Lao and the Thai languages. The Mong is [sic] not a subgroup of the Hmong and the Hmong is not a subgroup of the Mong, but they both have co-existed from time immemorial since the times of our forefathers as far back to history as we can remember.⁴⁵²

Besides expressing Thao’s discontent with K. Yang’s claim about the ethnic name, this excerpt expressed several claims that pinpoint where the Mong Federation’s views diverged most sharply from those of their opponents. First, Thao asserted that “White Hmong” and “Blue Mong” constitute different *languages*, suggesting that these are not simply dialects. Second, Thao asserted that neither “Mong” nor “Hmong” are subgroups of one another in order to emphasize that these terms refer to two separate *groups* as opposed to categories. Third, as a way to reinforce the preceding claim, Thao asserted that, since “time immemorial,” “Mong” and “Hmong” have *co-existed*. Here, Thao’s use of the term “co-exist” suggested something akin to

⁴⁵¹ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 4, 2003.

⁴⁵² Email in a message forum, June 1, 2003.

“co-habitation.” But my point is not simply that “co-habitation” and “marriage” mean very different things in the context of the law. Rather, my point is that, taken together, the vocabulary of “language, group, and co-existence,” suggests that people are part of bounded collectives and that these collectives are qualitatively distinct from one another. But, of course, Thao was not the only person to reify ethnolinguistic group boundaries. His opponent, by emphasizing “Hmong” as a “whole ethnic group,” also reified the boundary between ethnic Hmong and ethnic Others.

Categories of Evidence

As is apparent in this and subsequent interactions, many responses and counter-responses were accompanied by appeals to formal categories of evidence, specifically “scientific” evidence. The appeal to “sound research” can be seen in Paoze Thao’s statement above, in which he claimed that “since her [K. Yang’s] information is not based on sound research, it is biased and misleading.” As an alternative, Thao offered the audience with “excerpts from my research that were published in peer reviewed [sic] books and a book chapter.”⁴⁵³ Here, then, was a struggle not simply over points of view but also over whose views are more *credible* and which categories of evidence (e.g., written v. non-written evidence; systematic vs. non-systematic evidence, etc.) are more legitimate. But beneath this struggle for credibility was a struggle to establish aspects of social “reality” in order to mobilize support and demobilize opposition. I return to this point shortly.

However, as we shall see, the appeals to certain categories of evidence fueled the fire rather than quenched it. The MFI’s appeals to scientific evidence generated counter-appeals to other kinds of scientific evidence. For example, an opponent of the MFI pointedly asked, “Do you believe that linguistics is an absolute authority on [the] matter of distinguishing and

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

identifying the race and/or ethnicity of people? Did you draw or conclude the distinction between *Hmoob Dawb* and *Moob Leeg* from your research works?”⁴⁵⁴ Still, others raised questions such as the following: “If a survey were to be taken, would the findings actually show that there is a clear 50/50 proportion of Mong Leng speakers and Hmong Der speakers? What criteria would we use to distinguish Mong Leng from Hmong Der?”⁴⁵⁵ Do all Mong Leng speakers really agree with MFI about being called Mong? What is the evidence behind it?⁴⁵⁶

Similarly, the MFI’s presentation of less systematic evidence (oral history and legends) generated counter-responses that relied on other kinds of myths and oral histories. Furthermore, the appeals to morality were met with counter-appeals to other types of morality. For instance, the MFI’s appeal to specific moral sentiments (e.g., “Discrimination against Mong is wrong”; “If the Moog Leeg wants to be recognized as Mong Leng, what is so “divisive” or so wrong about it?!”; “adding to the bill to include Mong Leeg’s dialects and culture is not wrong”),⁴⁵⁷ generated counter-appeals to other kinds of moral sentiments. These counter-appeals included the following claims: “Fighting for greater student access is fine, but taking advantage of AB 78 (a bill that benefits the whole group) to do so is wrong”; and “using one’s position to create division in the ethnic community is morally wrong.” However, the Mong Federation’s appeals to morality came somewhat later in the struggle. It was when the MFI confronted more intense accusations of creating ethnic disintegration/disunity that they resorted to more specific moral claims such as the right of Mong to self-identification and self-determination.

I contend that the purpose of social actors’ regular appeals to categories of evidence and to morality was to try to establish a degree of formal *and* informal consensus about aspects of

⁴⁵⁴ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 3, 2003.

⁴⁵⁵ T. Vang, personal communication, January 17, 2009, Fresno, California.

⁴⁵⁶ Similar questions were raised by my research participants and by others in Internet message forums. These forums had mostly a Hmong audience.

⁴⁵⁷ Remarks from various individuals in support of adding “Mong” to the AB 78 bill.

social reality. Cognizant that “truth” or what is “real” is always relative because they are products of social construction, Armand Mauss (1975:8-9) distinguishes between *formal* consensual reality and *informal* consensual reality as two “parameters of consensual reality”—that is, “two different qualities or levels of reality” that form “the basis of public opinion” and “can be observed in societies like our own” (1975:8-11). In describing formal consensual reality, Mauss (1975:8) states,

Formal consensual reality is that which originates from persons or institutions generally regarded as authorities. Examples of this kind of reality are government reports and statistics, pronouncements by religious leaders (in religiously homogeneous societies), scientific articles and books, and various sorts of “expert” testimony. Social commentators, as well as ordinary people, are likely to be impressed by “facts” cited from such sources in conversations with friends and in newspaper and magazine articles. Even the experts themselves, for that matter, such as scientists and educators, are likely to regard data from such sources as the ultimate or more reliable level of “truth” (emphasis in original).

Informal consensual reality, according to Mauss (1975:9), “[refers] to such ‘truth’ as is found in folklore, myth, anecdotes, and certain episodes. These are distinguished from the more formal parameters of reality primarily by their unsystematic character.” Furthermore, Mauss points out,

Public opinion *may be informed more by informal than by formal types of consensual reality*, though it can be changed or persuaded by the introduction of weighty evidence from official or scientific reports and the like. *Public opinion or consensual reality is extremely important in the study of social problems. It constitutes the only truth that people have, in the operational sense, for it is the basis for people’s attitudes and behavior toward society and toward each other.* Public opinion, as derived from consensual reality, also provides the raw material for social problem-movements and the context within which these movements are acted out (1975:11, emphasis added).

I hold that establishing a degree of formal and informal consensual reality is not just the most crucial part of the strategic effort to establish what Snow et al. (1986:477) refer to as the “degrees of frame resonance,” but that it is a fundamental condition for the practice of framing itself. For framing would not be functional unless social actors engaged in interactions already share some informal consensus about the possibility that they and those with whom they interact

can be susceptible to or inspired by newly constructed, albeit condensed ideas or interpretations about “reality.” Snow and Benford recognize that the process of establishing consensual reality is fraught with contention when they point out that framing “denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (2000:614).

Counter-Movement

The MFI’s protest movement was met with a loosely-organized counter-movement. That is, the counter-movement lacked an identifiable social base and leadership. Nevertheless, a significant portion of this counter-movement consisted of members of the highly educated, fluent bilingual/multilingual segment⁴⁵⁸ of Hmong American society. In the next section, I show how these formally educated constituents and adherents⁴⁵⁹ of the counter-movement (collectively called opponents) engaged in various claims making activities that delegitimized the MFI’s social problem. I also describe the responses of more moderate participants who were not necessarily adherents of either movement. Specifically, I examine how opponents blurred intra-group boundaries by asserting claims of ethnic separatism and claims of mixed-identity. Then I examine how they tried to delegitimize the MFI’s social problem by reframing the set of “victims” and by reattributing the cause of the social problem.

Claims of Ethnic Separatism

Opponents did not merely question the MFI’s motives; rather, they explicitly accused the MFI of creating ethnic division or separatism. The allegation of separatism was invoked numerous times before and after AB 78 became law. Probably the first allegation can be seen in

⁴⁵⁸ Many of the participants are multilingual, able to speak, read, and write English, both Mong Leng and Hmong Der dialects, Lao, Thai and French.

⁴⁵⁹ We discussed these in Part I, but it is worth repeating the definitions here: *Constituents* are those individuals or organization(s) that actively participate and invest resources in support of the social movement (as challengers) or counter-movement (as antagonists); *adherents* are those individuals or organizations that believe in the goals of the social movement as can be seen from their occasional expressions but are not (yet) actively involved.

the following passage, in which an opponent referred to supporters of the MFI as “pro-Mong” and proclaimed sharply,

If I put myself in an extreme position, I would call Dr. Paoze and the Mong Federation a Hmong separatist and Hmong separatist foundation. I feel sorry for a phd linguist who [fail] to understand [etymology] and national integrity as well as other *dev txais cua*. I guess he was born Christian and never [got] to know the root of Hmong culture. Hmong always teach Hmong children in every funeral this: “*Tsev txoog npoj xyom cuab, nej muaj zoo txam ntxwv, tsis txhob muab txam zeb cub. Coj mus txam zeb tsuas.*” Dr. Paoze is doing the opposite of this order.⁴⁶⁰

Like other opponents of the MFI, this man scolded the MFI and its president for pursuing, in his view, a separatist movement. But this excerpt reveals something else that occurred frequently during the debates on AB 78. Even though some opponents displayed strong disapproval of ethnic separatism, they drew or reasserted other kinds of social boundaries. That is, even during the moments of heightened ethnic identity, other perceived intra-group differences (religion, educational status, generational status, etc.) also were made salient. However, opponents saw the need to highlight these other social differences and their negative consequences in order to plea with the “ethnic community” to refrain from creating further ethnic disintegration.

In response to opponents’ claims, other more moderate participants (not necessarily supporters of either side) wanted to find a “majority” solution to the ethnicity question. For instance, at least one participant suggested that a national survey ought to be conducted to decide Hmong Americans’ position on the ethnic label. Similarly, another moderate participant proposed that a “national convention” be held to decide the ethnic label:

AGAIN my recommendation is this: WHO CHOOSE? THE HMONG/MONG PEOPLE VIA A NATIONAL CONVENTION. If this is not possible, I am afraid, the MOOG

⁴⁶⁰ Message in *Central Place*, May 30, 2003. The Hmong sentences form a common proverb, but they are also an excerpt from a traditional ceremonial song typically sung to the loved ones of a deceased person. It serves to remind persons that they ought to apply their skills (symbolized by the chisel) in the appropriate place. In this passage, it means *not* to use their skills to attack the group to which they belong but rather use them to defend against outside attacks on the group.

LEEG [*sic*] WILL ALWAYS BE MOOG LEEG AND ANY OBJECTION OR RESISTANCE TO IT WILL BE FUTILE.⁴⁶¹

But the same person who proposed that a national convention be held also challenged opponents' claims that the MFI's movement would result in ethnic separatism. He questioned,

If the Moog Leeg wants to be recognized as Mong Leng, what is so "divisive" or so wrong about it?! If the Hmong Dawb wants to be call "Hmong", what can the opposition group do about it?! The argument or speculation that by doing so our Hmong/Mong people will be separated and a new nation of the Moob Leeg will be born and therefore a Moog Leeg leader will be crowned and therefore the Hmong/Mong people will be a weaker force or people is all but pure speculation and remains that...an argument. We Hmong/Mong are strongly bonded by culture, arts, marriage, and beliefs (funeral rites, wedding ceremonies, happy-event ceremonies, etc.). I don't think the impetus of or energy surrounding AB78 is going to destroy or break this bond in the indefinite future.⁴⁶²

In this participant's view, the threat of division is more of a political rhetoric than a real consequence. Directing his objection at "the supporters of AB78," he declared, "If you feel that recognition of the 'Mong Leng' is going to divide the Hmong/Mong people, you are sadly mistaken. And if, in fact, the division did occur, it is because you CHOOSE to allow it!!!"⁴⁶³

However, many took the threat of ethnic division seriously and were adamant that real consequences can occur should Hmong and Mong be recognized as two distinct ethnic groups. Comparing the MFI movement to the South's secession from the North during the American Civil War, an opponent claimed,

Although what they [the MFI] are doing may arouse much feeling from those who are able to see a broader vision for our ethnic group, it should be kept in mind that what Dr. PobZeb and his group are doing is perfectly legal and respectable. What remains to be stated, however, is that what they are doing is not a matter to be taken lightly. Separation of our ethnic group in the law has long term consequences and should, therefore, not be an issue that is easily glossed over.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 2, 2003. The writher here most likely meant to say "Moob Leeg" instead of "Moog Leeg." Perhaps he was preoccupied with the term "Mong Leng".

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Message in *Central Place*, June 11, 2003.

Although she never specified what the “long term consequences” could be, she urged readers to heed the lesson from the American Civil War. In her view, despite Abraham Lincoln’s “painful and costly” decision against secession, Lincoln’s decision resulted in the unity of the United States and “kept Americans powerful.”⁴⁶⁵ Underlying this opponent’s claims is the assumption that not only does the state create ethnic categories “from above,” but that it also is willing to fulfill demands “from below” for the creation of new ethnic categories. However, as I discussed in Part I, instead of fulfilling the MFI’s demand to add “Mong” to AB 78, the state pursued a cautious strategy aimed at preventing future ethnic-based social movements.

Moreover, her reference to “a broader vision for our ethnic group” alluded to another episodic discourse in which claims makers in the AB 78 debate were also engaged. That episodic discourse⁴⁶⁶ consisted of a complex set of claims that attributed the *cause* of a number of disparate historical and contemporary social problems to Hmong’s lack of their own “country” (“*tebchaws*”). When used in the Hmong context, the concept of “country” refers not just to a sovereign, bounded political unit but also to a complex set of practices and ideas. For Hmong adults speak of “*kev xav kom yus haiv neeg muaj teb muaj chaw, muaj nom muaj tswv, muaj vaj huam sib luag*” (the wish for my ethnic group to have land and country, leaders and rulers, with equal liberty).

Understanding what “country” means requires that we reflect on its commonly used opposites: “country-less” or “stateless.” I contend that Hmong former refugees’ concept of “statelessness” emerged largely out of their recent war and refugee experiences rather than out of

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Episodic discourse is “a discourse consisting of a set of general principles, concepts, symbols, and rituals used by actors to address problems in a particular historical episode” (Moaddel 1992:359).

some experience of antiquity.⁴⁶⁷ It was during this historical period that a major segment of the Laotian Hmong society was able to operate *as if it were a state* (within Military Region II of Laos, Hmong on the Royal Lao Government side had legitimate monopoly over the means of violence), but eventually lost this “state” when the secret war ended. In the aftermath of the war, Hmong refugees became stateless in the formal sense during their prolonged stay in Thai refugee camps. When properly situated in this more recent period of the Hmong experience, the discourse on Hmong’s statelessness is fundamentally an attempt to address the consequences associated with Hmong’s lack of legal protection and their subjugation to arbitrary rules/practices during and in the aftermath of war. Hmong’s desire to have a “country” expresses their desire to have legal protection and to be treated fairly.

During the AB 78 debates, the discourses on country, statelessness and nationhood emerged from time to time. These discourses appeared simultaneously in simplified, packaged forms in some opponents’ and more moderate participants’ call to standardize the Hmong writing system as a way to resolve the Mong vs. Hmong controversy and to forge unity among the Hmong. The call to standardize the writing system paralleled other calls, which we have seen above, for a national survey or convention to decide on a standard ethnic label for the ethnic group. Within the context of the counter-movement, the call for standardization, whether of the writing system or of the ethnic label, represented primarily a call to maintain ethnic solidarity. This call for solidarity can be seen clearly in the following passage, which represented a moderate position:

⁴⁶⁷ I base this on my observations that Hmong’s narratives of statelessness proliferated *after* rather than before 1975 (marking the defeat of the U.S. and Royal Lao-backed Hmong forces in Laos). These Hmong narratives are found in numerous folk songs and popular music in which artists highlight *txoj kev tsis muaj teb tsis muaj chaws* (lack of homeland); *kev poob teb poob chaw* (lost of homeland); *kev nom tswv tsis hlub* (being subjected to unfair ruling). For an example of a Hmong song about statelessness, see Appendix C.

As social beings we all desire righteousness/fairness, which starts from ourselves, our families, extended families, friends, one's ethnic group, our country if it exists, and so on... I am Hmong Der, and I agree with what [A] and [B] have said. We ought to consider and find what's fair for our people/ethnic group. *Hmoob/Moob* are just one people/ethnic group. I do understand Dr. Paoze's wish and objective. It is a fair path for the Mong Leng, however I am concerned that once it is realized it may cause *Hmoob/Moob* to segregate. Sometimes our Hmong Der need to put on Mong Leng's shoes to know how rough it is, before we voice our opinions. Are you someone who desires fairness? If you are, everyone (Hmong Der/Mong Leng) must come together to plan what steps to take. It will take both groups (Hmong Der/Mong Leng) working collaboratively in order for other ethnic groups to listen to them and take their position seriously.⁴⁶⁸

Claims of Mixed-Identity

The claims of ethnic separatism occurred alongside another set of claims. These are claims which assert that “mixed” rather than “homogeneous” identities prevail in Hmong American society. The following passage by a Hmong man and opponent of the MFI movement exemplified these claims:

My father is a Hmoob Dawb and my mother is a Hmong Leeg [*sic*]. What the hell am I then? To be absolutely fair to me and countless other Hmong of similar situation or other combinations, may we also require the addition of our own definitions to [AB78]? In my case, [AB78] ought to include “Hmong/Mong/Hmong+Mong”. Do we understand what I am saying here?⁴⁶⁹

These mixed-identity claims can be understood as responses to the MFI's claim that, “the two Mong/Hmong groups have interwoven their bonds through intermarriage for centuries *but, surprisingly, have preserved their linguistic and cultural homogeneity*, and have respected each

⁴⁶⁸ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 6, 2003. Original passage: *Ua neeg nyob peb yeej ntshaw/xav tau kev ncaj ncees, pib rau yus tus kheej, tsev neeg, kwv tij neej tsa, phooj ywg, yus haiv neeg, yus lub tebchaw yog muaj, and so on... Kuv yog Hmoob Dawb, kuv kuj pom zoo li [A] thiab [B] nkawv hais. Thov peb los tawm tswv yim nrhiav kev ncaj ncees rau peb haiv neeg. Hmoob/Moob yog ib haiv neeg xwb. Kuv yeej to taub Dr. Paoze qhov kev ntshaw thiab lub homphiaj yog dabtsi. Nws yog ib qho kev ncaj ncees rau cov Moob Leeg, tiamsis kuv ntshai tsam thaum tshwm sim lawd ho yuav ua rau peb Hmoob/Moob sib cais. Qee zaus peb cov hmoob dawb yuav tau rau moob leeg txhais khau thiab mloog seb nws lub li cas, peb mam los tawm suab. Koj puas yog ib tug ntshaw kev ncaj ncees? Yog koj yog, sawvdaws (Hmoob dawb/Moob Leeg) yuav tau los zaum uake tawm tswv yim seb yuav ua li cas. Yuav tsum yog ob pab (Hmong Der/Mong Leng) mus sib pab hais mas luag lwm haiv neeg thiaj mloog thiaj pom muaj nuj nqis.*

⁴⁶⁹ Message in *Hmong Forum*, May 30, 2003.

other's differences" (emphasis added).⁴⁷⁰ They are also extensions of the claims against perceived ethnic separatism; for both types of claims problematize the MFI's organization of Hmong society into two dichotomous categories: Mong and Hmong. While the latter type of claims criticizes the purported MFI goal to separate from the ethnic group, the former asserts that the MFI does not go far enough to recognize ethnic diversity within the group.

Both the claims of ethnic separatism and the claims of mixed-identity constitute opponents' broader strategy of social boundary blurring. Such strategy was a response to the MFI's sharpening of intra-ethnic boundaries. Against the MFI's claims that Mong and Hmong constitute two "linguistically and culturally distinct" groups, segments of the community trivialized the distinctions and constructed ethnic separatism as a threat in order to encourage perceptions of and induce reactions against such separation. Essentially, during their contentious interactions with the MFI, the opponents defined a new social problem (i.e., an ethnic separatist movement) complete with its own set of social cause (i.e., the MFI and its supporters), "long-term consequences," and a call to maintain ethnic solidarity. Meanwhile, in order to remain in the public agenda long enough for possible collective action to occur, the MFI's social problem had to compete directly with this new social problem for the public's attention and sympathy.

Reframing the Perpetrators and Re-attributing the Blame

Against the MFI's claim that discrimination against Mong is long-standing and that AB 78 represents a discriminatory policy against Mong, opponents claimed that no systemic discrimination against Mong ever existed. Responding to a supporter of the MFI, one participant interrogated,

Mr. [A], WHO has discriminated against you?! Where is the evidence?! Is it casual or systemic?! Is changing the classification term of Hmong to Mong going to help or hinder your cause?! (...) For centuries, the Hmong people have never thought about

⁴⁷⁰ Email in a message forum, June 1, 2003.

discrimination on the level of one linguistic group against another. Sure, there were groups, clans, families, etc. who did not get along, but never a linguistic divide on the scale that he imagines. Until someone with just enough education to be respectable, chose to take that road.⁴⁷¹

Once again, we see the implicit appeal to formal categories of evidence. But beyond the appeal to formal evidence, opponents were questioning the MFI's underlying assumptions about the social and political organization of Hmong society. In the above excerpt, the writer challenged the claim that Hmong social relations and political practices are organized along linguistic lines. Specifically, he suggested that the "linguistic divide," rather than existing as a natural division, was created by "someone with just enough education to be respectable." Furthermore, he questioned whether changing the ethnic label alone can remedy the social problem.

But opponents' most common response to the MFI's claims was to locate the cause of the social problem in singular perpetrators or isolated events. This was done in different ways. Especially after some of the MFI's supporters reported that a specific Hmong person had labeled Mong Leng as a slang language,⁴⁷² some participants took this opportunity to voice strong objections to the alleged perpetrator. One participant stated,

"Mr. Neng Yang of MN actually [wrote] to an Iowa University saying that the Mong Leng language is slang and is not a Mong official language. This [amounts] to character [assassination]. If he is an educated Mong/community leader and practice radical discrimination.... [he] has no place in the Mong society and must be dealt with."⁴⁷³

In a follow up to these claims, another participant wrote,

I have heard about Neng's attitude toward *Hmoobleeg*'s dialect. I was quite disturbed. It is important for us *Hmoobleeg* to stand on our own feet. When anyone has the evidence at hand he/she must take the appropriate action. [Continuing] to complain behind Neng's

⁴⁷¹ Message in *Central Place*, June 20, 2003.

⁴⁷² A participant in the debates made the following claim: "Prof. PaoZe may at this time [be] holding a letter written by a suppose to be Hmong Der in the name of Neng [Yang] from MN to an Iowa University (who knows how many universities he wrote to) as saying that Mong Leng Language is mere slang and is not a Mong official language." Message in *Central Place*, May 28, 2003.

⁴⁷³ Message in *Central Place*, May 29, 2003.

back does not do any good, in my opinion. If Neng has such view, let him live in his own cocoon.⁴⁷⁴

This passage and others like it demonstrate that even as some participants appealed to “evidence,” they unabashedly used public shaming against the alleged perpetrator. Defining the problem as an isolated case, they saw collective shaming against the alleged sole perpetrator as the proper remedy. But in making this claim, they implicitly denied that the problem represents something more complex than a single person’s actions.

Moreover, some opponents claimed that the problem was simply a “personal” issue turned into a “big” problem. At least two of my informants claimed that the problem can be traced to specific past events that involved Paoze Thao’s family while they were in Laos. One informant, for instance, claimed that, based on what she had heard from others, when in Laos, Thao’s father was denied a position in a local church. Taking the denial of position as discrimination against him for his Mong Leng background, Thao’s father purportedly vowed that he would work hard to have all of his children formally educated so that they will be able to overcome such discrimination in the future. Thao’s grievances (the discrimination against Mong Leng), this informant claimed, probably stemmed from his family’s previous encounters. The truth of this claim matters less to us than the mere that it was put forth as a justification to oppose the MFI’s social problem movement. By defining the problem as a “personal” problem and by locating the source of the problem in specific events or persons, opponents could claim not only that the issue was a non-*social problem* but also that particular individuals rather than entire categories of people (e.g., “Hmong Der”) are the real cause of the social problem.

Reframing the Victims

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

But in addition to challenging the MFI's definition of the perpetrators, opponents also challenged the MFI's definition of the victims. Framing the issue in terms of the victimization of the children, an out-of-state opponent wrote,

As I said before, if the best interests of Hmong/Mong children had been at the heart of the issue, ways would have been found to pass AB78. Clearly, Hmong/Mong children had been used and betrayed in the name of Hmong/Mong politics. (...) What Hmong/Mong children desperately need are good role models and good parenting. The fight over AB78 indicates that Hmong/Mong children are not important. The most vocal spokespersons for Hmong/Mong children are the worst role models. They sold out the best interests of the children for their own interests.⁴⁷⁵

Here and elsewhere, public shaming was used against the supporters of the MFI movement by labeling them as "the worst role models." Moreover, more moderate participants directly contested the allegations that Mong Leng were and are still being victimized by Hmong Der.

The following passage exemplified this view:

Everyone tries to write eloquently and wittingly about the topic but gingerly evades the actual "touchy" issue between White Hmong and Green Mong! People like me who ask for clarification are simply considered as ill-informed on this issue. Go do your own research we're told. Go read the translated resource material...it's all in White Hmong dialect. This seems so minor compared the allegations being presented to the press.

Someone please speak to: How more educated, affluent White Hmong have oppressed less educated Green Mong? Or the claim that more Green Mong suffered or perished during the war?

If you can't even educate the ignorant masses on what the disharmony is between White Hmong and Green Mong, how can you convince us that your cause is good and just? It's pointless.⁴⁷⁶

Here, the question is raised about the alleged negative treatment of the entire class of Green Hmong (here also synonymous with Mong Leng) by Hmong Der. The burden of proof is placed squarely on the members of the MFI. This moderate view expressed a dissension shared by other opponents of the MFI.

⁴⁷⁵ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 12, 2003.

⁴⁷⁶ Message in *Hmong Forum*, May 30, 2003.

In response to the opponents' reframing of the victims, some adherents of the MFI movement insisted that it is unfair to reduce the MFI's actions to simply the pursuit of political gain. A Hmong community member wrote,

I don't understand why you are still making these comments. Don't you get it? It's not about politics, it is about our Hmong/Mong children and their future. You sounded like you care a lot about our Hmong/Mong children, but your comment tells me another thing, that you don't care. Role models for our children. Of course, what the few of us is doing is role [modeling] for Hmong/Mong children. Again, please understand that what the Mong Federation is doing is not a separation of the two, but togetherness with equality. I suspect that you and the others have [known] by now that this is not about who gets famous over politics if this bill should or should not include Mong Curriculum into history at school. Maybe you are still coming from the old ways of thinking and living in the new ways of doing things? I might be wrong, but by reading your comments, that's the notion I get. Let's not think like the old folks back in Laos, that everything should be related to political gain.⁴⁷⁷

Against opponents' claims that the children were "sold out" by contemporary adults, adherents responded by comparing opponents' thinking with those of the "old folks back in Laos."

Essentially, adherents argued that social groups such as the MFI are pursuing humanitarian interests and that they ought to be distinguished from others who pursue political interests. It is the children, they claimed, who encounter inequality and lack representation; and it is the MFI that is fighting to secure equality and representation for the children.

Challenging the MFI's Legitimate Authority

Beyond contesting the MFI's definition of the victims and perpetrators, opponents contested the MFI's authority to represent a major segment of the ethnic community. This is expressed most clearly in the following excerpt, taken from a letter written by a participant who addressed her audience simply as "To whom it may concern." The writer started by describing herself as, "I am a mother of 4 children...I am Green Hmong (*Moob Ntsuab*) and proud of being Hmong and being a Green Hmong." She explained her reason for writing and then stated,

⁴⁷⁷ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 12, 2003.

Since when did you few [individuals] have the right to tell me what I should call myself? Back stabbing your own Hmong people is not the way to make your opinions known. The path you take to create social change only brings more chaos and enemies. Why don't you hold a public meeting to make your point[?]. If your [ideologies] are right and if the general Hmong public [accepts] your doctrines then no one will oppose or speak against you.

The general Hmong community which includes White Hmong and Green Hmong [does] not share the same views as you. You do not represent the Green Hmong community. You can only say you represent the Green Hmong community when they appoint you to be their representative. THAT HAS NOT HAPPEN[ED]. So consider what you are doing before you bring more embarrassment and humiliation to yourself.⁴⁷⁸

In her view, the decision “to label myself...should be up to me and not some crack-pot who [does] not have children in [the] school system.” Here, the participant indirectly challenged the MFI's authority to act as a representative of “the Green Hmong community.” But rather than assert that legitimate authority ought to be one appointed by the government, she defined the “Hmong public” as having the authority to appoint their own representatives. In her view, the MFI “backstabbed” its own people when it decided to bypass the regular channels of communication (e.g., public meetings) in the ethnic community.

The available evidence suggests that the MFI did not hold a public meeting with the broader ethnic community before approaching the state with their primary demand. In retrospect, this may have been their greatest tactical error. By not consulting the community of potential supporters, the MFI left open the possibility that their closest potential allies (Green Hmong and Mong Leng) could become some of their staunchest opponents. This indeed took place. Some individuals who identified themselves as “*Moob Ntsuab*” (Green Hmong) came out to oppose the MFI on the grounds that they have been using this name for a very long time and that they have never had a problem with being called *Moob Ntsuab*. Secondly, many participants

⁴⁷⁸ Message in *Hmong Forum*. Approximately mid-June 2003.

point out that they have never had a problem using the anglicized term “Hmong” as an ethnic label to represent the various dialect groups within the ethnic group.⁴⁷⁹

Constituents of the MFI movement countered this by labeling their opponents, including self-identified Green Hmong persons, as “Hmong wannabe.” A member of the MFI claimed,

We know that there are some Mong who are “Hmong Wannabe” and many Mong who already changed their identities completely from Mong to Hmong. If you are one of these Mong, you can choose to deny your existence, your root, your language, your culture, your parents and grandparents, your ancestors and your heritage all you want; that’s your choice, but please do yourself a favor and speak for yourself and do not speak against us or for us.⁴⁸⁰

However, such tactic of public shaming probably alienated potential adherents instead of converting them into constituents.

Hmong Replaced with Southeast Asians and AB 78 Becomes Law

On June 11, 2003, the AB 78 bill underwent a significant amendment. Specifically, all references to “Hmong” in the bill were replaced with “Southeast Asian.” Many in the ethnic community, but especially supporters of AB 78 were most struck by this change.⁴⁸¹ Expressing strong disappointment, one participant wrote,

⁴⁷⁹ One of my research participants, a Hmong man in his early 50s, shared his opinion as follows: Approximate translation: “Hmong had always called themselves *Hmoob*, except that different [dialect] groups say it differently [e.g., *Moob* or *Hmoob*]. Back in Laos, the [dominant] Lao always called us Meo. (...) Ever since we arrived in America [in Utah, 1981, he was about 25 yrs old on arrival], when we filled out [forms for the government], we initially used “Laotian” (*Pej xeem Nplog*) because that is our nationality, but we also started to use “Hmong” to be more specific [for instance when attending adult school]. Since then, Americans called us Hmong, and they called the Lao (*Nplog*), Laotians, just as they called the Vietnamese, Vietnamese. Since then, all of us [had always] written/used ‘Hmong’ to cover everyone in our ethnic group.” C. Her, personal communication, June 2, 2010, Sacramento, California. Another participant and supporter of AB 78 writes, “I recognize the concerns raised by Mong Federation and acknowledge that they exist to some [degree] (e.g. lack of resources in the Green dialect). However, I respectfully disagree with other things that have been said to the extreme (e.g. “Hmong” doesn’t include Mong. I strongly feel that Hmong is inclusive of all groups, regardless of dialect or religious practice. I know that when spoken in our first language, we always refer to ourselves as “Hmoob” or “Moob” depending on our dialect. However, the word Hmong is only an English spelling.” Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 11, 2003.

⁴⁸⁰ Chimeng Yang. “Email Response.” June 8, 2003. Retrieved January 15, 2010 from: http://www.mong.ws/email_response.htm

⁴⁸¹ Some participants proposed ways to reverse the change. One writer called upon participants in a message forum to join in a letter writing campaign to reverse the change from “Hmong” to “Southeast Asian.” Despite a gesture of support from some in the forum, this letter writing campaign never materialized. Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 15, 2003.

I agree with [A]’s comments. Changing the wording from “Hmong” to “Southeast Asian” is problematic and wasted the effort of many people who worked hard to even get the bill to this stage, unsurprising it is only Hmong who would oppose Hmong as usual. At the hearing this morning, who showed up? I was not there personally but I don’t think (many, if any) other “Southeast Asians” except Hmong showed up in large numbers? Yes, it may be more inclusive however it is problematic, since this bill was specifically written to address the lack of Hmong curriculum missing in the education system. I hope we all learn from this mistake.⁴⁸²

A second person added,

Now that the word “Hmong” [has] been taken out completely, I wonder if the Mong Federation think they have done any of us a service? [The] only real thing that’s happened is negative publicity of Hmong people and how divided they over a stupid letter "H". Maybe we should all write them a thank you letter.....thanks for nothing.⁴⁸³

A Hmong public figure wrote,

This removal constitutes a great defeat for the Hmong people as a cultural entity in modern history. However, this humiliating defeat, caused by some narrow-minded egocentrism, cannot stop our combat for Hmong Unity and Hmong recognition in the international community of peoples. In the contrary, it is a rewarding lesson for all the Hmong/Mong people who look forward [to] the future of our HMONG as one and indivisible ethnic identity.⁴⁸⁴

Some people, however, held more moderate views. One person wrote, “To some extent, I’m fine with the term ‘Southeast Asian’ because it was not just the Hmong/Mong who fought in the Secret War.”⁴⁸⁵ But the AB 78 amendment clearly impacted some participants more than others. Sympathizing with the supporters of AB 78, one person wrote,

You put your heart and soul into the bill to better all Hmong regardless of dialect. You tried to compromise with your opponents, but they were too stubborn and blinded by their own convictions. Most importantly, what they failed to see was that AB 78 was not the proper forum to address this issue. / As a woman, we tend to have the maternal instinct to forgive, compromise and make peace with our opponents, but sometimes that may not necessarily be the best solution.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 11, 2003.

⁴⁸³ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 12, 2003.

⁴⁸⁴ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 12, 2003.

⁴⁸⁵ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 11, 2003.

⁴⁸⁶ Circulated email message, June 25, 2003.

In contrast to the members of the MFI who defined AB 78 as the proper and ideal *opportunity* to raise their grievances,⁴⁸⁷ this participant and others regarded the MFI's use of AB 78 as unfair hijacking of AB 78. From the view of many opponents, not only did the MFI unfairly take advantage of AB 78—itsself an opportunity created by the ethnic community—but they *caused* the state to erase Hmong from the final bill that became law on July 10, 2003.

Well aware of this public allegation, members of the MFI attempted to deflect blame.

Three days after AB 78 became law, a member wrote,

I appreciate the fact that the Education Task Force in Fresno worked hard to introduce AB 78 and get it pass into law. Although, it is my strong belief that this group never intended to include the Mong, Iu Mien, Lao and other Southeast Asians in AB 78, the Mong's real and firm opposition to the bill forces [sic] the legislature to find a compromise in the term "Southeast Asian".⁴⁸⁸

In essence, this member of the MFI responded to the blame by alleging that the Task Force has been exclusive all along and by crediting the MFI with bringing about a more inclusive “compromise.” Yet, for many participants on both sides of the debates but especially for opponents, the deletion of Hmong from the bill was anything but a satisfactory compromise. To them, Hmong ended up back at square one, as an invisible group subsumed under an unofficial, marginalized, undifferentiated category of “Southeast Asians.” For, in the words of a supporter of AB 78, being recognized by the ethnic name matters:

We wanted to be recognized in the bill as Hmong because our way of life as a people changed, a large portion of our people died, and now our culture and traditions are forever changed because of America's actions in the past. It is now their responsibility to make sure they recognize what they have done, and in doing so, to pay respect to our people and the needs of our people now that we have been forced into their mainstream society as a deeply marginalized group of people. (...) Think of this bill and bills such as this as our ways of paying respect for all of our relatives who died and contributed during the war.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁷ That the MFI saw AB 78 as the ideal opportunity is expressed by one member of the MFI. See quote from Part II of this chapter, in which the member states, in part: “*AB 78 was the golden opportunity to say “enough is enough.”*”

⁴⁸⁸ Circulated email message, July 13, 2003.

⁴⁸⁹ Message in *Hmong Forum*, June 12, 2003.

Impact of the MFI Social Movement

Since AB 78 became law, the Mong Federation has been engaged in a number of social movement activities to further their cause. In the following section, I discuss some of these activities and some of the visible impact that the MFI movement has had on individuals' discourses and practices. A few months after AB 78 became law, the Mong Federation, Inc. created a webpage dedicated to "preserving our language and culture for the Mong people."⁴⁹⁰ The MFI also started an online *Mong Journal*.⁴⁹¹ According to its website,

The *Mong Journal* is published electronically twice annually in June and December both in English and Mong. It is sponsored by the Mong Federation, Inc. The Mong Journal is a professional research journal that promotes research in the areas of language, culture, education, social, and economic as well as political status of the Mong people. Another purpose of the Mong Journal is to clarify the misunderstanding, debunk the misconception, and educate the general public about the Mong and the consequences they face as a result of the misinformation, mis-education, and misrepresentation of the Mong.⁴⁹²

In late September 2009, the Mong Federation, Inc. filed an ISO 639-3 request with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International organization to add "Mong" onto their registry of language code.⁴⁹³

Then, in March 2010, the grievances of the MFI resurfaced when members of the MFI voiced concerns over a Hmong charter school that was being considered for approval by the Sacramento City Unified School District in Sacramento, California. According to the media, the chairman of the MFI, Txer Paul Vang wrote a letter to the superintendent which "[charged] that the proposed charter marginalizes the Blue Hmong-Green Hmong."⁴⁹⁴ Furthermore, "Vang, 55, said about 40 percent of the district's 3,000 Hmong children are Mong Leng, and if the Hmong

⁴⁹⁰ The Mong Page. Retrieved March 7, 2009 from: <http://mong.ws/contact.html>

⁴⁹¹ *Mong Journal*. Retrieved March 7, 2009 from: <http://www.mong.ws/publications/journal.htm>.

⁴⁹² Ibid. Retrieved March 7, 2009 from: http://www.mong.ws/publications/guidelines_for_mong_journal.htm

⁴⁹³ "Request for Change to ISO 639-3 Language Code." Retrieved January 3, 2010 from http://www.sil.org/iso639-3/cr_files/2009-090.pdf. The database is Ethnologue: Languages of the World. Retrieved March 7, 2009 from: <http://www.ethnologue.com/home.asp>

⁴⁹⁴ Sacramento Bee, "Sacramento's Hmong Community Divided over Charter School."

language teachers speak Hmong Der dialect, ‘it will be confusing for our Mong Leng children, and we do not feel comfortable to study the Hmong Der Language.’”⁴⁹⁵ The *Sacramento Bee* identified Vang also as the pastor “of the 130-member Hmong Calvary Evangelism Center.”⁴⁹⁶ This incident indicates that the Mong movement is ongoing rather than inactive.

What impact has the AB 78 debates had on individual attitudes and practices? What impact has the MFI’s subsequent movement activities had on institutional practices? Their impact on culture is worth considering. As Doug McAdam (1994:48-49) points out,

In assessing the impact of social movements, scholars have tended to focus their attention narrowly on political or economic consequences. (...) [However], resistance to significant political or economic change is likely to be sufficiently intense as to mute the material effects of all but the most successful movements. ... Given the entrenched political and economic opposition movements are likely to encounter, it is often true that their biggest impact is more cultural than narrowly political and economic.

Below, I highlight the increased discourses on Hmong ethnic identity and the emergence of new ethnic terms such as “(H)mong,” “HMong,” and “Hmong/Mong.” The authors who use these new cultural symbols also provide new interpretations of old meanings.

Although there is no way to measure the increase, my observations suggest that the MFI movement and the conflict that it generated created greater cultural awareness of and interest in Hmong culture and history. During the months following AB 78’s passage, participants in online message forums and social network sites brought up the topic of Mong vs. Hmong and engaged in discussions and debates on linguistic differences, ethnic labeling, and Hmong history. Many of these participants previously participated in the AB 78 debates; but many others were new participants. Among Hmong college students, for instance, some reported⁴⁹⁷ that they were aware of the Mong Leng-Hmong Der debates; others, however, reported that they have never

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Responses on follow up questions to my Hmong American Language Use Survey.

heard of or used the term “Mong.” Nonetheless, many were interested in learning more about the differences between Mong Leng and Hmong Der.⁴⁹⁸

Besides Internet message forums, these discourses on Mong and Hmong can also be found in more academic settings. In the aftermath of AB 78, more widely known anthropologists have attempted to address questions such as, Who are the Hmong? Or from where did they originate? One example is Gary Y. Lee’s (2007) “Diaspora and the Predicament of Origins: Interrogating Hmong Postcolonial History and Identity.” Additionally, in a “12-Point Statement on Hmong,” anthropologists Gary Y. Lee and Nicholas Tapp have attempted to “distinguish between what is fact and what are opinions” on a number of topics, including the topic of “Hmong or Mong.”⁴⁹⁹ Lee and Tapp have claimed that “both Hmong Der and Mong Leng belong to the same ethnic group by virtue of their common religious practices, history, cultural traditions and language (despite some dialect difference).” In their view, using two separate terms “will only create confusion for younger Hmong who grow up in Western countries and to researchers on the Hmong to have to face these different terms.”⁵⁰⁰ Aware of the politically charged debates on the term “Green Hmong,” Lee and Tapp have rendered a different definition; they suggest that “the word ‘*ntsuaab*’ (green) connotes lush vegetation and life, while no one knows what ‘*lees*’ (leng) really [means].”⁵⁰¹

But perhaps the most visible impact of the MFI movement is the creation of new cultural symbols, namely informal ethnic labels. Interestingly, a few years prior to the AB 78 controversy, at least one person had used a variant of the term “Hmong.” Yu-Fong Chai (1999),

⁴⁹⁸ Some of my respondents asked me to explain the differences. In my reply, I tried to provide a common-sense view of the differences between Mong Leng and Hmong Der by citing differences in traditional dresses, dialect, and some religious practices.

⁴⁹⁹ Retrieved May 11, 2010 from: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Topical/12point%20statement.html>

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

in a master's thesis, used the term "HMong" to refer to the ethnic group.⁵⁰² Since AB 78's passage, at least two ethnic Hmong persons have used the term "Hmong/Mong" in their academic writing. Nealcheng Thao (2009), for instance, used the term "Hmong/Mong" throughout his doctoral dissertation on the educational and career aspirations of high school students. Kia Yang (2009) also used "Hmong/Mong" in her master's thesis on the communication gap between parents and children. The use of these new cultural/ethnic symbols can be understood as part of individuals' ways of expressing their identities and/or social experiences. But whether these symbols will be regarded as meaningful gestures of inclusion, as willful acts of division, or as attempts at cultural compromise will depend on the collective consensus that prevails in a particular context.

Moreover, in at least two of his recent articles, Jacques Lemoine (2005), a long-standing scholar of Hmong studies and French anthropologist,⁵⁰³ employed the label "(H)mong" to represent the ethnic group. In a footnote to his article "To Tell the Truth," Lemoine (2008:1) explains his reason for using this new symbol:

Since my article in *Hmong Studies Journal* Vol. 6, What is the actual number of the (H)mong? I have decided to use a very simple system for distinguishing between the two main divisions of this ethnic group: Hmong and Mong by using brackets around the aspirated H, meaning it may or [may] not be pronounced, when both are involved, and the real pronunciation Hmong or Mong according to the context when only one of them is concerned. In my previous publications I did stick to only one spelling Hmong adding the tribal marker: White, Green, Leng, Striped Sleeves, etc. because at this time, Hmong was a new name in ethnography and it was already difficult to have it properly used by concerned writers (See for instance the H'mong spelling in Vietnam). But I have always known that it was not satisfactory on linguistic grounds at least. When Mong speakers in the U.S. have made an issue of it, Hmong as an ethnic group name was well settled all over the world, and a more sophisticated approach could be undertaken, provided it did not break away radically from the previous spelling. Hence: (H)mong.

⁵⁰² Judging by Chai's name, she is probably of Chinese ancestry.

⁵⁰³ Lemoine's (1972) early research focused on the Hmong in Laos. He completed his dissertation, *Un Village Hmong vert du Haut Laos*, in 1968.

Apparently, Lemoine has been influenced by the MFI's call for greater representation of Mong. However, in his recent articles, Lemoine is not as concerned about the debates over dialect as he is about the task of delimiting Hmong's ethnic boundary in order to pursue systematic empirical research. More specifically, Lemoine (2008) suggests that tracing Hmong populations and migrations by their language is necessary in order to objectively study Hmong history.

One thing that Lemoine, Lee and Tapp all have in common is their awareness of and attention to Hmong Americans' ongoing "transnationalism" and conscious "nation" building projects. That is, Hmong Americans' increasing trans-state interactions with their "co-ethnics" in Laos, Vietnam and China *and* their claims that certain social categories in these countries belong to the Hmong *ethnic group*. These researchers, however, do not necessary agree on what Hmong's "nation" building projects means for the systematic study of this ethnic group. Furthermore, they and other students of Hmong studies are engaged in an intermittent, often unacknowledged debate that, at times, resembles the contentious struggle between the Mong Federation and their opponents over the terms "Mong" and "Hmong." But instead of focusing on Mong and Hmong, their debates have centered on the perceived differences between "Hmong" and "Miao" and on the proper ways for delimiting Hmong ethnicity and reconstructing Hmong history. Like the participants in the AB 78 debate, researchers have been actively involved in the creation of social categories or group identities that, in turn, maintain intra-group divisions and inter-group distinctions.

The MFI's movement represents a new social movement within Hmong American society in at least two ways. First, one of the MFI's central goals is the creation and preservation of collective identity, specifically Mong Leng language and culture (the other main goal being the equal distribution of resources to Mong Leng students). This social movement differs from

previous Hmong American-led social movements whose stated goals focused on improving Hmong's economic wellbeing in the U.S. or on reducing human rights violations against their ethnic compatriots in Thailand and Laos.

But the MFI movement is new in another sense. The key leaders of the MFI are persons of professional backgrounds. As we have seen, these ethnic and class characteristics of the MFI's new social movement had important implications for how their interactions with opponents emerged and developed. Whereas in the past, *public* conflicts often occurred between leaders or political factions, in the MFI case, public conflict occurred between the formally educated and professional segments of Hmong American society. Compared to the rest of the ethnic population, the persons who comprise these new opposing "factions" are relatively more integrated, socially, economically and politically across multiple mainstream institutions. Not surprisingly, they are usually accorded a greater degree of authority within and outside of the ethnic community because of their formal language and educational training and the set of resources associated with this training. Accordingly, they are also held to a higher standard regarding their assumptions and reasoning about complex reality and social problems, their use of evidence, their actions toward the ethnic community, and their dealings with the state.

Co-Ethnic Opponents: Responses to Boundary Sharpening Work

The MFI case demonstrates that each stage *and* sub-stage of the career of the social problem process represents a *potential* point of contestation and possibly prolonged conflict.⁵⁰⁴

The potential of the MFI to motivate collective action within the ethnic community rests on its

⁵⁰⁴ Here, stage refers to the major sequences of the career of the social problem: "the emergence of the social problem; the legitimation of the social problem; the mobilization of action with regard to the social problem; the formation of an official plan of action; the transformation of the official plan in its empirical implementation" (Blumer 1971:301). Sub-stage refers to the set of activities directed at achieving each of the major stages: constructing the social problem, seeking legitimacy for it, mobilizing action, etc. Below, I focus on the contentious social interactions during the construction-to-legitimation stages.

members' ability to motivate influential third parties to endorse the claim that something can and ought to be done about the social problem. Achieving collective consensus, in turn, depends on the MFI's ability to convince others, especially opponents, that a set of conditions exists and that these conditions constitute a significant social problem.

First, the MFI case affirms the hypothesis of Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) that after a social problem has emerged and entered the public agenda, it must still compete with other social problems *to remain on* the public agenda long enough such that collective action may occur on the social problem. As we have seen, the specific social problem that the MFI constructed—i.e., the injustice against Mong Leng—had to compete directly with another socially constructed problem—ethnic separatism—for the ethnic community's attention. It is the competition between these two social problems that I am calling an ethnicized conflict. Second, the MFI case provides support for the claim that the successful construction of a social problem is a complex process fraught with vulnerabilities (Loseke 2003).

In their attempt to mobilize consensus and collective action, the supporters of the MFI employed diagnostic and prognostic framing along with motivational framing. However, opponents of the MFI, through counter-framing, attacked nearly every claim that the MFI put forth in support of the social problem. These counter-claims were aimed at the MFI's core claims: 1) that Mong and Hmong constitute two distinct, albeit culturally and linguistically homogeneous groups; 2) that systemic discrimination exists against Mong Leng; and 3) that state recognition for Mong is a proper remedy to the problem of linguistic inequality. Against each of these claims, opponents presented rival claims based on their own set of putative objective conditions, perceived victims and perpetrators, and proposed course of actions. Whereas the members of the MFI emphasized the call for equitable treatment, their opponents emphasized the

call for ethnic solidarity. Both sides vehemently asserted versions of social reality that tended to support their social problem claims but challenged the credibility of their opponents as well as their opponents' claims. I am claiming that ethnic opponents created dissension not by challenging any particular claim of the MFI's social problem, but by challenging nearly every stage and sub-stage of the career of the social problem. They discouraged collective action by delegitimizing not just the social problem but also the key promoters of the social problem.

Moreover, the MFI case shows that existing ethnic boundaries are robust even in the face of intense, verbally violent struggles and negotiations. As we have seen, both sides of the AB 78 debates were engaged in contentious boundary making work. It was supporters' and opponents' disagreement over perceived intra- and inter-group boundaries that animated much of the conflict between the movement and counter-movement. The MFI pointed to differences in language, culture and costumes in order to define the "cultural stuff" (Barth 1969:15) enclosed by the Mong and Hmong boundaries and to suggest that Mong and Hmong are sharply bounded groups. Their opponents objected and instead claimed that while the cultural distinctions between Mong and Hmong do exist, they have never served as scripts for acting toward persons in the "newly" constructed categories of "Mong" and "Hmong." In other words, opponents insisted that not only has Hmong society never been organized along cultural and linguistic lines—i.e., along a dichotomous Mong v. Hmong category—but that the boundary between Mong and Hmong has always been fuzzy and frequently crossed. This boundary construction work was a crucial part of the MFI's effort to construct the victims and perpetrators of the social problem. Specifying the victims and perpetrators, in turn, matters for making claims about the specific social causes and consequences of the social problem.

However, opponents responded to the MFI's sharpening of intra-group boundary in various ways, including trivializing intra-group distinctions, emphasizing external discrimination, accusing the MFI of encouraging ethnic separatism, and calling for ethnic unity. All of these responses should be understood as constituting part of the opposition's boundary blurring work. Boundary blurring, in turn, functioned as a tactic to reattribute the cause of the social problem. Instead of conceding that Hmong Der are the perpetrators, opponents shifted the blame to individual persons and to state institutions.

But what was especially detrimental to the MFI's movement was the specific opposition from the Mong Leng and Green Hmong segments. This opposition undermined the MFI's authority to represent or speak for "Mong Americans" and hampered the MFI's ability to mobilize a broad social support base. However, this begs the question of whether the MFI had sufficient legitimacy to influence the state during the movement regardless of the opposition from the Green Hmong/Mong Leng segment. To address this question, let us consider the MFI's initial legitimacy as a social movement organization.

Although leaders of the MFI are well integrated within American society and have worked in one way or another directly with the state (California), the Mong Federation as a formal organization lacks history working with the state. Several leaders of the MFI work within public educational institutions or in state institutions that manage public education. Several members of the MFI have worked on bilingual teacher training materials. Paoze Thao, for instance, has also made recommendations to California's Department of Education regarding the education of Hmong students in the state's public schools. During my conversations with over three dozen Hmong individuals, including college students, community professionals, and leaders in multiple Hmong communities within California's Central Valley (from Chico in the north to Bakersfield

in the south), nearly all individuals said they have never heard of Mong Federation, Inc. prior to the AB 78 controversy—that is, prior to about February 2003. Many of the Hmong individuals who came to know about Mong Federation as a result of the AB 78 controversy expressed that they were unfamiliar with the services of the MFI and unaware that the MFI was registered as an organization in Illinois instead of California. Most did not know that the MFI had a website.⁵⁰⁵ However, since the passage of AB 78, several (about six) of my informants have said they know about or have come across the online *Mong Journal*, which is still managed by members of the Mong Federation.⁵⁰⁶ Given the Mong Federation’s lack of history working with California’s Legislature as a formal organization, it is doubtful that the state automatically accepted the MFI as a legitimate representative of the Hmong American community.

Besides the state, most Hmong Americans have not yet come to see the MFI as a legitimate representative or political broker of the ethnic community.⁵⁰⁷ The situation is the same for the vast majority of Hmong-staffed community organizations; however, clearly some formal organizations, such as the Lao Veterans of America, Inc., have had a much more extensive support and membership base compared to the MFI.

Moreover, being a legitimate political broker entails much more than simply name recognition. As M.N.M. Lee (2005) has convincingly argued, historically, the legitimate authority of a Hmong political broker in the Laotian-Hmong context⁵⁰⁸ depended primarily on the patronage of the state (French colonial authorities and their designated bureaucrats) or some

⁵⁰⁵ Mong Federation website: www.mongfederation.org or <http://mong.ws/>

⁵⁰⁶ Mong Journal website: mong.ws/publications/.

⁵⁰⁷ In this context, a political broker is a person who, through his/her experiences in dealing with outside authorities and work with the ethnic community, come to acquire legitimacy as a representative leader and intermediary between the ethnic community and the state or other authorities on issues of social or political significance.

⁵⁰⁸ I use the term Laotian-Hmong to refer to the Hmong in Laos. In her study of the rise and fall of Hmong “messianic” and secular leaders, M.N.M. Lee (2005) examines the period between French colonialism in Laos and the middle of the Second Indochina War. It is mostly the latter kind of leaders (secular leaders) that Lee considers political brokers.

powerful authority outside of the ethnic group (U.S. military forces). An indication of the MFI's lack of influence is the fact that the MFI, as an organization, has not yet achieved the status of being a well-known ethnic organization or an organization with a relatively broad membership base or clientele. As I suggested above, until 2003, the MFI was largely unknown to people of various backgrounds in California's Central Valley.

What I am suggesting here is that several related factors plausibly led the state to define the issue as a non-state social problem and to refer the MFI case back to the ethnic community for possible action. First, the MFI lacked history working with the state as a formal organization. Yet, it needed this history in order to support its claim of being a legitimate representative of a significant segment of the Hmong ethnic population. Secondly, the MFI as a formal organization lacked history working with the various Hmong American communities in California. Prior to AB 78, relatively few Hmong Americans knew about the Mong Federation, Inc. compared to organizations such as the Lao Family Community, Inc. or the Lao Veterans of America, Inc. Given Hmong's unfamiliarity with the MFI and the MFI's lack of history with the majority of the population, achieving the status of a political broker over a short period would require nothing short of an extraordinary feat.

Third, although the leaders of the MFI are highly educated individuals and established professionals in their own workplaces,⁵⁰⁹ prior to AB 78, they had not achieved the status of influential public figure within Hmong American society. As such, their legitimacy and authority as leaders was (and continues to be) subjected to challenges from various segments, including public figures within the ethnic community.

⁵⁰⁹ Several leaders of the MFI work within public education institutions or in state institutions that manage public education.

Conclusion

I contend that a set of mutually reinforcing processes determined the outcome of the MFI protest movement. This set of processes includes the state's refusal to hear the MFI case (as we discussed in Part I), the mass media's trivialization of the social problem (discussed in Part II), and the ethnic community's further delegitimation of the social problem. Ultimately, it was the *interaction* between the MFI's movement, the counter-movement, and the representatives of the state that resulted in the unintended outcome: the replacement of Hmong with Southeast Asian in AB 78. The media provided the needed stimulus for the counter-movement but were not involved in the amendment process. The mass media, the state, and the ethnic counter-movement each played an important role in delegitimizing the MFI's social problem. However, it was the state that played the most crucial role in defining the 'problem' of language material inequity as *not a social* or state problem at all. By refusing to hear the MFI case any further, the state conveniently relieved itself of the responsibility to resolve this institutionally produced social problem. The message the state sends is that immigrant communities, if they want to make changes to public policies, would have to engage in organized protests or other electoral forms of participation. The next and final chapter focuses on Hmong Americans' participation in electoral politics and some of the impact that this has had on public policies.

Chapter 8: Hmong Americans' Electoral Participation in Three U.S. States, 1980-2012

Although the number of Asian American elected officials since the 1960s has increased, research on Asian American communities elected officials has been scarce (J.S. Lai, Cho, Kim, and Takeda 2001). James Lai and his collaborators (2001) point out that this gap in the literature may have to do with two things. First, “the literature on state-sponsored discrimination against Asian Americans seems to suggest that Asian-American political activity has been greatly depressed by racist practices.” Second, this suggestion “has led to an emphasis on ‘politics by other means’—the view that Asian Americans are quite political, but that this political activity largely manifested itself in non-electoral activities such as cultural politics, labor politics, and feminist” (2001:616). However, by focusing on ‘alternative’ politics, past studies have paid less attention to “politics [that occur] within mainstream political institutions” (2001:616). As such, we have only fragmentary knowledge about who among Asian Americans become political candidates; where or when they run for public offices; how political contexts impact electoral mobilization and outcomes; and what impact Asian American electoral participation has had on their political incorporation. Although Lai et al. acknowledge the need to define politics broadly in order “to capture the full breadth of Asian American political activity,” they see the need for more research “that will take seriously the relationship between strategic politicians of Asian-American descent and the political institutions that define our nation’s public life” (2001:616).

This chapter contributes to the research on Asian American electoral participation by investigating Hmong Americans’ descriptive representation in three states—California, Minnesota and Wisconsin—over a 21 year period. Specifically, I examine the outcomes of Hmong Americans’ campaigns for city, county and state elected offices between 1991 and 2012 in order to address three related questions: 1) What are some of the characteristics that Hmong

American political candidates possess? 2) How do group-level resources and political contexts shape the opportunities for turning out candidates, engaging in electoral campaigns, and winning elected offices? 3) What impact has electoral mobilization had on mobilizers and on Hmong Americans' political incorporation? This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I describe the method and sources of data. Next, I describe the state political contexts. Then I present the main findings of this study, focusing on the differences between states and localities in their production of Hmong American public officials. Then I discuss factors that help account for the emergence of Hmong political candidates and those that increase the likelihood of their election into public offices.

Data and Method

Using primary and secondary sources, I compiled a fairly exhaustive list of Hmong candidates who competed for or won an elected office in the United States between November 1991 and November 2012. Primary sources included Hmong elected officials and city or state government documents on political candidates and their election outcomes. Secondary sources included newspaper accounts, community informants, and existing case studies. By public elected office,⁵¹⁰ I mean any officially sanctioned legislative, judicial or executive position at the local, state or federal level of government that is achieved through a direct popular election process. In some cases, an individual could initially be appointed to a popularly elected office; I count these offices. However, this definition of elected office excludes public offices where appointment is the sole means of their attainment.⁵¹¹ This is not to imply that appointed offices

⁵¹⁰ In this paper, I use “public office” and “elected office” interchangeably. I refer to the persons occupying these offices as public officials or elected officials. I am aware that different states may have different ways of defining who is a public official.

⁵¹¹ As an example of appointed offices, I want to point out that Lee Pao Xiong of Minnesota was appointed by former Governor Jesse Ventura to the Minnesota Metropolitan Council, where Xiong served from 1997-2003. In 2000, Xiong was also appointed by former President Bill Clinton to serve on the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders.

are less important than elected offices; for both are relevant to a group's electoral politics. However, I am more interested in the collective mobilization processes surrounding popularly elected positions. Secondly, I am interested in the extent to which increased descriptive representation could lead to greater political incorporation, of which appointments to government posts and commissions is one dimension.

In addition to compiling information on the names, locations, and election results of Hmong candidates and their attempted offices, I also compiled information on other aspects of their background. These variables included a candidate's country of birth, age, age at arrival, age at election, education and occupational background, formal organization affiliation, history of campaign work, political affiliation (unless it was a non-partisan race), key endorsements, and where available, campaign contributions received. I also recorded the type of election used (at-large or district-based), the number of seats, and the names and occupational background of the candidates (or incumbents) that competed for elected office during the same election cycle. Finally, for persons who won elected office, I also researched their length of service in office (by number of terms and years), the number of times they sought re-election, and whether or not they were successfully re-elected.

The Political Contexts of California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin

Given Asian Americans' smaller population relative to most other racial minority populations and an even smaller Asian American electorate in most precincts, it is common knowledge that Asian American political candidates cannot simply rely on co-ethnic votes to win elected office. Instead, what Asian American candidates must often do, if they have not already done so through years of previous community service groundwork, is to seek the official

endorsement of key minority and majority leaders and organizations, including government officials.

To better understand Asian Americans' capacity and opportunity for engaging in electoral mobilization,⁵¹² it is necessary to examine the social and the political contexts of California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. A state's racial composition constitutes a component of the social contexts that is especially relevant to the politics of representation. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin were home to about 29.7 million, 4.4 million, and 4.9 million residents, respectively (table 8-1). In California, non-Hispanic whites comprised the majority (57 percent) of the population. In sharp contrast, non-Hispanic whites made up 94 and 91 percent of Minnesota's and Wisconsin's population respectively. Whereas Hispanics (26 percent) comprised the largest non-white category in California, it is blacks who made up the largest non-white category in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. Asian Pacific Islander Americans (APIs) made up 9.6, 1.8, and 1.1 percent of the general populations in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, respectively. In absolute terms, there were about 2.8 million APIs in California, 78,000 APIs in Minnesota, and 54,000 APIs in Wisconsin. By the 2000 U.S. Census, the percentage of APIs had increased to 11.3 percent in California, 2.9 percent in Minnesota, and 1.7 percent in Wisconsin (not shown).

[Table 8-1 about here]

These figures give us an idea of racial minorities' potential voting power relative to whites and of racial minority categories' potential voting power relative to each other. They also begin to suggest the challenges that racial minorities such as Asian Americans have to confront as they seek political representation in different states. As Lai et al. have pointed out, given that

⁵¹² By electoral mobilization, I mean collective action or activities aimed at influencing the government by affecting the choice of government personnel.

the Asian American population is “geographically dispersed and largely foreign-born...successful Asian-American candidates at all levels must seek the support of non-Asian constituents and focus on broader campaign issues” (2001:612). But candidates’ political strategies as well as the outcomes of their strategies are conditioned by their political contexts.

Besides differences in their racial composition, California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin also differ on several dimensions of political contexts. Although “political contexts” refer to a number of things in the socio-political environment that can shape political behavior, I want to focus on three dimensions of political contexts that could affect the emergence of immigrant political candidates, their ability to mobilize support, and their chances of winning elections. These dimensions are a state’s existing levels of descriptive representation, its voter registration policy, and its level of civic organizations.

One dimension of political contexts is the level of descriptive representation in a particular place and time (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Lien, Collet, Wong, and Ramakrishnan 2001). Table 8-2 presents data on the number of elected local officials by race and state in 1992. It shows, perhaps not surprisingly, that none of the non-white racial categories has achieved parity in terms of descriptive representation. In fact, non-whites were and likely still are severely underrepresented in local governments considering their relative population sizes.

[Table 8-2 about here]

Table 8-3 presents more detailed data on the number of Asian Americans, Hispanics, and blacks who held various elected offices in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin during the mid-1990s. The most obvious difference between the three states is in their absolute number of

minority elected officials. California, with 1,313 non-white⁵¹³ public officials, clearly outnumbered Minnesota (23) and Wisconsin (34) on this aspect. But the data reveal three other general patterns. First, the difference in the number of elected officials across racial categories only roughly reflects the difference in the size of these populations. Within each state, larger racial categories do not necessarily have a greater share of elected officials than smaller racial categories. For example, in 1994-95, there were 796 Hispanic elected officials, 244 API officials, and 273 black officials. If population size were the only thing that mattered for descriptive representation, we would expect for APIs (recall that APIs made up about 10 percent of California's population in 1990), to have more elected officials than blacks (who made up just over seven percent). Second, in all three states, blacks have achieved more elected offices than APIs and Hispanics considering blacks' relative population size. This is seen most clearly in Minnesota and Wisconsin where the number of black officials was two to seven times larger than the combined number of API and Hispanic elected officials. Finally, in all three states, APIs, Hispanics, and blacks have won elected offices at the county, municipal, and school district levels at a much higher rate than they have won offices at the state level. For instance, of the 796 public offices in California held by Hispanics, 92 percent were at the county, municipal, or school district level compared to two percent at the state level.

[Table 8-3 about here]

Personal observations suggest that racial minority and immigrant political candidates rely on other racial minority elected officials (often from the same state) for support—in the form of information sharing, resource provision, and endorsement—above and beyond the support from whites. The perceived and real availability of this kind of “minority support” in a particular state

⁵¹³ Non-white here refers to Asian Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and blacks. Other categories such as Native Americans would fall under this category but specific data on their elected officials are hard to come by.

or local context could influence a person's decision to run or not to run for public offices. Having access to existing minority support could strengthen an emergent candidate's legitimacy vis-à-vis political contenders, increase his/her supporters' sense of political efficacy, and enable them to mobilize support from segments of the established and marginalized communities. If and when a person chooses to run for office, other factors in the political contexts could facilitate or constrain his/her opportunities to mobilize votes.

Civic organizations, if they exist in sufficient numbers in a particular area and have discretionary resources (money, skills, time/volunteers), could help political candidates mobilize voters. Data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics show that, since 1995, counties within Minnesota and Wisconsin have maintained significantly more civic organizations⁵¹⁴ per 1,000 residents compared to the counties in California. For instance, in 1995, Ramsey County (MN) had about 1.2 civic organization per 1,000 residents compared to Fresno County's 0.51 civic organizations per 1,000 residents (figure 8-1). During the last 15 years, the number of civic organizations in Ramsey County has grown at a much higher rate than other counties shown. Furthermore, the available data suggest that civic organizations in Ramsey County have maintained significantly greater resources, as measured by reported assets per capita,⁵¹⁵ than civic organizations in other counties of Wisconsin and California (figure 8-2).

[Figure 8-1 about here]

⁵¹⁴ The National Center for Charitable Statistics does not define "civic organizations" per se, but I have categorized the following four classes of NCCS-labeled organizations into this category: "International, Foreign Affairs, and National Security; Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy; Community Improvement, Capacity Building; and Philanthropy, Voluntarism, and Grantmaking Foundations." These organizations include both those that are non-profit and those that are "other" (presumably, for-profit). For further information of these organizations, see <http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/PubApps/nteeSearch.php?codeType=NTEE&gQry=>

⁵¹⁵ Assets per capital is calculated by taking the total reported assets of all organizations in a county in a particular year and dividing it by the estimated number of residents in that county at that time. I used U.S. decennial and American Community Survey single-year data to estimate the population of each county.

[Figure 8-2 about here]

U.S. states have different laws regarding the requirements for identification cards on election day and the closing date for voter registration. None of the three states has laws requiring voters to show voter identification cards at the time of voting. However, in Minnesota and Wisconsin, eligible U.S. citizens have the right to register to vote on the day of election.⁵¹⁶ In contrast, California law states that eligible U.S. citizens must register to vote no later than 15 days before an election.⁵¹⁷ State laws governing voter registration could have an impact on the level of voter registration and voter turnout in a particular state or locality.

The level of voter turnout is an indirect indicator of the opportunities/constraints provided by the political contexts. In the 2008 general election, not only did Minnesota and Wisconsin beat California by far but they also beat all other U.S. states in terms of voter turnout, as measured by dividing the vote for highest office by the voting-eligible population.⁵¹⁸ Specifically, the voter turnout rates in Minnesota and Wisconsin were 77.8 and 72.4 percent respectively. These are significantly higher than California's 60.9 and the nation's 61.6 percent.⁵¹⁹ Past studies have shown that early deadlines for voter registration impede voter turnout (Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978) and that the adoption of election day registration increases average voter turnout in more rural, less populous states (Brians and Grofman 2001). The difference in state's deadline for voter registration may help to explain why both the level of

⁵¹⁶ Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, "Registration and Voting." Retrieved February 8, 2012, from: <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/voters/registration-voting>. Minnesota Secretary of State, "Registering to Vote." Retrieved February 8, 2012, from: <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/index.aspx?page=204>

⁵¹⁷ California Secretary of State, "Voter Registration." Retrieved February 8, 2012, from: http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_yr.htm

⁵¹⁸ Michael McDonald, "2008 General Election Turnout Rates." (updated 3/31/12) United States Elections Project, George Mason University. Retrieved April 15, 2012, from: http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

voter registration and the level of voter turnout in California are lower than those of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Given that counties follow their state's voter registration policy, it is not surprising that the counties of Minnesota and Wisconsin also reported registering and voting at a higher rate than the counties of California. For example, during the November 2008 presidential election, 85 percent of the voting-age population (VAP) in Marathon County (WI) reported that they registered to vote as compared to 63 percent of the VAP in Fresno County (CA) who reported having registered. Whereas 75 percent of Marathon County's VAP reported voting, only 51 percent of Fresno County's VAP reported having done so (table 8-4). In fact, the available evidence shows that, from 2006 through 2012, the voter turnout rates in Ramsey County and Marathon County during general elections have been about 15 to 20 percentage points higher than that of Fresno County (figure 8-2).

[Table 8-4 about here]

[Figure 8-3 about here]

Hmong American Contexts and Office Holders

Research on Asian Americans has found that the size of an ethnic group's electorate (i.e., the number of registered voters) in a particular community is closely related to its overall population size (Nakanishi 1985:13). Whereas Hmong Americans are the largest Asian American group in Wisconsin and Minnesota, they are one of the smallest Asian American groups in California. Specifically, within California, Hmong made up only 1.8 percent of Asian Americans even though California's Hmong population is the largest of all states. In Wisconsin, the three largest Asian American groups are Hmong (37.1 percent), Asian Indians (18 percent)

and Chinese (13.1 percent). Similarly, in Minnesota, Hmong, Asian Indians, and Chinese made up 30.3, 15.8, and 11.2 percent of Asian Americans, respectively.⁵²⁰

Furthermore, Hmong American communities are more residentially dispersed in California and Wisconsin than they are in Minnesota. According to the 2000 Census, within California, Hmong communities of 1,000 or more persons were dispersed across seven counties.⁵²¹ Moreover, in Fresno county, where at least 930,000 persons currently reside, the Hmong American community (31,000 or 3 percent) is dwarfed by the Mexican American (46 percent) and non-Hispanic white communities (33 percent).⁵²² Similarly, in Wisconsin, Hmong communities of 1,000 or more were dispersed across ten counties.⁵²³ In Milwaukee county (population: 948,000), the Hmong community (11,000 or one percent), despite being the largest in the state, remains significantly smaller than that of Mexican Americans (9 percent), blacks (27 percent), and non-Hispanic whites (54 percent). In contrast, in Minnesota, Hmong communities of 1,000 or more were concentrated in two counties: Ramsey and Hennepin counties. In Ramsey County, where about 509,000 residents call home, the Hmong community (34,000 or 7 percent) is surpassed only by the black (11 percent) and non-Hispanic white communities (67 percent). Can we expect to see the greatest electoral participation in the counties where Hmong's electorates are potentially largest (i.e., Ramsey, Fresno, Sacramento, Hennepin, and Milwaukee counties)? Let us turn to the findings.

⁵²⁰ Data source: American Community Survey, 2005-2009 Sample Estimates.

⁵²¹ Based on the Census 2000, these seven counties are Fresno, Sacramento, Merced, San Joaquin, Butte, Yuba, and San Diego counties; each of these counties contain at least 1,000 Hmong Americans.

⁵²² Data source: American Community Survey 2010 Sample Estimates.

⁵²³ Based on the Census 2000, these ten counties are Milwaukee, Marathon, Brown, Sheboygan, Outagamie, La Crosse, Dane, Winnebago, Eau Claire, and Manitowoc counties.

Between 1991 and 2012, 23 distinct Hmong persons won 25 primary elected offices and two secondary elected offices from local to state governments.⁵²⁴ Of the 23 persons, all but five are men. Of these 25 elected offices, 20 were won through public elections while five were won through appointments initially.⁵²⁵ More than two-thirds (17) of the 25 positions were won through at-large elections while a third of the positions were won through district elections (table 8-5).

[Table 8-5 about here]

Figure 8-3 shows the number of concurrent Hmong American office holders between 1992 and 2012. It shows that the number of Hmong American office holders gradually increased from one office holder to four office holders between 1992 and 1999, then increased again after 1999, reaching a peak of ten office holders in 2002-03. After 2003, this number dropped slightly to nine office holders and remained relatively stable between 2005 and 2011. Presently, only six Hmong Americans hold elected offices in the entire U.S.

[Figure 8-4 about here]

However, looking only at the number of elected officials gives us an incomplete picture of the extent of Hmong Americans' electoral participation. The number of persons who attempted but failed to win elected offices must also be taken into account. Figure 8-3 presents

⁵²⁴ I distinguish between a primary and a secondary public office. By primary public office, I mean the primary or initial office that a candidate holds. A secondary public office is any additional office held concurrently by a person after his/her election into the initial public office. For instance, I consider the position of mayor pro-tem (or acting mayor) to be a secondary office and therefore exclude it from the primary office total count. Lormong Lo's primary office was city council member of Omaha, NE. At the time of this writing, Noah Lor's primary office is city council member of Merced, California.

⁵²⁵ In 1994, Lormong Lo was appointed to Omaha's City Council in Nebraska. In 1997, Lo was elected into that position. Also in 1997, Lormong Lo was appointed Acting Mayor of Omaha. In 1999, Paul C. Lo was appointed to the Merced City School District Board of Trustees in California. Lo was elected to that position in 2001. In 2005, Tong W. Ly was appointed to the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors in Wisconsin. He did not seek election after his term. In 2011, Noah Lor was appointed by the Merced City Council to Mayor Pro-Tempore in California.

data on all Hmong American candidates that have ever run for elected office between 1991 and 2012. Altogether, 43 distinct Hmong persons have waged a total of 59 campaigns for elected offices throughout the United States.⁵²⁶ Of these 59 campaigns, the majority (34) have been unsuccessful at winning elected offices. Among the unsuccessful campaigns,⁵²⁷ 16 were lost through general elections, 16 were lost through primary elections, and two were lost as a result of non-appointment.⁵²⁸ Of the campaigns, 49 were waged by Hmong male candidates while only ten were waged by Hmong female candidates. In fact, until very recently (2012), the only state in which Hmong American women have run for elected office is Minnesota, almost exclusively in St. Paul.⁵²⁹

The data suggest that Hmong's electoral participation tended to be higher in presidential election years than in non-presidential election years. Specifically, Hmong Americans engaged in two, six, seven, one, and six electoral campaigns in years 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012, respectively. It is plausible that some candidates and their supporters saw presidential years as opportune times to run for public office because voter turnout tends to be higher in presidential election years than in non-presidential election years (Lijphart 1997).⁵³⁰

⁵²⁶ This figure does not include re-election campaigns. The discrepancy between the number of persons and number of campaigns is due to the fact that some of the candidates ran multiple (unsuccessful) campaigns and some candidates were elected into multiple offices. Re-election wins are not included in the elected offices won count but re-election losses (provided that an incumbent sought reelection) are included in the elected offices losses.

⁵²⁷ The 34 unsuccessful campaigns were carried out by 30 distinct candidates (25 men and five women).

⁵²⁸ In 2008, Neng Lee of St. Paul, MN was not appointed despite being selected as a finalist for the vacated position of Board Member of St. Paul Public Schools (a seat vacated by former school board member Vallay Moua Varro's resignation). Jeff Risberg won the appointment to Board of Education of SPPS. In 2011, Sor Lo was a finalist for the seat of City Council of Chico, California. However, in the end, Lo's contender, Bob Evans, won the appointment.

⁵²⁹ At the time of this writing, 2012, Misty Yang ran unsuccessfully for the Sacramento City Council. Youa Xiong ran unsuccessfully for the Board of Education of Wausau School District.

⁵³⁰ The Center for Voting and Democracy points out that "Since 1988, [turnout in presidential election years] has fluctuated, from a low of 52.6% of eligible voters (and 49.1% of voting age population) in 1996 to a high of 61% of eligible voters in 2004, the highest level since 1968. Turnout in midterm elections is far lower, peaking at 48.7% in 1966 and falling as low as 39.0% in 1978, 1986, and 1998 remaining below 50% in midterm elections." Retrieved January 10, 2012, from: <http://www.fairvote.org/voter-turnout>

[Figure 8-5 about here]

Having discussed the general trends, let us examine the types of offices in greater detail. Figure 8-3 presents the type of elected offices that Hmong American candidates have won or attempted to win since 1991. The offices of city council member (nine wins, 13 losses) and school board member (11 wins, 6 losses) have been the two most sought-after elected offices. But the positions of state senate and state house of representatives have also been sought with some frequency. For instance, a total of six Hmong candidates have sought the state senator seat over the last two decades. Of these, only two have been elected as of November 2012 (Mee Moua and Fong Hawj).

[Figure 8-6 about here]

But what these figures do not show is how Hmong Americans in different states have fared in terms of electoral participation and outcomes. For that information, we turn to table 8-6, which shows Hmong Americans' electoral outcomes (wins and losses) disaggregated by office type and state. The table shows that since 1991, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, and Nebraska have each produced ten, nine, five, and one Hmong American public officials, respectively. But if we count both successful and unsuccessful electoral campaigns as part of electoral participation, then electoral participation has occurred most frequently in Minnesota (24 campaigns). Minnesota is followed by Wisconsin (21 campaigns), California (12 campaigns), and Nebraska (two campaigns).

The fact that Hmong have been elected in these four states rather than other states with sizable Hmong American populations suggests that an immigrant group's population size and population growth are both crucial to its electoral participation. As we saw in chapter 3, several states including California, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and

Wisconsin have been home to Hmong former refugees from Laos since 1976 (Bliatout, Downing, Lewis, and Yang 1988). However, the Hmong populations in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have significantly outgrown all other states since 1990 as a result of Hmong's secondary migration in the mid-1980s. In contrast, Hmong populations in states such as Colorado, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington have declined or remained relatively stable during the last 15-20 years (see table 3-1 in chapter 3).

[Table 8-6 about here]

That Wisconsin is the state with the most number of Hmong American public officials is a bit surprising given that California and Minnesota are the states with the first and second greatest number of Hmong populations in the U.S., respectively. Recall, however, that the Hmong in Wisconsin as well as those in Minnesota are about two times more likely to become naturalized when compared to the Hmong in California (chapter 3). Also 42 percent of Hmong in Wisconsin are eligible to register compared to 37 percent of Hmong in Minnesota and California. It is possible that the difference in Hmong's naturalization rate, which affects their proportion eligible to register across states help explain how the Hmong American communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota have produced a greater number of Hmong candidates compared to their counterparts in California. Additionally, relative population size may be just as important as absolute population size. The data suggest that states with larger relative Hmong population size (Wisconsin and Minnesota) have produced more Hmong candidates/campaigns for elected office (24 candidates/campaigns in MN and 21 in WI), than states where Hmong make up only a fraction of the Asian American population (12 in CA and two in NE).

Moreover, the states differ in terms of when they elected their first Hmong American to public office. Minnesota saw its first Hmong public official in 1991 (Choua Lee, school board

member in St. Paul); Wisconsin saw its first Hmong public official in 1993 (Thai Vue, school board member in La Crosse). Nebraska saw its first Hmong public official in 1994 (Lormong Lo, city council member in Omaha). But it was not until 1999 that California saw its first Hmong public official (Paul Lo, school board member in Merced). Considering that all four states have been home to Hmong refugee communities since 1976, it took Minnesotans 15 years after Hmong's resettlement to elect their first public official of Hmong descent. In contrast, it took Californians 23 years or 1.5 times longer to do the same.

What is perhaps unexpected, based on relative and absolute population size, is that one Hmong person was able to win appointment and later on, election into the City Council of Omaha, Nebraska. The late Lormong Lo, who was born in Laos, came to Omaha, Nebraska in March 1976 at the age of 17. In 1983, Lo graduated from Creighton University and in 1988 he became a naturalized U.S. citizen. Between 1991 and 1993, Lo worked in the Omaha Planning Department and in 1994, he was appointed to Omaha's City Council. In 1997, Lo was elected to Omaha's City Council and later appointed Acting Mayor of Omaha for a short period of time.⁵³¹

What makes Lo's election unique is that neither the city of Omaha nor the state of Nebraska has ever had a significant Hmong population. According to U.S. decennial census count, the entire state of Nebraska had only 135, 101, and 161 Hmong in 1990, 2000, and 2010, respectively. Moreover, Hmong Americans make up a miniscule 0.8 percent of Douglas county's Asian American population and 0.5 percent of Nebraska's Asian Americans. In the county of Douglas and Nebraska state as a whole, Asian Indians are the largest Asian American subgroup.⁵³² Nevertheless, because no other Hmong has campaigned for elected office since

⁵³¹ Susan Szalewski, "Former Councilman Lo Dies," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 26, 2011.

⁵³² Asian Indians make up 29 percent of Asians in Douglas County and 19 percent of Asians in Nebraska. Chinese make up 15 percent of Asians in Douglas County and 14 percent of Asians in Nebraska. Based on American Community Survey 2005-09, Sample Estimates.

Lo's election, his election in a state (and county) with relatively few Hmong may be the exception rather than the rule.

The available evidence suggests that electoral participation also varies across local contexts, specifically counties.⁵³³ Figure 8-5 shows the distribution of Hmong American political campaigns (not necessarily candidates) across all U.S. counties in which at least one elected office has been attempted. Since 1991, Hmong Americans have campaigned for elected offices in 12 U.S. counties. Of these counties, ten have produced at least one Hmong elected official.

[Figure 8-7 about here]

Figure 8-5 also shows Hmong as a percentage of the Asian American population in each county (hereinafter, relative Hmong concentration). The data suggest that Hmong campaigns for elected office have tended to occur in counties where there are significant relative Hmong concentrations. For instance, the Hmong American population in Ramsey (34,400 Hmong), Eau Claire (2,200 Hmong), and Marathon (5,600 Hmong) county comprised 59, 67, and 80 percent of the Asian American population in these counties, respectively.⁵³⁴ Ramsey County alone has seen 20 campaigns for elected office. The other two counties have each seen seven Hmong American campaigns for elected office. Five other counties—Dane and La Crosse counties of Wisconsin, and Fresno, Merced, and Sacramento counties of California—have each turned out two campaigns for elected office. The relative Hmong concentration in these five counties ranges from 13 percent (Sacramento) to 65 percent (La Crosse). Douglas County of Nebraska

⁵³³ County populations are used here instead of local district populations because of the lack of disaggregated nationally representative data at the latter level. Second, looking only at the Hmong populations in local districts would ignore their presence in the larger county. By local district, I am referring to districts within the county (city council district) instead of state assembly districts which could span multiple counties.

⁵³⁴ Source: American Community Survey, 2005-2009 PUMS. The combined Asian American population in Ramsey, Eau Claire, and Marathon county make up 11.5, 3.3, and 5.2 percent of each county's general population respectively.

has seen two Hmong campaigns for elected office (by the same candidate), even though its relative Hmong population is merely one percent; however, the election of one and only one Hmong to Omaha's City Council in Douglas County is probably an outlier. For, as a whole, it is clear that three quarters (9 of 12) of the counties with any history of Hmong political candidacy have at least a 35 percent relative Hmong concentration.

Does having a significant relative ethnic concentration necessarily mean that a county will produce candidates for political office? No. In fact, there are many other U.S. counties with relative Hmong concentrations very similar to the counties shown in figure 8-5 that have never had any history of Hmong political candidacy. For example, four other counties of Wisconsin, which are fairly similar to Ramsey County in terms of relative Hmong population size, have never produced any Hmong political candidates. In Brown County, Hmong make up 59 percent of Asian Americans; in Winnebago County, this figure is 59 percent; in Portage County, 63 percent, and in Chippewa County, 57 percent. This, of course, does not take away the point made earlier that an ethnic community's relative population size appears to be important for its ability to turn out political candidates and possibly win elections. Rather it suggests that there are other factors besides population size that could affect political candidate emergence and ethnic electoral participation. How population size facilitates candidate emergence, electoral participation, or electoral outcomes remains to be explained.

Three Cases of Electoral Participation

What I am interested in explaining is how Hmong American communities have been able to obtain descriptive representation in the state and local contexts that they have. Let us begin with the individual factors before considering the group-level and contextual factors.

Choua Lee is the first Hmong American to have won elected office in the U.S. Born in Laos in 1968, Lee came to the United States in 1976 at the age of eight (Lien 2001:102). At the time of her election to the Board of Education of the St. Paul Public Schools, Lee was 23 years old and had been naturalized for about four years.⁵³⁵ In some ways Lee's background is similar to that of many Hmong American office holders. Given Hmong's recency in the U.S., it is perhaps not too surprising that all of the 25 Hmong elected officials were foreign born: 23 were born in Laos and two were born in Thailand. Their average year of arrival to the U.S. was 1977 (range: 1972 to 1984). The group's average age at arrival was 13 years old (range: one to 25 years old); about half of the 25 elected officials are first generation while the other half are 1.5 generation.⁵³⁶ Their average age at the time of election was 35 years old (range: 23 to 48 years old); on average, Hmong office holders have resided in the U.S. an average of 22 years by the time they were elected (range: 14 to 31 years). Most have obtained at least a bachelor's degree and several have obtained graduate or advanced degrees (MA, JD, EdD.). The group's occupations varied but included a former police deputy, college and graduate students, teachers, business owners, several staff of community organizations, and attorneys.

Besides length of residency in the U.S., formal education, and occupation, two other aspects of individuals' experiences seem especially relevant to their political socialization. These are membership in non-profit organizations and prior contacts with government officials or their affiliates. Several of the Hmong public officials were pioneers in founding or leading the formal community organizations which provided important social and educational services to Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugee communities. For example, Choua Lee once served

⁵³⁵ The year of naturalization could only be obtained for a few of the candidates. According to one media's account, Lee was naturalized in 1987. See Diane Bartz, "23-Year-Old Woman First Hmong to Win Political Office in the U.S.," *Agence France Presse*, November 9, 1991.

⁵³⁶ The 1.5 generation are those children who arrived in the U.S. by age 12. The first generation are those who arrived at age 12 or above.

as the executive director of the Women's Association of Hmong & Lao (WAHL). Founded in 1979, WAHL operated until 2006, making it one of the longest lasting formal organizations in the Hmong Minnesotan community (C.Y. Vang 2008:34). In 1980, the late Lormong Lo, former city council member of Omaha, founded the Lao-Hmong Association of Nebraska, which provided refugee services.⁵³⁷ The late Joe Bee Xiong, a former school board member of the Eau Claire School District, was an executive director of the Eau Claire Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (established in 1982). Thai Vue, a former school board member of the La Crosse School District, was an executive director of the La Crosse Area Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (established in 1982); Tong W. Ly, a former supervisor of the La Crosse County Board, was on the board of directors of the same organization.⁵³⁸

Given that many Hmong political candidates and their families were among the first wave of generally more educated Hmong refugees to arrive in the United States, their work in establishing or leading community-based organizations is perhaps not surprising. Hmong political candidates' educational and occupational backgrounds make them part of an emergent middle class within Hmong American society. However, what makes them members of a "social class" is not simply their similar backgrounds but also the fact that they are embedded in similar social networks and organizations. For instance, the late Lormong Lo worked as the executive director of the Hmong National Development, Inc. (HND), an organization that former Fresno School Board member Tony Vang co-founded in 1990. Blong Xiong was a deputy director of

⁵³⁷ Omaha World-Herald, "Former Councilman Lo Dies."

⁵³⁸ Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations, Inc., Brochure from the 2008 Wisconsin Hmong Annual Conference. Retrieved March 12, 2010 from: <http://www.wucmaa.org/pdf/AnnualConferenceBrochure.pdf>

the Fresno Center for New Americans (FCNA) before he was elected to the Fresno City Council; but FCNA was founded by Tony Vang in 1991.⁵³⁹

Several Hmong elected officials have worked in the public sector prior to their election. For instance, prior to his election as a member of school board, city council, and county board supervisor in Wisconsin, Ya Myyoufu Yang had worked as a police deputy for over 10 years in Akron, Ohio. Three years prior to Lormong Lo's appointment to the Omaha City Council in 1994, he "worked as an intern in the Mayor's business development office and in 1991, joined the Omaha Planning Department in the Housing Rehabilitation Division."⁵⁴⁰ However, Choua Lee was not working in the public sector at the time of her election. But how Choua Lee came to win election illustrates the importance of contexts in opening up opportunities for political participation. Next, I consider how the contexts of three cities—St. Paul, Fresno, and Wausau—may differently impact the emergence of Hmong candidates and their election into office.

St. Paul, Minnesota (Case Study)

Choua Lee's election to the St. Paul Board of Education illustrates the importance of ethnic social networks and political party mobilization in electoral politics. According to a media account, it was during a district convention that an Assistant Post Master in the Minnesota House of Representative, who happened to also be Hmong, recommended Choua Lee based on "her work in the schools" and "asked her to consider running for the school board."⁵⁴¹ The assistant post master was the late Soliving (Song) Kong, who was a neighbor of former Minnesota State Representative Steve Trimble; years earlier (1986), Representative Trimble⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ California Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus. "Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Month Celebrated at State Capitol - Prominent APIs Receive API Heritage Awards." May 9, 2005, Sacramento, California.

⁵⁴⁰ City of Omaha, Legislative Chamber, Resolution to recognize and honor former Omaha City Councilmember Lormong Lo, August 2, 2011.

⁵⁴¹ James Walsh, "Hmong Woman Wins Respect - and Seat on School Board," *Star Tribune*, November 7, 1991.

⁵⁴² In 2012, former Representative Trimble also endorsed Fong Hawj in his campaign for MN State Senator.

had “recommended him for work [as post master] at the State Capitol.”⁵⁴³ Kong’s recommendation opened the way for Lee to be recruited by the Democratic Farmer Labor Party; “[a] week later, Lee met [Pat] Lindgren for the first time over lunch.”⁵⁴⁴ Pat Lindgren, a resident of St. Paul and who the media described as a “longtime DFL activist” became Lee’s campaign manager. In fact, Lindgren had also managed the campaigns of several democratic candidates including Bill Wilson, an African American who served in the St. Paul City Council from 1980-1993, Andy Dawkins (MN Representative 1986 to 2002), Howard Orenstein (MN Representative 1987-1996) and Sandy Pappas (MN Representative 1985 to 1991 and MN Senator 1991 to Present).⁵⁴⁵ Lindgren helped Lee win endorsement from the DFL Party:

Ten days before the city DFL convention, Lindgren gave Lee a list of 500 delegates to call. [S]he was endorsed [by the DFL Party] on the first ballot. She won other endorsements, and people flocked to help her learn the ropes of campaigning. After that, she said, she campaigned expecting to win.⁵⁴⁶

Lee’s endorsement by the DFL Party, in turn, opened the way for “support by women, labor groups and teachers.”⁵⁴⁷ According to the media, eventually Lee “pulled in Asian voters and built a crucial coalition among other minority groups. But her stunning success is primarily due to longtime party activists eager [sic] for someone to represent the city’s large Asian population on the school board.”⁵⁴⁸ Given that members of the St. Paul Board of Education are elected at-large, Lee and her supporters’ ability to mobilize a coalition of supporters was probably crucial for the success of her campaign.

Lee’s case illustrates the importance of having ties to co-ethnic government ‘insiders’ (e.g., Soliving Kong) who are alert to political opportunities and willing to recommend qualified

⁵⁴³ Allie Shah, "Soliving Kao Kong, 55, Hmong Clan Leader," *Star Tribune*, March 7, 2011.

⁵⁴⁴ James Walsh, "Hmong Woman Wins Respect - and Seat on School Board," *ibid.* November 7, 1991.

⁵⁴⁵ In 1997, Lindgren ran unsuccessfully for the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners.

⁵⁴⁶ *Star Tribune*, "Hmong Woman Wins Respect - and Seat on School Board."

⁵⁴⁷ *Agence France Presse*, "Hmong Woman to Be Sworn in to St. Paul School Board," *Agence France Presse*, January 7, 1992.

⁵⁴⁸ *Star Tribune*, "Hmong Woman Wins Respect - and Seat on School Board."

ethnic candidates to make use of those opportunities. It also helps if the ethnic candidate already has some degree of credibility within the community through her work experience. Secondly, Lee's case indicates that professional support from experienced political party activists (Pat Lindgren) is crucial to a candidate's likelihood of success. Experienced political party activists can help bring the newly politically initiated candidate up to speed on the intricacies of the political process and the concrete methods for navigating the political process. Third, in the case of partisan elections, winning the endorsement of the most established political party (in St. Paul, this is the DFL Party) can increase a candidate's sense of political efficacy and more importantly, help her garner support from the party's existing members and/or network of supporters. But by focusing on the outcome of election campaigns, we beg the question, what conditions help give rise to Hmong political candidates in the first place?⁵⁴⁹

That the first Hmong American office holder was elected in St. Paul, Minnesota rather than some other state is probably no accident. In St. Paul, a network of politically conscious Hmong American professionals emerged in the mid-1980s and in 1990, some founded the Hmong American Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Caucus.⁵⁵⁰ This means that at least one year before Choua Lee was elected, segments of the Hmong professional class already had cultivated relationships with the DFL Party in St. Paul. Moreover, as we noted in chapter 5, two of Hmong Americans' earliest state allies were U.S. Representative Bruce Vento (D-MN) and U.S. Senator Rudolph Boschwitz (R-MN), who, in April and May 1990, introduced the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act of 1990 in both houses of the U.S. Congress. This context may help explain the willingness of DFL party to endorse Lee's campaign.

⁵⁴⁹ The same conditions that give rise to Hmong political candidates could also help Hmong candidates help an election: absolute population size, which means a potentially larger electorate, more resources (contributions, etc.), political efficacy, political visibility (important in order to claim the need for descriptive representation), etc.

⁵⁵⁰ Lee Pao Xiong and Neal Thao co-founded the first Hmong American DFL Caucus in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1990. The Caucus is no longer operating. L. P. Xiong, personal communication, April 24, 2012.

Indeed, in St. Paul, an elaborate social network consisting of Hmong and non-Hmong political actors, mostly of the DFL Party, has developed since the 1990s (See Diagram in Appendix D). It was out of existing networks that new political candidates emerged and have sometimes won elective and appointed public offices. For example, in 1995, the Hmong DFL Caucus endorsed Neal Thao during his campaign for the St. Paul Public Schools' Board of Education after Choua Lee stepped down.⁵⁵¹ Thao, a co-founder of the Hmong American DFL Caucus, eventually won election into the school board and served continuously until 2003. In 1997, Lee Pao Xiong, also co-founder of the Hmong American DFL Caucus, was appointed by former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura to the Minnesota Metropolitan Council, where he served from 1997-2003. In January 2002, Mee Moua, also affiliated with the DFL Party, became the first state senator of Hmong descent in the U.S. From 2002 to 2011, Moua represented District 67 (St. Paul), which is home to about one-fourth of all the Hmong in Minnesota.⁵⁵² During Minnesota's August 2010 primary election, four Hmong candidates, Cha Yang, Chai Lee, Fong Hawj, and Vang Lor, competed against five other candidates for the DFL endorsement toward the position of Minnesota State Senator of District 67.

The elaborate, largely Democratic social network that Hmong Americans have been able to develop in St. Paul might give the impression that Hmong have ready access to the political arena or at least the established political party (DFL). However, such is not the case. Trying to win the endorsement of one's favored political party, like trying to win an election, requires collective mobilization but there is no guarantee of success. The competition among or between

⁵⁵¹ For existence of Hmong American DFL Caucus, see: State of Minnesota, Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board Minutes of March 19, 1999. Retrieved May 5, 2010 from: <http://www.cfboard.state.mn.us/bdinfo/minutes/r99-03-19.html>. See also Hmong Times, "Fong Hawj Is Seeking Dfl Endorsement at the Senate District Convention," *Hmong Times Online*, April 24, 2012. See: Fong Lee, "Neal Thao to Run for St. Paul Public School Board Seat," *Asian Pages*, April 14, 1995.

⁵⁵² Perspectives, "Mee Moua ('97) Heads Asian American Justice Center." *Perspectives*, University of Minnesota, Spring 2012. Retrieved April 1, 2012 from: <http://www.law.umn.edu/eperspectives/spring2012/alumni/mee-moua-heads-asian-american-justice-center.html>

candidates within a political party can be just as tough as the competition between candidates of different political parties. This is the case especially when long-standing incumbents of one's political party and their supporters do not want to share political power. When Pakou Hang was asked during her 2007 campaign for St. Paul City Council to describe the "biggest hurdle so far" in her campaign, Hang states,

[I]t's working with people in the same party who hold the power but are so obviously opposed to us. I'm not only talking about the incumbent [Dan Bostrom], but all of his supporters as well, including the Ward Chair. And no, it's not about race, it's more about trying to keep the power within their circle of friends.⁵⁵³

Like political systems, local and state political parties also practice and maintain levels of social closure. As an important element of the political context, political parties, through their selection of candidates to endorse or support at conventions, serve as crucial filters between mobilization and electoral outcome. That is, a candidate's level of access to a political party can strongly affect that candidate's level of access to the political system.

Fresno, California (Case Study)

If the St. Paul case illustrates the importance of social networks, the Fresno case suggests the importance of a closely related factor: multi-ethnic coalitions. In November 2002, Tony Vang, a college professor, ran for and won a seat in the Fresno Unified School District Board of Education. Vang became the first Hmong to hold elected office in Fresno.⁵⁵⁴ Vang ran as part of a larger coalition called the "4 Voices for Children Reform Team" (herein, 4 Voices). The other three candidates on the 4 Voices platform included Luisa Medina (Latina, won), Joseph Penbera (lost), and Richard Johanson (won). Notably, the 4 Voices won the endorsements of key

⁵⁵³ Wameng Moua and Andrea Sachs, "Victorious Pakou Hang Prepares for Long Road Ahead," *Hmong Today*, June 1, 2007.

⁵⁵⁴ In 2007, Vang was elected president of the School Board Pablo Lopez, "Tony Vang to Lead FUSD Board: New President Is First Hmong Elected to the Position.," *Fresno Bee*, December 13, 2007.

federal, state and local allies.⁵⁵⁵ These included endorsements from at least two political actors of Hispanic/Latino descent: then-California State Senator Jim Costa and then-Fresno County Board Supervisor Juan Arambula.⁵⁵⁶ Although not all four on the coalition won, Vang won 62.8 percent (34,024 votes) of the total votes compared to his opponent's 31.7 percent (20,089 votes).⁵⁵⁷ Vang's colleague Luisa Medina won 42 percent of the votes against her opponent's 37 percent. Given Fresno's large Latino population, it is likely that Vang benefited from his association with Medina, who was the Executive Director of *Centro La Familia*, a non-profit organization in Fresno.

Coalition building did not end with Tony Vang's campaign. In 2006, when Blong Xiong ran for the Fresno City Council, he enlisted Mark Scozzari as his campaign manager. Scozzari, a well-known political consultant in Fresno, had worked on several candidates' campaigns including, recently, that of former Fresno City Council member Mike Dages during Dages' 2006 unsuccessful run for mayor of Fresno.⁵⁵⁸ Xiong and his supporters actively sought the support of

⁵⁵⁵ Source: League of Women Voters of California. "School Contests for Fresno County, CA." November 5, 2002 Election. Retrieved November 5, 2010 from <http://www.smartvoter.org/2002/11/05/ca/fr/school.html>

⁵⁵⁶ Other supporters of the 4 Voices Team included U.S. Representatives George Radanovich and Cal Dooley; California State Senator Jim Costa; Fresno Mayor Alan Autry; Fresno County Board Supervisor Juan Arambula; Fresno County School Superintendent Pete Mehas; the Fresno Deputy Sheriffs Association; the Fresno Chamber of Commerce; and other individuals and organizations. League of Women Voters of California. "Tony Vang: Candidate for Board Member; Fresno Unified School District; Trustee Area 4." November 5, 2002 Election. Retrieved November 5, 2010 from: http://www.smartvoter.org/2002/11/05/ca/fr/vote/vang_t/

⁵⁵⁷ Tony Vang ran against Raymond C. Baker for the Trustee Area 4 Board Member position. Source: League of Women Voters of California. "Board Member; Fresno Unified School District; Trustee Area 4 Voter Information." November 5, 2002 Election. Retrieved November 5, 2010 from: <http://www.smartvoter.org/2002/11/05/ca/fr/race/6215/>

⁵⁵⁸ According to the Hmong-run magazine, *Txhawb*, Xiong's campaign manager during his run for Fresno City Council was "Mark Scozzar." The author may have meant to refer to Mark Scozzari, a well-known political consultant in Fresno, who has worked on several campaigns including that of former Fresno City Council member Mike Dages during Dages' 2006 unsuccessful run for Fresno mayor. See Lar Yang, "Blong Xiong Makes California History," *Txhawb - California Asian Directory*, November 25, 2007. ; George Hostetter, "City Skybox Goes to Consultant, Casino," *Fresno Bee*, September 7, 2009.

Latinos in Fresno.⁵⁵⁹ Xiong's multi-ethnic coalition building eventually paid off and he won; as of this writing, he still serves on the Fresno City Council.

To form effective coalitions with members of the public and influential actors who could advance their campaigns, political candidates must engage in many of the same activities in which social movement actors also engage. That is, they must mobilize consensus as well as collective action in order to try to win political office. To mobilize support from a diverse community, ethnic political candidates not only actively construct and seek legitimacy for social problems (i.e., running a particular political platform, proposing solutions to the defined problems, etc.), but they also engage in complicated, situational identity politics. Both of these aspects of Hmong American political campaigns remain understudied but here I want to highlight the second aspect. I contend that Hmong Americans' situational identity politics entails a great deal more than simply doing what the mass media and other writers commonly describe them as doing: e.g., managing "two cultures" or the Hmong v. American cultures (Yoshikawa 2006; Doherty 2007).

Ethnic and racial identity politics matters as part of collective consensus building in electoral politics (during and after campaigns). The actions of Hmong American political candidates show that many of them seem well aware of this. As part of making themselves suitable candidates for elected office, candidates play situational identity politics—that is, frame and manage collective identities across multiple social fields. Several Hmong American candidates, in their attempt to influence a broader constituency, publicly emphasized that they are candidates of "color" or "immigrant" candidates rather than *Hmong* candidates. For example, during his campaign for Fresno City Council, Blong Xiong and his campaign workers

⁵⁵⁹ Eduardo Stanley, "Latinos Help Elect First Hmong City Council Member in California," *New America Media*, November 28, 2006.

consistently emphasized his *immigrant* background. Oralia Maceda, who helped Xiong mobilize Latinos in Fresno to vote reportedly stated, “We told people he was *an immigrant, like us*, and that he understood our situation. Xiong is a member of *an ethnic minority* and now is the time to unite and support him” (emphasis added).⁵⁶⁰ Cognizant of the predominantly Latino makeup of Fresno’s District One, Xiong recalled how he framed his experiences:

It’s not like my name was Tom, Dick, or Harry...or anything else that might’ve sounded like something familiar. But, I did my utmost to communicate to many of the good people of District One that we shared something more important than a familiar name...many, many of us share the emigrant experience (L. Yang 2007).

Similarly, Minnesota Senator Mee Moua’s reflection on her political identity shows that she recognized the importance of broadening the boundaries of one’s identities: “being Hmong, being Hmong-American, or being Asian-American is not enough; you have to be a person of color, and on top of that you have to be a person of color who happens to be a woman” (Yoshikawa 2006:9).

However, race/ethnicity never really disappears from ethnic candidates’ political campaigns, especially because, in many districts, the votes from and interests of racial minorities matter. To win votes, ethnic candidates find ways to address racial minority concerns and interests without using racially conspicuous language. For instance, even while some candidates deliberately tried to minimize ethnic attachments, downplay ethnic/racial differences and emphasize individual merits over group characteristics, they also tried to win racial minority support by expressing general concern, if not direct support for certain historically racialized issues such as U.S. immigration. As an example, when Blong Xiong was asked during his 2006 campaign for Fresno City Council about the nationwide immigrant marches that occurred in April 2006, Xiong was quoted as saying that “the voice of immigrants should be heard” and that

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

he “will keep the dialogue open [with the local immigrant community].”⁵⁶¹ Xiong’s reply is not surprising considering that he and his Latino campaign manager were actively trying to mobilize Latino support in Fresno County where Hispanics/Latino residents comprise about 50 percent of the county’s 930,500 residents.⁵⁶²

Wausau, Wisconsin (Case Study)

Between 1990 and 2012, the city of Wausau has seen more Hmong American campaigns for elected offices than any other city in Wisconsin. Specifically, nine campaigns have been waged by Hmong candidates in Wausau. Of these nine campaigns, seven were waged by the same person: Ya Myyoufu Yang. Yang’s persistence eventually paid off. Between 1993 and 2000, he won three of these seven campaigns (School Board, City Council, and County Board Supervisor). But the Wausau case is not just about the importance of persistence. It demonstrates the challenges and consequences that publicly elected officials face as they try to make concrete institutional changes.

The controversy over school busing in Wausau, Wisconsin in late 1993 illustrates the vulnerabilities that public officials including ethnic minority officials encountered as they tried to take collective action to alleviate a complex social problem (school segregation), which is intertwined with other equally complex social issues such as immigration, poverty, residential segregation and racial tensions. It also illustrates how long-time white residents responded to a growing Asian American community’s attempt to seek social change through institutional channels. According to the media, during the 1979-80 school year, there were 23 Asian American students in Wausau, Wisconsin.⁵⁶³ Hmong refugee families, some of whom were

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Data source: American Community Survey, 2005-2009 Sample Estimates.

⁵⁶³ Robert Imrie, "Forced School Busing Creates Political Turmoil - Again," *Associated Press*, December 12, 1993c.

sponsored by the local Lutheran and Catholic churches, had barely started to settle in Wausau.⁵⁶⁴ But “by the end of the [1992-93] school year, Southeast-Asians accounted for about a tenth [3,600] of the Wausau [school] district’s residents, about 16 percent [1,400] of its students [8,800], and nearly one in four of its entering kindergartners.”⁵⁶⁵ However, Southeast Asians were concentrated in a few low-income neighborhoods and their children were concentrated in four elementary schools, one of which had over 60 percent minority enrollment.⁵⁶⁶

In June of 1993, with support from most local teachers and Asian American parents, the School Board of Wausau School District voted 6-3 to implement a school “partnering” program.⁵⁶⁷ This program was intended to integrate minority students, mostly of Hmong and low-income background with more affluent white students in order to “boost student achievement and unite a community that appeared to be becoming racially polarized.”⁵⁶⁸ The plan took affect that fall and involved the busing (about 2 miles far) and classroom intermixing of 600 white and minority students in six elementary schools: three schools located in low-income, ethnically concentrated neighborhoods were partnered with three other schools in higher income neighborhoods with few non-white minority students.⁵⁶⁹

The implementation of this busing decision, however, led to fierce opposition from local residents and parents who “argued that the plan created unwanted busing, wrongly dismantled neighborhood schools and disrupted families.”⁵⁷⁰ Some families opposed to the busing program also decided to enroll their children in private schools. This controversy over “partner-” versus

⁵⁶⁴ Cynthia Mayer, "Two Peoples Apart Inviting Hmong Refugees to Live in Homogeneous Wausau, Wis., Was a Well-Meant Idea. But It Hasn't Worked out So Well.," *The Philidelphia Inquirer*, September 14, 1994.

⁵⁶⁵ Peter Schmidt, "Bold Busing Plan Leads to Deep Divides in Wausau," *Education Week*, December 15, 1993. ; Robert Imrie, "Fallout Is Heavy in Wausau Recall Election," *Associated Press*, December 16, 1993a.

⁵⁶⁶ Capital Times, "Wausau Adopts Plan to Bus Asian Students," *Capital Times*, June 15, 1993b.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Education Week, "Bold Busing Plan Leads to Deep Divides in Wausau."

⁵⁶⁹ Capital Times, "Wausau Adopts Plan to Bus Asian Students."

⁵⁷⁰ Robert Imrie, "Southeast Asian Refugees Angered by Busing Turmoil," *Associated Press*, May 10, 1994.

“neighborhood-” schools quickly gained statewide and national media attention.⁵⁷¹ But the mass media frequently focused attention on Ya M. Yang, who at that time was serving his first year as Board Member of the Wausau School District. Yang and four other school board members, including the school board president, had voted in favor of the busing program. But the perceived difference was that Yang was the first Asian American elected to an elected office in Wausau who was also supporting what opponents considered an Asian American cause. The intense controversy led to the resignation of the district superintendent, Penelope J. Kleinhans, in November 1993. Then, in December 1993, over 10,000 residents in the city of 37,000 signed petitions to implement a recall election.⁵⁷² Except for Ya Yang, who was protected by state law from the recall because he had not yet served a full year on the board, the other five board members who supported the busing plan were recalled and replaced by five newly elected board members who were anti-busing.⁵⁷³ Yang, nevertheless, received threats against “his family...as a result of his decision [to support the busing program].”⁵⁷⁴

In May 1994, the mostly newly elected school board voted 7-2 to drop the busing-integration plan, reversing to the “neighborhood schools” system.⁵⁷⁵ Ya Yang, who was one of the two board members who voted in dissent, left his office after his first year ended. In the end, what appears to some as the successful outcome of a “democratic process” (power in the hands of the majority of local residents), appears to others as the maintenance of the status quo. From the standpoint of Richard Allen, who was among the school board members ousted during the recall election, “While it would be grossly unfair to state racism was the sole issue or major

⁵⁷¹ Rogers Worthington, "School Desegregation Efforts Divide Town," *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1993.

⁵⁷² Education Week, "Bold Busing Plan Leads to Deep Divides in Wausau." According to the *Capital Times*, “Peter Beltz, president of Families Approve Neighborhood Schools... coordinated the recall drive.” See: *Capital Times*, "School Busing Spurs Wausau Recall Effort," *Capital Times*, December 13, 1993a.

⁵⁷³ Robert Imrie, "School Board Members Who Approved Busing Plan Ousted," *Associated Press*, December 14, 1993b.

⁵⁷⁴ Education Week, "Bold Busing Plan Leads to Deep Divides in Wausau."

⁵⁷⁵ *Associated Press*, "Southeast Asian Refugees Angered by Busing Turmoil."

issue, it would be extremely naive not to recognize that race was a significant issue.”⁵⁷⁶

According to one media account, Ya Yang expressed a similar view:

The biggest message from the election seems to be that Wausau parents are unwilling to change to reflect a changing community, Yang said. “I would not say racism played a big part of it, but probably played a certain part of it,” he said.⁵⁷⁷

This case illustrates that despite support for busing/integration from former state officials and most local teachers, local residents were able to reverse local policies through counter-mobilization.⁵⁷⁸ White residents’ sheer numbers and history in the local community proved to be a powerful force against significant changes to long-standing practices in local social institutions. As I mentioned at the outset, this case illustrates that public officials are vulnerable to organized challenges; several school board members were voted out as a result of decisions that the majority of voters deemed socially problematic. However, this local controversy over school desegregation did not permanently preclude ethnic minorities from running for or winning local elected offices. Six years after leaving his school board office, in 2000, Ya Yang ran for and was elected into two elected offices in Wausau: City Council Member of Wausau (in office 2000-04) and Marathon County Board of Supervisors (2000-2006). Not only did Yang hold these offices concurrently for several years but he ran, albeit unsuccessfully, for Mayor of Wausau twice (2002 and 2004).⁵⁷⁹ But since Yang’s departure from the Wausau School Board, no other Asian

⁵⁷⁶ Robert Imrie, "Wausau Voters Reject Busing Plan," *Capital Times*, December 15, 1993d.

⁵⁷⁷ Associated Press, "Fallout Is Heavy in Wausau Recall Election."

⁵⁷⁸ For instance, former state school superintendent Herbert Grover “likened critics of the [integration plan] to a group with white supremacist views.” Additionally, “a survey of teachers before [the] recall election showed [that] 84 percent supported the restructuring plan the School Board passed in June to improve integration.” See *Capital Times*, "School Busing Spurs Wausau Recall Effort."; *Capital Times*, "Teachers' Advice Is Rejected," *Capital Times*, December 17, 1993c.

⁵⁷⁹ Y. M. Yang, personal communication, April 23, 2012.

American has been on the board even though Asian Americans make up 8.6 percent (Hmong Americans alone make up 8 percent) of the district's 53,800 residents.⁵⁸⁰

Similarities across Cases: Mobilizing Ethnic Capital

What do all three cases have in common? I suggest that in all three cases, the mobilization of ethnic capital is a key ingredient to campaign success. Ethnic population size matters; but for population to be an effective resource to ethnic political candidates, people must be mobilized during crucial political opportunities. There are at least three main ways through which co-ethnic members participate in the campaigns of ethnic candidates. First, even though co-ethnics usually make up a small proportion of the electorate, they often serve as a major source of financial support. Second, many Hmong American candidates rely on extended families and co-ethnic members to serve as volunteers, staff, advisers and in some cases, managers of their campaigns.

One indicator of Hmong Americans' political mobilization is the extent of their contributions to political campaigns, political parties and bills or measures. Although the data on Hmong's contributions to political parties and bills are harder to come by, data on their contributions to political candidates are more accessible. The available evidence shows that, over the years, many Hmong individuals and organizations have given money in support of a number of candidates at the local, state and federal levels. For instance, during former Wisconsin Attorney General, James "Jim" Doyle's campaign for Governor Wisconsin in 2002, close to 400 identifiable Hmong Americans from multiple states but especially Wisconsin and

⁵⁸⁰ Based on American Community Survey 2009 Sample Estimates. Racial composition of Wausau School District residents: Whites comprise 88.8 percent, Asians 8.6 percent, Hispanics 1 percent, blacks 0.6 percent, Native Americans 0.6 percent, and multi-racial 1.1 percent. The foreign-born population make up 3,200 or 5.9 percent of all residents; of this number, about 1,500 or 47 percent are naturalized U.S. citizens.

North Carolina contributed over \$22,000 to Doyle's campaign (see Table 8-2).⁵⁸¹ Similarly, Hmong Americans across California contributed to Steve Samuelian's 2002 campaign for State Assembly. More recently, many Hmong community members have contributed to Dave Jones' campaigns for State Assembly in 2004, and his re-elections in 2006 and 2008.⁵⁸² Both Doyle and Jones are democrats but Samuelian is a republican. Although these amounts may seem miniscule in the larger scheme of things, they rival the contributions that Hmong give to their co-ethnic candidates for elected office and in some cases, even surpass those amounts.

[Table 8-7 about here]

Do Hmong Americans' contributions vary along political lines or reveal any clear political preference? At present, there is insufficient evidence to address this question. The limited evidence at hand suggests that, on the ground, things are more complex than clear-cut and more dynamic than stable. We can find the same Hmong individuals or set of related individuals giving money to candidates of different political parties during the same year or in different years. We can also find Hmong individuals contributing money to state measures that would seem to contradict their decision to also contribute to political candidates who are opposed to those same measures. For example, some Hmong persons who contributed money to the controversial California Proposition 8, which "eliminates [the] right of same-sex couples to marry,"⁵⁸³ also contributed to the campaigns of democratic candidates who at one point or another publicly expressed opposition to that bill.

Furthermore, the available evidence suggests that the ethnic identity of a candidate may matter more for his/her ability to win ethnic contributions than his/her political affiliation which

⁵⁸¹ Using the data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics, I identified Hmong contributors by using surnames and first names as proxies for ethnic background.

⁵⁸² Hmong Americans also contributed toward Dave Jones' 2010 run for California's Insurance Commissioner.

⁵⁸³ California General Election, "Official Voter Information Guide," November 4, 2008.

is more subject to change and varied interpretation than his/her ethnicity. Because detailed information on campaign contributions is available for only a handful of Hmong American candidates' campaigns, it is not possible to make any generalization about the variation between the amount of contributions and certain variables such as gender, type of office, or state of location. The only clear pattern is that all Hmong American candidates rely on some of their co-ethnics, including extended families, for support, especially during election campaigns. Support takes the form of voluntary services (e.g., managing phone banks, interacting with residents door to door, putting up signs, fund raising, etc.); formal assistance (campaign manager, treasurer, adviser, etc.); and monetary and material contributions. As table 8-7 shows, co-ethnic contributions make up a significant portion (close to one-half and as high as 92 percent) of some Hmong candidates' campaign funds. Most contributions come from co-ethnics within the same state but it is common for funds to also come from out of state.

What is most revealing about Hmong Americans' campaign contributions is that, in recent years, ethnic candidates have been able to mobilize support from a broad base of co-ethnic communities. The data on the late-Joe Bee Xiong's campaign for Wisconsin's State Assembly and Noah Lor's campaign for re-election to Merced's City Council suggest two remarkable social phenomena. During Joe Bee Xiong's 2004 campaign for a seat in the Wisconsin State Assembly (District 68), he and his campaign team were able to win monetary contributions from over 330 Hmong persons whose backgrounds represent at least 14 major Hmong clans, 11 states, and at least 107 distinct cities.⁵⁸⁴ Similarly, in 2011, Noah Lor and his campaign team were able

⁵⁸⁴ Joe Bee Xiong received contributions from Hmong members of the Xiong, Vang, Yang, Lee/Ly, Vue, Lor, Thao, Moua, Song, Kue, Her, Hang, Chang, and Kong clans. The amount of the contributions follow approximately this order, with members of the Xiong clan contributing about \$22,000 or 61 percent of all co-ethnic donations. Hmong contributors reside in 11 states: Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin.

to win contributions from over 120 Hmong persons whose backgrounds represent at least 12 Hmong clans, two states (CA and NC), and 24 cities.

These are remarkable achievements in at least three ways. First, it indicates the creative skills and tremendous resource and energy that Hmong candidates and their campaign team invest in the mobilization of collective consensus and support. It is not simply the monetary contributions that candidates win; candidates also acquire legitimacy as a leader who symbolizes something more than just a representative of the constituents in a voting district. Secondly, it shows that Hmong American communities across the U.S. can become a collective force behind state-specific candidates. This is not unlike Hmong Americans' organized protests, where Hmong Americans try to amplify their voices and make their demands more visible by mobilizing co-ethnic communities in several U.S. states all at once.

Third, it suggests that Hmong Americans are willing to invest tangible resources to support an emerging leader's work, even if his or her official jurisdiction does not include them. No doubt, a candidate and his team's existing ethnic social networks and their access to efficient communication channels make it possible to reach a great number of people over a relatively short period of time. However, I want to suggest that it is primarily the increasing interconnectedness and political maturity (i.e., increased political awareness, sense of political efficacy and desire for political incorporation) of Hmong American communities that make most of these things possible. Hmong Americans' election campaigns and elections into elected offices have the potential to reinforce this interconnectedness and further develop the co-ethnic community's sense of political efficacy.

The importance of campaign volunteers should not be overlooked because they carry out some of the most important campaign duties: going door-to-door to greet and inform residents

about candidates and issues, organizing fundraising events, putting up signs, and encouraging residents to vote. It is volunteers who help rally local eligible voters to attend precinct caucuses and nominate delegates. Moreover, volunteers help register eligible citizens who otherwise might not register due to language or other factors and provide transportation to voters who need it on election day. Recent campaigns show that Hmong candidates have been able to draw on their extended family or extended kinship ties to put together significant teams of co-ethnic volunteers and staff to work directly with their campaigns. According to Pakou Hang, who served as the campaign manager for Mee Moua during her 2002 campaign for Minnesota State Senator and the Deputy Political Director of the late-U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone's 2002 re-election campaign,

[Mee Moua] put together a campaign team of *young Hmong professionals, all originally from the Twin Cities*. Many held leadership positions at their jobs, sat on statewide and national boards, and were viewed as emerging community leaders themselves. Aside from the fact that nine were Moua's first cousins, it was an impressive group and a real reflection of the caliber of talent in the Hmong community (Hang 2002).

Hang's emphasis on the role of the younger generation of educated, bilingual professionals is worth noting. It is members of this segment "who were born either in Laos or in the refugee camps but grew up in the United States" who "[understand] the issues of the Hmong elders...[and possess] the vocabulary to express and respond to the unjust power dynamics they live under" (Hang 2002).

Moreover, it is through mobilizers' participation in co-ethnic candidates' campaigns that they themselves learn valuable political skills and knowledge of political processes. The development of these politically relevant skills, knowledge and values among the younger generation of Hmong Americans is essential in fostering a more politically engaged ethnic community. Some ethnic candidates are well aware of this potentially positive impact. For

instance, Chong Chang Her, during his 2000 campaign for Board of Education of Eau Claire Area School District, expects that “even if I lose this time, it will prepare the community for the next time. It will make it easier for Hmong candidates running in the future.”⁵⁸⁵ The evidence suggests that there is some truth to Her’s statement. Because of Hmong mobilizers’ interactions with local residents, political parties, government officials, and the ethnic and mass media, they are able to cultivate crucial social and political relationships. These various forms of capital, in turn, enable some among the mobilizers to organize their own campaigns for elected office. For instance, in November 2007, Pakou Hang ran for St. Paul’s City Council but lost to DFL incumbent Dan Bostrom. In 2011, Bee Kevin Xiong of St. Paul, who previously worked on the campaigns of former Eau Claire city council members Joe Bee Xiong and Saidang Xiong, ran unsuccessfully for the St. Paul City Council.

Besides having an impact on mobilizers, Hmong Americans’ political campaigns serve as important ways through which new constituents and people of disadvantaged backgrounds can participate directly or indirectly in political processes. As members of one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in contemporary American society, candidates of Hmong American background take seriously their opportunities to outreach to disadvantaged communities, seeking their support as well as participation in electoral politics. The campaign of former Minnesota State Senator Mee Moua exemplifies this. Pakou Hang describes Senator Moua’s community outreach during her campaign as follows:

In some ways, Moua’s campaign was no different from other traditional campaigns: identify your base, win the primary, expand the base, get some of your opponent’s voters, and then GOTV [get out the vote] and in the process raise money, attend events, and get the media coverage. *What made her victory unique was her base: poor people of color.* Moua was committed to reaching out to the disenfranchised and marginalized voter and even at one point stated, to the surprise and dismay of her staff, that she did not care if

⁵⁸⁵ The Associated Press, "Hmong Citizens Finding a Place on Wisconsin Ballots, Candidates Getting National Attention," *Duluth News Tribune*, January 10, 2000.

she lost, as long as she was able to bring people out to the polls. After Moua's victory, the Minnesota voter file, which stores information from 1980, boasted over 5,000 Hmong names, of which over 500 names came from the Senate District 67 special election (emphasis added) (Hang 2002).

It is this kind of active outreach and message of optimism on the efficacy of indirect political participation that can help to reinvigorate communities that have historically been excluded from political decision making.

The Definition of Crucial Political Opportunities

The data on Hmong office holders clearly show that it took decades rather than years for the Hmong American communities to produce their first political candidate.⁵⁸⁶ This suggests that a certain level of group history and presence in the local society is required before an ethnic candidate can emerge. It is not simply the size of the ethnic population that matters but also its stable presence in an area. It is during this interim period that members of the ethnic population become integrated into various local mainstream institutions (workplaces, schools, churches, etc.) even as they also form their own sets of informal and formal ethnic organizations (churches, non-profit service organizations, sports clubs, Hmong community associations, etc.) and businesses (grocery and specialty stores, ethnic media, firms, etc.). These ethnic organizations and businesses, especially if they are concentrated in minority or working-class neighborhoods, set them apart as a recognizable "ethnic community."

Over time, and assuming that the ethnic population continues to increase (net of births and deaths and in- and out-migration), an ethnic community's ethnic infrastructure can become more developed as co-ethnics in the community acquire more resources to create new, more diverse formal organizations, start up new businesses, and accumulate additional financial and

⁵⁸⁶ In Minnesota, Choua Lee was elected into public office in 1991, which represents 15 years after the first wave of Hmong families began to resettle in that state in 1976. In Wisconsin, the first Hmong to be elected was Thai Vue in 1993. In Nebraska, Lormong Lo was first elected in 1997; L. Lo was first appointed in 1994. In California, the first Hmong to be elected was Paul Lo in 2001; P. Lo was first appointed in 1999.

social capital. Or, an ethnic community could experience a racially or politically hostile environment that is neither conducive to development nor habitable for very long. The local residents and/or city government may decide to pass city ordinances that indirectly curtail further ethnic development or deflect ethnic in-migration (Light 2006). In this case, the ethnic infrastructure may never reach the minimal threshold of development and integration necessary to introduce an ethnic candidate for elected office.

But let us assume that the local environment is not hostile and that ethnic development is allowed to occur. Then the members of these new organizations and businesses, in order to secure a more permanent foothold in local life, must interact more frequently with local residents, comply with city ordinances, compete with area businesses, deal with local social problems, vote in local elections, voice grievances to the city government or local media, participate in schools, local institutions, public events and even protests. As the younger generation completes their education degrees, they may staff these ethnic organizations and businesses, work in the local primary labor market or public service sector, or move to work outside of town altogether. It is when the ethnic neighborhood life and ethnic infrastructure have reached this threshold of integration—i.e., crisscrossing interactions between ethnic residents and local residents in and across multiple local institutions—that integrated professionals or activists in the ethnic community are more likely to feel the need to and see the benefits in pursuing positions of authority and influence, including political offices. The next step for these integrated persons is to wait for or *define* some preexisting set of circumstances as the “right” period of time or the appropriate window of opportunity to present and back one or more “qualified” ethnic candidates for elected office.

But whether or not some set of circumstances is the appropriate opportunity to take action will depend on social actors' subjective interpretation or definition (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Here, a subjective definition involves social actors' perception of the relative "openness" in the political system. Rather than happening overnight, this openness, if it occurs, occurs over a period of time. It is during such period, rather than during closed periods, that short windows of opportunities could arise and become crucial for collective action. Put differently, under normal peaceful circumstances, some elements of the political context undergo gradual rather than rapid changes. It is the gradual changes in relevant political context elements (discussed below) that lay the groundwork for new social processes, and hence, social actors' ability to act on new or unexpected opportunities.

As Gamson and Meyer (1996:282) point out, social actors' ability to "recognize" political opportunities as such and to "act appropriately" on them is crucial to collective mobilization. We may contrast a subjective perception of opportunity with the "objective" conditions, or how existing people, policies and practices actually are relatively open or close to new challengers and their demands. Furthermore, given that social actors can never have complete information about all circumstances relevant to their goals, they may not be aware of or may overestimate aspects of the opportunities in a political context (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Kriesi 2004). Secondly, even when a social actor recognizes some set of circumstances as a crucial opportunity to enter the political arena (e.g., to have one or more of its members run for elected office), his/her values and beliefs may discourage or constrain him/her from mobilizing toward that opportunity (Rootes 1999). Given all of these contingencies, how political candidates and their team of campaign staff, volunteers, and key allies collectively define windows of political opportunity could determine whether a candidate runs for office. Furthermore, how these social

actors mobilize toward the political opportunities and deal with new political contingencies could determine whether a political candidate will actually win an election.

Some Hmong American public office holders have been able to take advantage of sudden or unexpected vacancies on local and state elected offices to run for and in some cases, win these vacated seats. However, their ability to win these seats was not simply because of the short window of opportunity created by the vacancy. Rather, it was because prior to these vacancies, influential political parties, state leaders and organizations were already displaying some level of support for Hmong communities and the Hmong candidates were already socially and politically integrated in the local communities enough to act on the opportunities. The fact that Hmong candidates had to compete against other political candidates presented a separate and new set of important political contingencies. But these contingencies were made more surmountable because of an existing, relatively open political climate. In other words, what makes an opportunity a *crucial* opportunity is that it occurs during a period (or within a broader context) in which it is supported by other accessible, politically relevant opportunities. It is this complex of institutionally nested opportunities, rather than any particular opportunity, that matters for collective action in general and ethnic electoral participation in particular.

What specific elements in the social and political contexts affect ethnic collective mobilization and therefore an ethnic candidate's ability to win election to elected office? Undoubtedly, multiple, complex historical and social processes are involved in the election of any person to elected office. These social processes vary across local and state contexts and more importantly, they may have very different effects on (i.e., constraints or opportunities for) different racial/ethnic persons or groups. In the case of Hmong Americans, three social

processes stand out as crucial for effective mobilization: 1) support from ethnic actors; 2) support from community organizations; and 3) support from political parties and other elected officials.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Hmong office holders share important individual-level similarities such as period of arrival, birth place, educational attainment, and bilingual ability. These individual-level factors are certainly important to candidates' ability to naturalize, their familiarity with American social norms and political processes, and their ability to mobilize support from the ethnic community. However, by themselves these factors cannot explain how it is that Hmong Americans' electoral outcomes (the number of Hmong political candidates and office holders) differ not only across states but also across local contexts within states. Although there is no clear relationship between relative Hmong concentration and the number of elected officials, I want to suggest that the development of the ethnic infrastructure—comprised of the ethnic population, its social networks and its institutional completeness—plays the most crucial role in the emergence of Hmong American political candidates. Secondly, I contend that it is the dynamic interaction between ethnic collective mobilization and institutional contexts that can determine whether or not candidates, once they emerge, actually become elected into local and state public offices.

During the past 20 years, most Hmong American candidates for elected office have openly identified with and/or sought endorsement from the Democratic Party more so than they have with the Republican Party.⁵⁸⁷ But several candidates have run as members of the Republican, Independence or Green Parties. More data about candidates' backgrounds and the history of political parties in different locations are needed before any generalization can be made about whether and how political parties influence election outcomes across contexts.

⁵⁸⁷ The only known Hmong republican to have held public office is the late-Lormong Lo of Omaha, Nebraska.

Nevertheless, it appears that in some locations and for some elected offices, receiving endorsement from a well-established political party could provide the necessary resources, labor power, and legitimacy to boost a candidate's visibility and credibility and therefore increase his/her chances of winning an election.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁸ For instance, during his 2000 campaign for Senate Representative of District 65A, Cy Thao ran as an Independence Party endorsed candidate but was unsuccessful. Two years later, in 2002, Thao ran again for the same office but as a DFL endorsed candidate; in this campaign, Thao won. His DFL endorsement was not the only factor but it was an important factor in his win.

Tables and Figures for Chapter 8

Table 8-1: Race and Hispanic Origin by Selected States, Census 1990

	Total Population	Percent non- Hispanic White	Percent Black	Percent Asian Pacific Islander	Percent American Indian	Percent Hispanic
California	29,760,021	57.2	7.4	9.6	0.8	25.8
Minnesota	4,375,099	93.7	2.2	1.8	1.1	0.5
Wisconsin	4,891,769	91.3	5.0	1.1	0.8	1.9

Notes: American Indians column includes Eskimo and Aleut; Hispanic can be of any race.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990, 100 percent count.

Table 8-2: Elected Officials of Local Governments by Race and State, 1992

	Total Local Officials¹	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Asian Pacific	Percent American Indian	Percent Hispanic²
California	15,583	95.76	2.69	1.21	0.35	4.99
Minnesota	16,111	99.56	0.12	0.01	0.31	0.33
Wisconsin	16,269	99.48	0.28	0.01	0.23	0.15

¹ Represents officials who responded to the race question, not the actual total number of officials, which are higher: CA = 18,699; MN = 18,247; WI = 17,379 local officials.

² Hispanic can be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1992 Census of Governments, Vol. 1, No. 2
Popularly Elected Officials, Tables 18 and 19.

Table 8-3: Asian Americans and Hispanics in Elected offices by Selected States during 1994/1995

	Total		State executives and legislators ¹			County and municipal officials		Judicial and law enforcement		Education and school boards	
	Asian	Hispanic	Black ²	Asian	Hispanic	Asian	Hispanic	Asian ³	Hispanic	Asian	Hispanic
California	244	796	273	51	16	34	349	79	50	80	381
Minnesota	4	3	16	0	2	3	0	0	1	1	0
Wisconsin	2	2	30	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0

¹ Includes U.S. Senators and Representatives. "State executives" include persons who served as members of state governing boards/commissions. The figure for Asians and Hispanics under this heading may not be directly comparable because in the Hispanic case only certain state governing boards were included.

² Represents the number of black elected officials as of January 1993.

³ Does not include seven retired judges.

Source: National Asian Pacific American Political Roster and Resource Guide, 1995, 6th Edition. U.S. Census Bureau, citing 1994 National Directory of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), formerly published as the National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials. Black Elected Officials: A National Roster, 1993.

Figure 8-1: Civic Organizations Per 1,000 Residents by County and Year

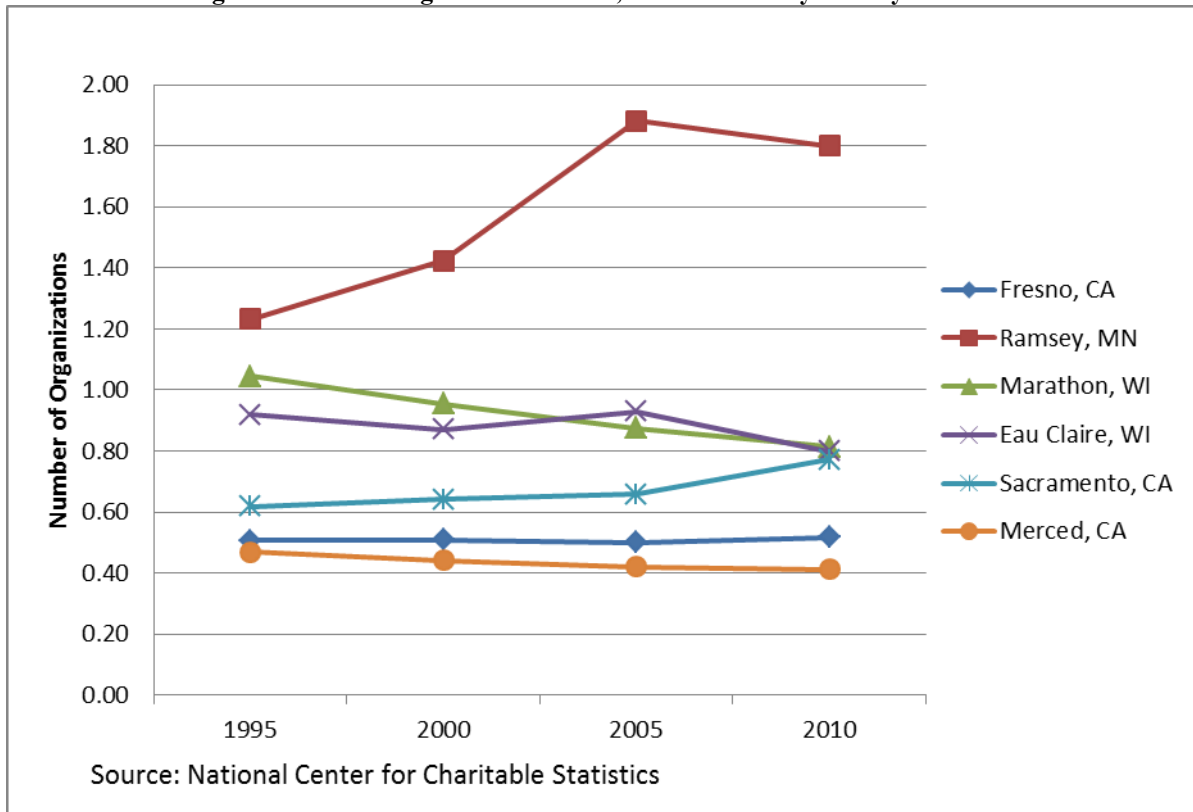


Figure 8-2: Civic Organizations' Reported Assets Per Capita by County and Year

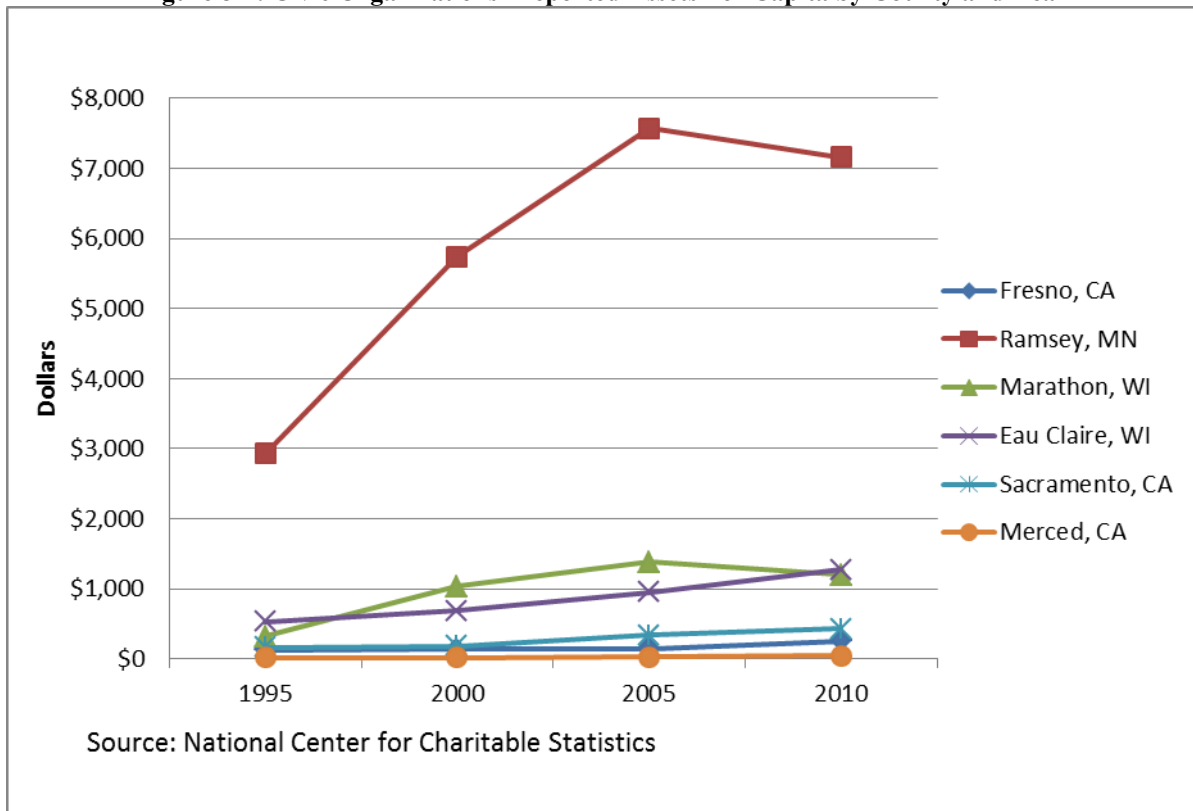


Table 8-4: Registration and Voting in the November 2008 Election among U.S. Adult Citizens and the Voter-Age Population by State and County, 2008

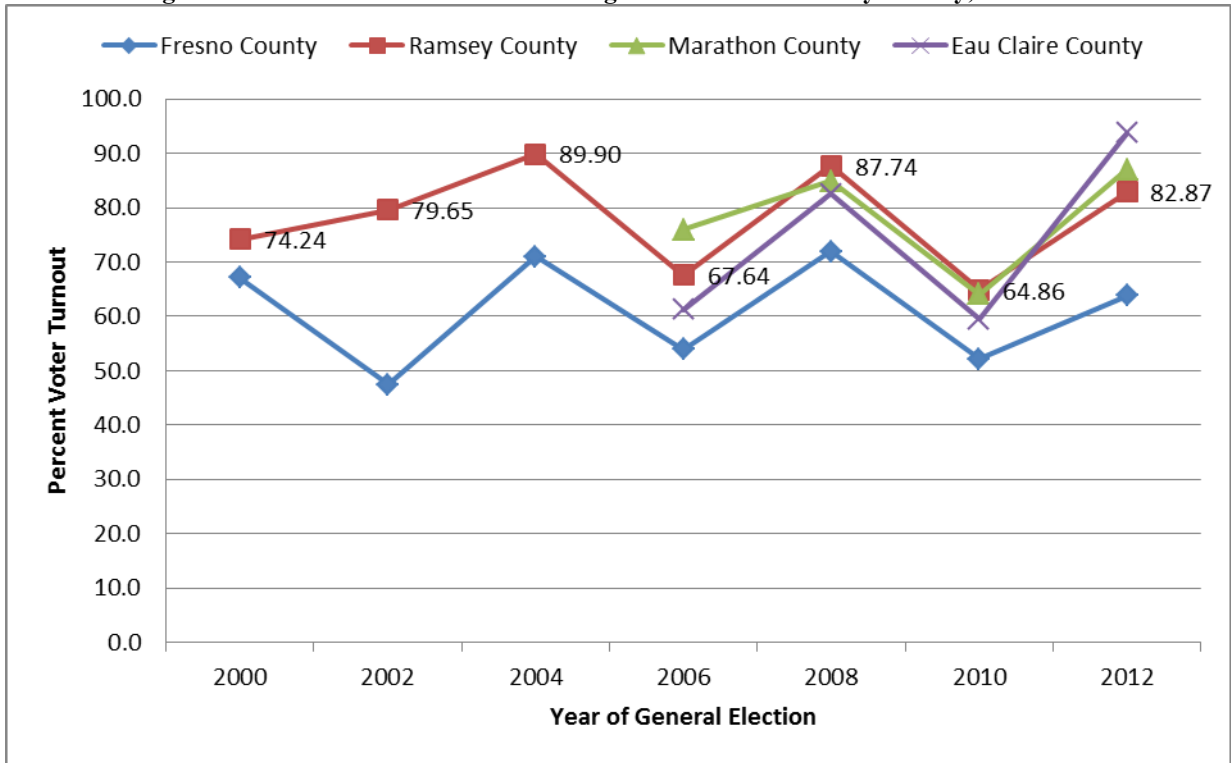
	Voting-Age Population ¹	Adult Citizens ²	Reported Registered		Reported Voted	
			As a Percent of VAP ²	As a Percent of Adult Citizens	As a Percent of VAP ²	As a Percent of Adult Citizens
California	26,993,166	21,815,958	55.1	68.2	51.2	63.4
Fresno Co.	583,880	475,186	62.6	76.9	50.6	62.2
Merced Co.	194,770	148,158	52.1	68.6	45.7	60.1
Sacramento Co.	990,775	840,680	51.6	60.9	48.2	56.8
Minnesota	3,898,384	3,678,253	75.2	79.7	70.8	75.0
Ramsey Co.	372,382	337,326	71.1	78.5	69.2	76.4
Wisconsin	4,212,242	4,053,153	73.5	76.4	68.5	71.2
Marathon Co.	143,782	141,863	84.7	85.9	75.1	76.1
United States	225,499,244	206,072,413	64.9	71.0	58.2	63.6

¹ The voting-age population (VAP) includes citizens and non-citizens 18 years or older.

² Adult citizens include U.S. citizens 18 years or older only.

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2008: Voting and Registration Supplement, Weighted using PWSSWGT.

Figure 8-3: Percent Voter Turnout among U.S. Citizen Adults by County, 2000-2012



Note: Prior to 2006, not all counties in Wisconsin kept records of voter registrations.

Sources: California Secretary of State, Voter Registration Statistics; Fresno County Clerk’s Office, Registrar of Voters; Minnesota Secretary of State, Election Results and Statistics; Ramsey County, Election Results from 2000 – Current; Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, Elections Division; Eau Claire County Clerk’s Office; and Marathon County Clerk, Election Results

Table 8-5: List of Hmong Elected Officials in the U.S., 1991-2012

Year Elected	Term Ended	Office Holder (Sex)	Office	Election Office				
				Type	Size	City	County	State
Nov-91	1995	Choua Lee (F)	School Board Member of St. Paul Public Schools	at large	7	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Apr-93	1996	Thai Vue (M)	School Board Member of La Crosse School District	at large	9	La Crosse	La Crosse	WI
Nov-93	1994	Ya Myyoufu Yang (M)	School Board Member of Wausau School District	at large	9	Wausau	Marathon	WI
May-94	2001	Lormong Lo (M)	City Council Member of Omaha, District 1	district	7	Omaha	Douglas	NE
Nov-95	2003	Neal Thao (M)	School Board Member of St. Paul Public Schools	at large	7	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-96	2000	Joe Bee Xiong (M)	City Council Member of Eau Claire	at large	10	Eau Claire	Eau Claire	WI
Nov-99	2003	Paul C. Lo (M)	School Board Member of Merced City School District	at large	5	Merced	Merced	CA
Apr-00	2002	Neng Lee (M)	City Council Member of Eau Claire	at large	10	Eau Claire	Eau Claire	WI
Nov-00	2004	Ya Myyoufu Yang (M)	City Council Member of Wausau, District 10	district	11	Wausau	Marathon	WI
Nov-00	2006	Ya Myyoufu Yang (M)	County Board Supervisor, District 10	district	38	Wausau	Marathon	WI
Apr-01	2007	Shwaw Vang (M)	School Board Member of Madison Metropolitan School	at large	7	Madison	Dane	WI
Jan-02	2011	Mee Moua (F)	State Senator, District 67	district	67	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-02	2012	Tony Vang (M)	School Board Member of Fresno Unified School District	at large	7	Fresno	Fresno	CA
Nov-02	2011	Cy Thao (M)	State Representative, District 65A	district	134	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-02	2004	Saidang Xiong (M)	City Council Member of Eau Claire	at large	10	Eau Claire	Eau Claire	WI
Nov-03	2011	Kazoua Kong-Thao (F)	School Board Member of St. Paul Public Schools	at large	7	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-04	Current	Thomas T. Vue (M)	City Council Member of Eau Claire	at large	10	Eau Claire	Eau Claire	WI
Jan-05	2006	Tong William Ly (M)	County Board Supervisor, District 4	district	29	La Crosse	La Crosse	WI
Nov-06	Current	Blong Xiong (M)	City Council Member, District 1	district	7	Fresno	Fresno	CA
Nov-07	Current	Noah Lor (M)	City Council Member of Merced	at large	7	Merced	Merced	CA
Nov-07	Current	Xiong Yang (M)	City Council Member of Walnut Grove	at large	4	Walnut Grove	Redwood	MN
Nov-09	2010	Vallay Moua Varro (F)	School Board Member of St. Paul Public Schools	at large	7	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-11	Current	Kaying Thao (F)	School Board Member of Roseville Area Schools	at large	6	Roseville	Ramsey	MN
Nov-12	Current	Foung Hawj (M)	State Senator, District 67	district	67	St. Paul	Ramsey	MN
Nov-12	Current	Steve Ly (M)	School Board Member of Elk Grove Unified School District	at large	7	Elk Grove	Sacramento	CA

Figure 8-4: Number of Concurrent Hmong American Office Holders, 1991-2012

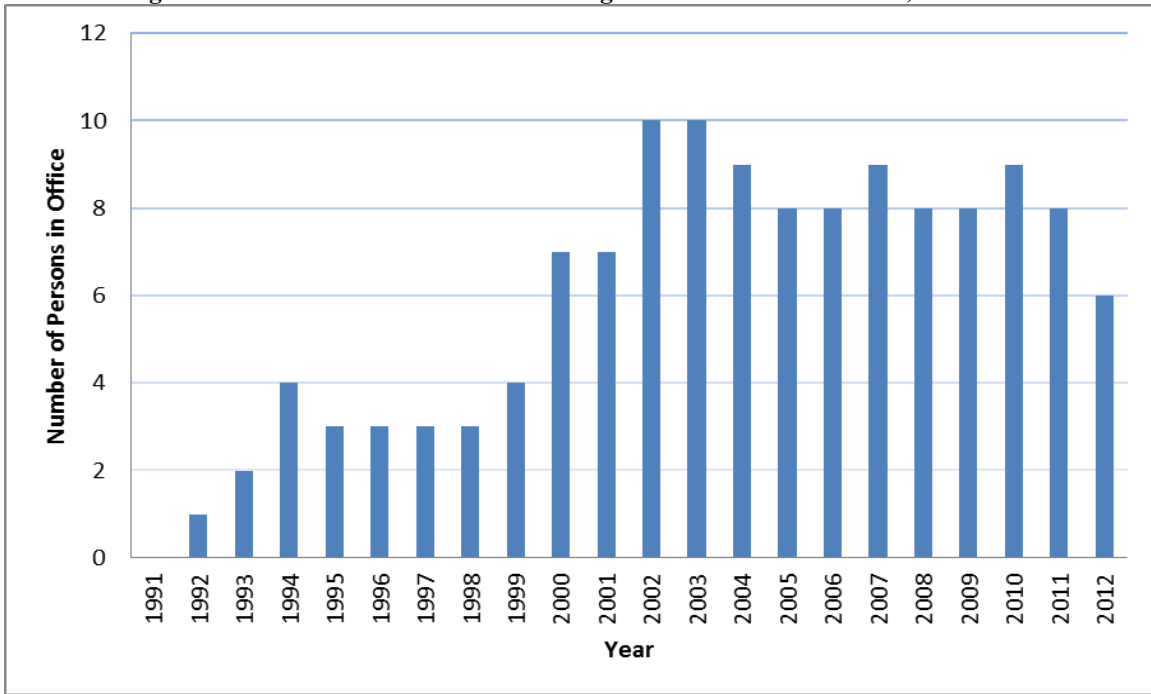


Figure 8-5: Hmong Candidates for Elected offices from 1991-2012

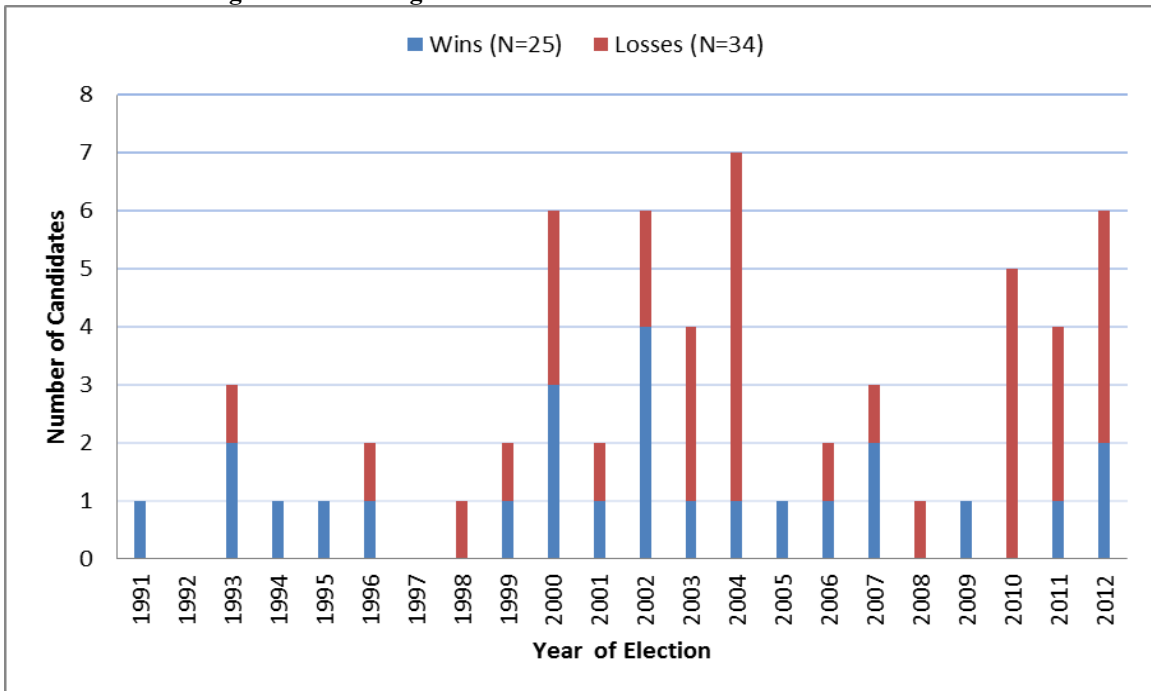


Figure 8-6: Elected Offices by Type, 1991-2012

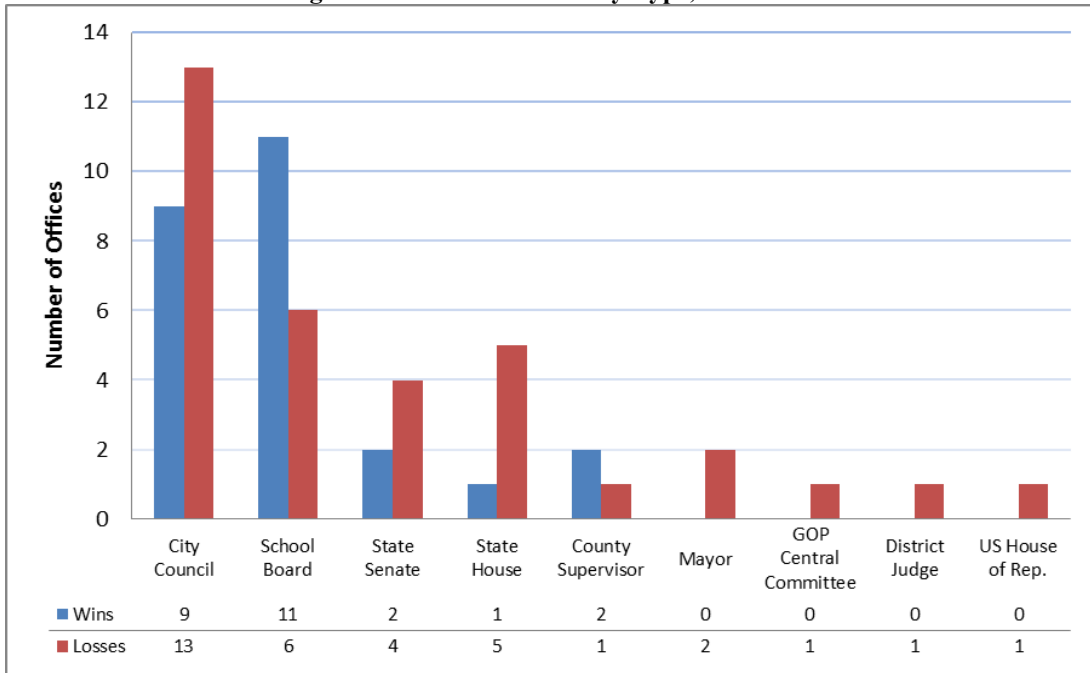


Table 8-6: Hmong American Candidates for Primary Elected Offices by State, 1991-2012

	Wisconsin		Minnesota		California		Nebraska		All 4 States	
	Wins	Losses	Wins	Losses	Wins	Losses	Wins	Losses	Wins	Losses
U.S. House of Rep.	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
State Senate	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	2	4
State House/Assembly	0	2	1	2	0	1	0	0	1	5
District Court Judge	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
County Board Supervisor	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Republican Central Committee	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
City Mayor	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
City Council Member	5	3	1	7	2	2	1	1	9	13
School Board Member	3	3	5	1	3	2	0	0	11	6
Column Total	10	11	9	15	5	7	1	1	25	34

Figure 8-7: Hmong American Candidates by County and Percent Concentration, 1991-2012

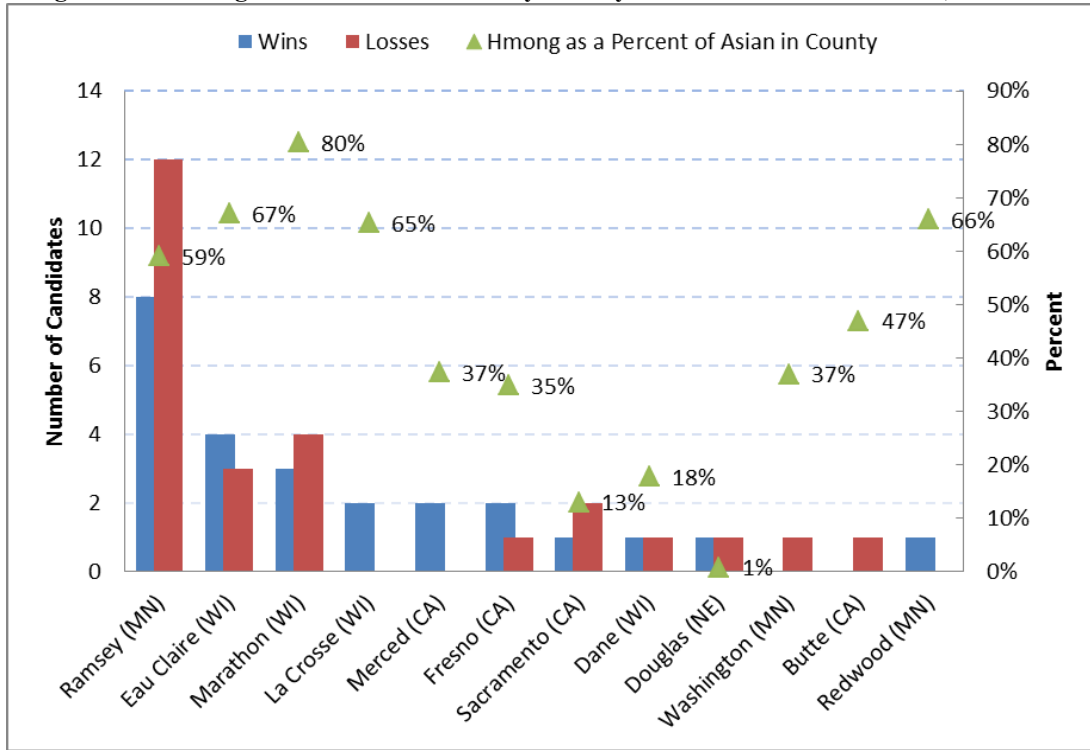


Table 8-7: Hmong American Campaign Contributions by Select Candidates

Year, Candidate (Party-State) ¹	Total Contributions Raised	Percent From In-District	Percent From In-State ²	Percent From Out of-State	Number of Identifiable Hmong Contributors	Total Hmong Contribution	Percent of Total	Office Sought	Outcome
2002, Doyle, James (D-WI)	\$4,855,242	--	87.7	12.5	394	\$22,680	(0.5)	Governor/Lt. Governor	Elected
2002, Samuelian, Steve (R-CA)	\$836,544	46.3	97.2	2.8	24	\$7,600	(0.9)	State Assembly 29	Elected
2002, Moua, Mee (DFL-MN)	\$46,701	39.1	98.6	1.4	10	\$1,263	(2.7)	State Senate 67	Elected
2004, Xiong, Joe Bee (D-WI)	\$79,204	23.7	85.5	14.4	334	\$35,998	(45.5)	State Assembly 68	Lost
2004, Arambula, Juan (D-CA)	\$1,611,255	30.0	96.0	4.0	35	\$4,125	(0.3)	State Assembly 31	Elected
2008, Jones, Dave (D-CA)	\$1,160,099	50.2	94.2	5.8	83	\$13,240	(1.1)	State Assembly 9	Elected
2010, Lee, Chai (DFL-MN)	\$20,789	60.6	71.6	3.4	40	\$10,175	(48.9)	State Senate 67	Lost
2010, Lor, Vang (DFL-MN)	\$12,009	56.4	47.9	--	18	\$5,500	(45.8)	State Senate 67	Lost
2010, Yang, Cha (DFL-MN)	\$7,189	71.4	94.4	5.6	30	\$5,950	(82.8)	State Senate 67	Lost
2011, Lor, Noah (D-CA)	\$26,120	19.0	99.2	0.8	113	\$24,170	(92.5)	Merced City Council	Elected

¹ D stands for Democrat; DFL for Democratic-Farmer-Labor; R for Republican

² The percents from in-state and out-of-state do not necessarily sum to 100 because some funds did not identify their state of origin.

Source: Author's tabulation based on data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics for all candidates except Noah Lor. For Noah Lor, data derived from City of Merced, City Clerk, Recipient Committee Campaign Statements, January - December 2011.

Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the key arguments and findings of my study as they relate to my two central research questions. Along the way, I will also try to address the question, What can the experiences of Hmong former refugees tell us about the United States' practices of selective political inclusion? Let us begin.

Given Hmong Americans' particular contexts of exit and contexts of reception, how and to what extent have Hmong Americans been incorporated into the U.S. political system? My main argument is as follows: During the past three decades, Hmong Americans' engagement in nonelectoral and electoral politics in the U.S., has occurred gradually, reflecting their gradual acquisition of politically relevant resources. The collective mobilization of endogenous and exogenous resources in response to perceived political opportunities has been the key mechanism through which Hmong Americans have been able to *participate in* the U.S. political system. Hmong Americans' *degree of political incorporation* is a byproduct of the interplay between Hmong-led mobilization and the responses of the state. To the extent that some segments within Hmong American society have developed a greater capacity to access the mass media, mobilize support from formal organizations, and court state allies to mobilize collective action on various domestic and foreign social problems, Hmong Americans are now more politically incorporated than they used to be 20 years ago.⁵⁸⁹ However, to the extent that Hmong Americans' interests are still not represented in most local, state, and federal policy making and they continue to be underrepresented at all levels of government, Hmong Americans are much less politically incorporated than other white, non-white minority, and numerically significant immigrant groups.

⁵⁸⁹ I accept the definition of political incorporation proposed by Ong and Meyer (2004:4), as "the development of the capacity to mobilize effective political action in response to perceived political opportunities in a host country."

Hmong Americans' ability to participate in political activities, whether electoral or nonelectoral, has depended on the interplay of a number of conditions and factors rather than on any single set of factors. First, the ability to participate in the political system of the host society depends a great deal on an immigrant group's forms and level of politically relevant resources.⁵⁹⁰ These resources include the size of the immigrant group's electorate, knowledge of political issues and systems, civic skills, money, communications and organizational infrastructure, etc. Within Hmong American communities, these resources have evolved over time as they become more involved in forms of nonelectoral and electoral politics. For instance, by engaging in organized protests, Hmong American followers but especially leaders of protests have developed civic skills, such as the skill to communicate grievances to the mass media or to appropriate targets and gained more knowledge of political issues, actors, and institutions. Hmong Americans' engagements in protest activities, regardless of domestic or international orientations, have helped nurture their sense of group identity and strengthen their organizational capacity. Protest mobilization has helped Hmong Americans develop younger leaders, form new civic organizations, and cultivate a broad alliance system. But protest mobilization has also helped Hmong to refine methods for building ethnic and multi-ethnic coalitions and mobilizing collective consensus through the use of common protest symbols, such as the uniformed Hmong veteran, and master frames, such as the military service frame.

Given Hmong Americans' relatively small population and low average SES, their political incorporation has also depended on their ability to mobilize exogenous resources. Whereas endogenous resources refer to an ethnic community's internally derived material resources (aka human and financial capital), social and demographic resources (social capital),

⁵⁹⁰ It is worth emphasizing that, in order for resources to be politically relevant, they usually must be considered by dominant political actors in the host society to be valuable or at least worth competing for.

and discursive resources (cultural-symbolic capital), exogenous resources are those resources external to ethnic communities that can be mobilized in collective action. These exogenous resources include the mass media, formal civic and legal organizations, political parties, elected officials, private businesses, etc.

In their struggles to access the U.S. political system—in places such as the federal courts, the U.S. Congress, and the White House—Hmong American social movement actors have relied on the help of formal organizations, such as the Asian Law Caucus, and on the help of state representatives such as the late U.S. Representative Bruce Vento of Minnesota. Institutional and state allies, in turn, have played extremely important roles in creating access points to the political system by utilizing their influence and resources to mobilize the mass media and other influential reference publics (e.g., city mayors, state governors, U.S. Congress members, political law firms, national pan-ethnic organizations, etc.). But some institutional and state allies have also helped social movement actors frame their political claims in ways that achieve what Derrick Bell (1980) has referred to as the “convergence of interests” between the system and the challengers of that very system. The creation of access points to the political system, no matter how temporary these access points may be, has not simply resulted from the efforts of ethnic followers and their leaders; rather, it has almost always required the concerted efforts of ethnic community groups, especially well-organized, intelligent, resourceful pressure groups and their alliance systems.

How do broader political contexts or homeland circumstances shape Hmong American politics and the state’s treatment of Hmong Americans? Most social scientists agree that social/political behavior takes place within specific social/political contexts and that it is important to understand how contexts shape political behavior (Eisinger 1973; Kriesi 2004;

Logan, Darrah, and Oh 2012). However, figuring out which elements of the political contexts (i.e., the independent variables) affect which aspects of immigrant political behavior (i.e., the dependent variables) is a not an easy task (Amenta et al. 2002). One of my goals has been to try to identify the elements of the *host* political contexts—i.e., immigrants’ contexts of reception—that matter for U.S. immigrants’ political behavior. But I have also been interested in explaining how host societal context overlap or ‘interact’ with homeland societal contexts. Moreover, I have been interested in the specific consequences that this ‘interaction’ could have for immigrants’ political behavior as well as the host state’s treatment of immigrant groups.

My study assumes that political *interactions* (as opposed to isolated actions) between immigrants and the state take place in nested political contexts and are shaped by these contexts. Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized three types of contexts—the contexts of exit, contexts of reception, and broader political contexts. I have suggested that contexts of exit influence an immigrant group’s political narratives, the materials out of which they can construct counter-discourses. The contexts of reception affect immigrants’ prospects for forming communities and their access to conventional socioeconomic resources. Finally, the contexts formed by the relations among a constellation of homeland-affiliated states,⁵⁹¹ which I have simply called “broader political contexts” continue to shape an immigrant group’s political grievances and activities long after their immigration to the U.S. (or a new host society).

The host state, like the homeland state, is nested in broader ‘international’ contexts—that is, the set of bilateral and multilateral policies to which homeland state and host state are vulnerable. Bilateral and multilateral policies do not just affect individual states’ *domestic*

⁵⁹¹ The reason for saying “homeland-affiliated states” rather than simply “multiple states” is that I am dealing with *specific* immigrant groups or national origin groups. It is the policies and conditions of states affiliated with a specific immigrant group’s former homeland, as opposed to non-affiliated states or just any state in the world, that usually have the most direct impact on the immigrant group.

policies; rather, they affect the relationship between states and more precisely, the political commitments that a constellation of states have to one another. Changes in international political contexts, that is to say, shifts in the constellation of power between multiple affiliated states produce contingencies that can influence the homeland state's treatment of its citizens (and future emigrants) as well as the host state's treatment of its national origin groups (and future immigrants). From this perspective, the processes of immigrant political incorporation are shaped not only by the host state's domestic policies but also by its foreign policy interests.

The U.S. government is concerned about 'controlling' the composition of immigrants through selective immigration policies (Hing 2004). But the government is equally, if not more concerned about managing its national security and image in the 'international community' (i.e., the set of countries that matter in world politics in a particular historical period), through waging domestic and foreign policies. Changes in the broader political contexts or pressures from influential outside states could alter U.S. policies on minority or immigrant groups inside its borders. For example, just as U.S. immigration 'reforms' in the 1960s were "[m]otivated by Cold War politics and civil rights activism" (E. Lee 2006:18), the U.S. 'reforms' on civil rights during that same historical period were motivated by the government's compelled desire to manage its international image in the contexts of the Cold War (Dudziak 2000). In the Hmong American case, the U.S. government hesitantly admitted them as political refugees in the mid-1970s. It was not until after a decade of sustained social movements organized by Hmong veterans and their supporters that the U.S. government symbolically recognized Hmong as one of America's "allied aliens."⁵⁹² However, in the 2000s, after the U.S. had re-established trade and political relations with the war-torn countries of Southeast Asia, internally displaced Laotian Hmong refugees, who were once 'freedom fighters,' suddenly were classified as "terrorists" and

⁵⁹² Jeremy Hein (1993:24) used this term in his book, *States and International Migrants*.

barred from entering the U.S. Those Laotian Hmong former refugees already in the U.S. who applied to become naturalized U.S. citizens had their applications delayed. It was not until Hmong Americans mobilized against this injustice that Hmong refugees were taken off the terrorist list.

Homeland circumstances or the state policies of and conditions in the former homeland and in the case of refugees, those of the country of first asylum, continue to evolve and impact both the socioeconomic resources and political interests of national origin group (e.g., Hmong former refugees, Vietnamese former refugees, etc.). Hmong Americans' resources are impacted when they send remittances to their families or compatriots abroad. But their resources are also impacted when they engage in fund raising campaigns and/or lobby the U.S. Congress in order to protest some social problem abroad (e.g., the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees from Thailand to Laos). Moreover, homeland circumstances, much like domestic circumstances, create conditions or contingencies. Some of these conditions or contingencies could emerge as social problems when social actors or interest groups perceive and define them as such. Some of these collectively defined social problems may develop into organized protest movements.

My historical analysis of Hmong Americans' protest events between 1980 and 2011 study reveals that during the past three decades, patterns of Hmong Americans' political participation are oriented toward both the host society and the homeland. Homeland-oriented protests, rather than declining in frequency, have occurred at a rate almost equal to domestic-oriented protests. This finding suggests that immigrants, because they are embedded in overlapping communities—that is, communities of the host society as well as communities of the former homeland—are not simply concerned with domestic issues or social problems. Furthermore, the findings of my study suggest that Hmong Americans, much like other

immigrant groups, frequently rely on their relatively more privileged (*vis-à-vis* their foreign compatriots) position as U.S. permanent residents and U.S. citizens to try to effect changes in the homeland. For example, Hmong American leaders, elected officials, and formal organizations have lobbied members of the U.S. Congress on issues ranging from the forced repatriation of Hmong refugees to human rights violations against internally displaced Laotian Hmong, to grave desecration in Thailand.

But if Hmong Americans' patterns of political participation are oriented toward both the homeland and the host society, their patterns of political incorporation have been oriented more toward the host society. During the last 35 years, Hmong former refugees have more often *reacted to* perceived social injustices in Thailand and Laos than taken an active role in pursuing political inclusion in these foreign countries. Although some Hmong Americans are involved in homeland politics, many among them clearly recognize the limitations in fighting for social justice, let alone democratic inclusion in foreign countries, especially countries with political systems significantly different from that of the U.S. Furthermore, Hmong recognize that pursuing political inclusion in foreign lands would involve active political intervention, something that most of them, except the most active participants of homeland politics, have been unwilling or unable to do openly given their relatively powerless and politically charged status as exiles (*i.e.*, relative to an economically, politically powerful nation-state such as the Lao PDR). In short, whenever Hmong American interest groups have responded publicly to social injustices in Laos or in Thailand, they have done so mostly in order to try to stop preexisting egregious violations against the human rights of their ethnic compatriots.

Whereas Hmong Americans' homeland politics has been mostly reactive, their domestic politics has been both reactive and offensive. During the last three decades, Hmong Americans

have not only responded to social injustices but also actively sought greater political inclusion into the social and political institutions of their adopted homeland--that is, the United States. This is clearly demonstrated by the evidence on Hmong Americans' protest/social movements and their electoral participation. Since the early 1990s, for instance, Hmong Americans have actively pursued political inclusion, as indicated by their movements for U.S. citizenship and the inclusion of Hmong history in public school curricula. As I pointed out in chapter 5, several years before Hmong groups carried out protest movements against the Welfare Reform Act in the mid-1990s, Hmong interest groups and their state allies were already pursuing U.S. citizenship accommodations for Hmong veterans of the Secret War at the federal level. In the 2000s, Hmong Americans actively pursued the inclusion of Hmong history in the public schools of states such as California and Minnesota. Since the late 2000s, Hmong Americans in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have actively sought the inclusion of Hmong American studies on college campuses. The Hmong Federation's movement for language equality, which we examined in a preceding chapter, was and still is a movement for greater inclusion into both Hmong American and U.S. society.

Moreover, the evidence suggests that since the early 1990s, Hmong social actors, with the support of co-ethnics and non-Hmong communities, have actively pursued public offices in the U.S. Many undoubtedly pursued these local and state public offices in order to try to effect *domestic* public policies. When some elected Hmong officials (e.g., former Minnesota Senator Mee Moua and Minnesota Representative Cy Thao) became involved in certain foreign social problems for short periods of time, they were responding to egregious violations of human rights (e.g., the Thai government-sanctioned exhumation of Hmong graves and grave sites in Thailand).

They were not actively pursuing Hmong's political inclusion in foreign countries.⁵⁹³ In other words, these foreign-oriented actions reflect episodic interventions in direct response to specific social injustices committed against stateless Hmong refugees rather than deliberate movements to alter Hmong refugees' legal status or political standing in a foreign political system.

What can the experiences of Hmong former refugees tell us about the United States' practices of selective political inclusion? If there is a single thread that runs through my chapters, it is that, in the last 30 years but especially during the last 15 years, the state has been more active in disincorporating immigrants than in incorporating them politically. The state has excluded certain categories of racialized immigrants using various, persistently refined methods. These methods of exclusion have been implemented at various points in immigrants' pre-migration and post-migration process. These practices deserve further study and I outline some of them below:

1) For some immigrant groups, exclusion from the U.S. occurs much earlier than the point of entry. Through foreign policies and/or foreign involvement, the state contributes to political instabilities in foreign lands (war, violence, turmoil, etc.) that permanently exclude countless foreign peoples from emigrating (because they have been killed, permanently imprisoned, made powerless or destitute, etc.). If refugees resettle in another resettlement country, they are deemed protected by that country and therefore ineligible to seek asylum in the

⁵⁹³ Some might argue that some Hmong Americans' support for normal trade relations (NTR) between the U.S. and the Lao PDR during the early 2000s represented their active pursuit of greater economic opportunities and potentially greater political opportunities for the Hmong inside Laos. It is true that in the early 2000s, a segment of the Hmong American population (and among them one Hmong elected official) became involved in supporting the establishment of normal trade relations between the U.S. and the Lao PDR. However, Hmong supporters of NTR were not the initiators of NTR. Rather, it was the U.S. Executive Branch and to a lesser extent, the Lao PDR government, who initiated and planned NTR between their two countries in response to perceived geopolitical changes in Southeast Asia. Hmong Americans played, at most, a very minor role in the establishment of NTR between the U.S. and the Lao PDR. More importantly, NTR can hardly be said to represent the 'ordinary' people's or even the state's attempt to address the problem of Laotian Hmong's lack of political integration/representation in Laos.

U.S. The result of all of this is that only a small subset of foreign populations can immigrate to the U.S. during a certain historical period.

2) Exclusion also occurs at the point of entry. Our federal government passes laws restricting the immigration of certain classes of immigrants that it deems undesirable. For instance, immigrants from China and most of Asia were barred from immigrating to the U.S. until the 1965 Immigration Act. In the current era, new policies create new categories to be excluded. For example, especially after 2001, those who are categorized as terrorists are barred from entering the U.S. With the passage of the USA Patriot Act of 2001, certain classes of Hmong from Laos, including those who previously fought on the side of the U.S. military, were deemed terrorists and barred from entry.

3) If immigrants and/or refugees manage to get inside the border (for most immigrants, this means they have had to mobilize significant or extraordinary amounts of resources), they confront exclusion within the nation. Exclusion takes a number of forms after the point of entry:

a) Formal exclusion from U.S. citizenship: Historically, the state passed laws that prevented certain classes of immigrants, including Asians, from becoming naturalized citizens. Those without U.S. citizenship had no access to certain benefits. Worse, those without citizenship were subject to deportation.

b) Physical expulsion: The state deports documented and undocumented immigrants. From the 1921-30, thousands of Mexican workers, including those with U.S. citizenship, were deported. The practice of deportation is a persistent (perhaps permanent) practice of the U.S. government that continues to subjugate and exclude many post-1965 immigrants. The U.S. government deported Chinese laborers in the mid to late 1800s, Russian workers in the late 1910s (Palmer raids during the First Red Scare), Mexican workers in the 1920s, etc.

c) Exclusion from benefits unless one is a documented immigrant or U.S. citizen:

California's Proposition 187 is an example of the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from public education, welfare, and health services. As a result of past collective struggles, naturalization has become possible for most immigrant categories. However, naturalization procedures, fees and exams still make it very unlikely for non-English speakers to be able to acquire citizenship.

d) Informal or de-facto exclusion from communities and social institutions regardless of citizenship status. My dissertation has examined how the public's negative reaction and treatment to Hmong and Southeast Asian former refugees led to secondary migration in the 1980s. Negative public reaction to Hmong in areas with high concentrations of co-ethnics have sometimes led to organized protests and movements for greater political incorporation.

Appendix A: Myth of Re-Creation and Description of the Main Table Event

I. A Hmong Myth of Re-Creation of Human Beings

According to one version of the Hmong myth of re-creation (not to be confused with myths of origin of the world or humans), after the Great Flood, *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus* (Young Sister and Young Brother) were the only human survivors. It was them who, through a series of consultations with *Saub* (a deity that possesses all knowledge) and manipulated trials of fate (*dov zeb los sib khwb; ces, koob xov los sib chob*), became the incestuous couple to give birth to *Tub Liaj Lwg Qhwv Mwg, muaj ntsej tsis muaj ntswg* (an egg-shaped living flesh with ears but no nose).

Confused about what is contained in the egg-shaped living flesh, the couple went to consult *Saub*, the mythical Holder of All Knowledge. When *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus* consulted *Saub*, he (the female counterpart is *Puj Saub*) informed them to seek shelter from the rain that would come later that night. *Saub* then called upon *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus*' grandparents, *Niam Laj Sab* and *Txiv Sab Sua*, to come and break open (destroy) the egg-shaped living thing. This they did, and they also tacked each piece of flesh they had cut from the egg-shaped living thing onto different types of trees and vegetation. Each piece of flesh then turned into a *clan* of people whose clan name (family or surname) rhymes with the type of tree or vegetation on which it was originally tacked. On the next morning, *Nkauj Mim* and *Nraug Nus* awoke up to a bewildering sight of countless people. This people populated the earth.

Source: Nhia Pao Xiong, personal communication, Marysville, California. February 15, 2010. Xiong is a cultural specialist and teacher of *zaj tshoob*, *txiv xaiv*, and *qeej* who was born in Luang Prabang province, Laos.

For research on other myths of origin and/or re-creation within Southeast Asia, see Proschan (2001), Van (1993), Lemoine (1987), and T.D. Nguyen (1985).

II. Description of the Main Table Event During the Funeral Ceremony (Applicable to practitioners of Hmong traditional religion)

During the Main Table event, the cultural specialist and his junior partner, known jointly as *Kav Xwm* or *Txiv Coj Xai*, serve as the *lead mediators* at the Main Table (*lub rooj hais xim* or *rooj mob rooj tuag*). In the context of the funeral, the *Kav Xwm* serve as the legal representatives of the deceased and his/her immediate family. What takes place at the Table is a legal proceeding (real and symbolic) in which a social committee, comprised of several people as discussed below, focuses on accomplishing four main tasks:

a) to assess the personal, material and symbolic valuables (children, money, ceremonial clothing, etc.) that the deceased left behind or that have been given to him by other family members;

b) to give an opportunity to members of the Table to raise any legitimate claim or grievance (e.g., past mistreatment or wrongdoings) about their past social relationships with the deceased and/or his/her family or lineage;

c) to resolve (not merely absolve) the deceased of any financial debts he/she may still owe to others or that others may owe to him/her; and

d) to assess the social and economic situation of the family whom is left behind by the deceased in order to help the family plan for its future wellbeing, and to identify and delegate the social actors who can provide social support for that family.

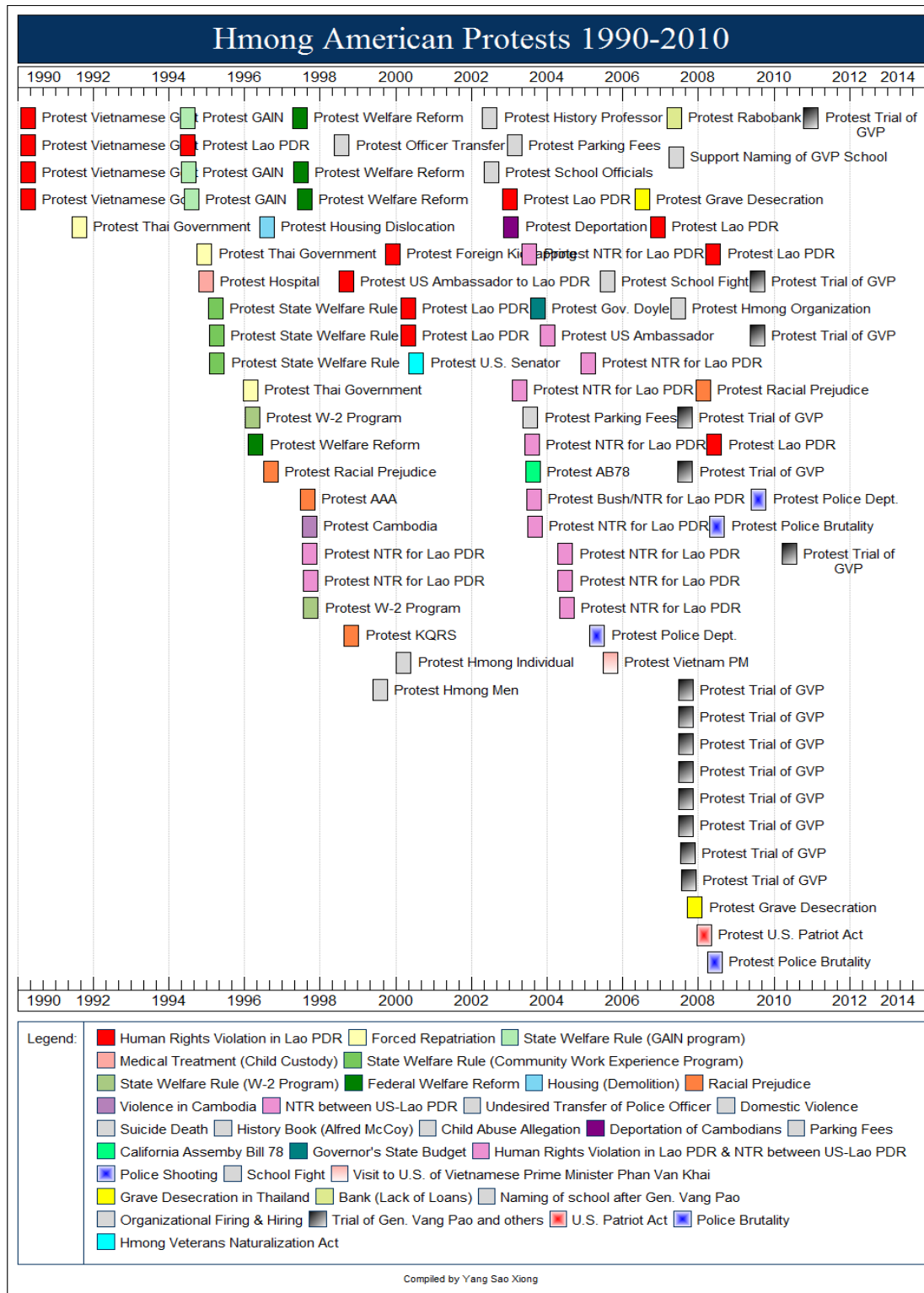
The *Kav Xwm* set the ground rules for how the legal proceeding shall be conducted and mediate when a legitimate claim or grievance arises from any of the members at the Table. In the rare event that a grievance becomes too great for the *Kav Xwm* to resolve, the authority who decides on the case is the *Xeev Txwj Laug* (head village leader/elder).

Several persons comprise the seated positions at the Table; each member of the table performs a different role. Among these members are the immediate family members of the deceased or, in the absence of immediate family members, the next closest kin of the deceased. Upon a formal request by the deceased's family or their designated representative, each member attends the funeral ceremony and sits at the Table. There, they individually and collectively perform the role of *txheeb nws laus kev iab kev khwv* (literally, to peruse the deceased's 'toils and tribulations'). That is, depending on each member's specifically assigned role, they each take their turn to pose questions through plain language, riddles or verses to the deceased's *Kav Xwm* and/or to the deceased's spouse and adult children regarding a number of things related to the four main tasks (a – c). These questions may include questions about the material or symbolic valuables that the deceased left behind or that were given to him (or her) by his wife (her husband) and children (including sons- and daughters-in-law).

Typically, the persons or their designated representatives who sit at the table include the following: *Txiv Cuab Tsav* (the younger brother of the deceased); *Muam Phauj* (sister of the deceased) or *Txiv Dab Laug* (brother of the deceased); *Cuas Nyab* (the deceased's daughter-in-law's father); *Cuas Ntxhais* (the deceased's son-in-law's father, also known as *Nam Xov Pem Txiv Dlaab* in Mong Leng); *Txiv Npaws* (first cousin of the deceased); *Xeev Txwj Laug* (village leader); *Txiv Txiag* (coffin maker); *Txiv Qeej* (the lead specialist who performs crucial songs using a free-reed bamboo musical instrument; this specialist and his assistants play a vital role throughout the funeral ceremony); *Tshwj Kab* (lead cook and representative of the cooks made up of several men and women; the *Tshwj Kab* is also known as *Txiv Thwv Txiv Txos* in Mong Leng).

Source: Personal observations; interpretations based on conversations with Nhia Pao Xiong, Marysville, California, June 8, 2009.

Appendix B: Timeline of Hmong American Protests, 1990-2010



Appendix C: Tables of Government Publications and Song of Statelessness

I. Tables of Government Publications

Given the prevailing assumption within the general Hmong community that there is disparity in terms of translated materials, I have tried to quantify the type and amount of translated materials in order to assess whether a disparity exists and if so, where it occurs. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of White Hmong or Mong Leng translated official documents by select California state departments and the Judicial Branch. A translated official document is defined as any document that, at the time of the survey on January 10, 2011, appeared on a state department's official website or appeared elsewhere in electronic form but contained the name of the state department or one of its official agencies in its header.

Table 1: Translated Official Documents by Select State Departments by Dialect

Department	Total Translated Documents Sampled	Dialect In Use			
		Documents Using Mong Leng		Documents Using Hmong	
		Percent	Der	Percent	Der
California Department of Education	10	0	(0.0)	10	(100.0)
California Department of Health Care Services	39	0	(0.0)	39	(100.0)
California Department of Public Health	38	0	(0.0)	38	(100.0)
California Department of Social Services	110	0	(0.0)	110	(100.0)
California Judicial Branch (Superior Court of Sacramento)	1	0	(0.0)	1	(100.0)
Total	198	0	(0.0)	198	(100.0)

Source: Publications on websites of individual state departments. All documents filed with author.

The years of publication (not shown) of the 198 documents in Table 1 ranged from 2002 to 2010, but most documents were published in 2005 or later. All of the documents sampled have been produced in only White Hmong dialect. These documents ranged from the state-wide Medi-Cal application and instruction documents to public health information brochures to the Home Language Survey used to determine the linguistic minority status of public school students. Furthermore, education-related documents such as the "2008 Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (STAR)" (CA Dept. of Education 2008) which provides information about the different subject areas (reading, math, etc.) that the state-mandated STAR test assesses, have been translated into only White Hmong. Although most of these documents are only 1-2 pages long, some documents such as the "English/Hmong Legal Glossary" (of the CA Superior Court of Sacramento, published in 2005) can be over 175 pages long.

To check whether this pattern of material disparity may be unique to California, we look at data from two other states with the second and third largest concentrations of Hmong Americans. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of White Hmong and Mong Leng translated official documents by select Minnesota and Wisconsin state departments.

Table 2: Translated Official Documents by Select State Departments by Dialect

Department	Total Translated Documents Sampled	Dialect In Use			
		Documents Using Mong Leng		Documents Using Hmong Der	
		Leng	Percent	Hmong Der	Percent
Minnesota Department of Education	34	0	(0.0)	34	(100.0)
Minnesota Department of Health	18	0	(0.0)	18	(100.0)
Minnesota Department of Human Rights	2	0	(0.0)	2	(100.0)
Minnesota Judicial Branch	4	0	(0.0)	4	(100.0)
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	16	0	(0.0)	16	(100.0)
Wisconsin Department of Children and Families	3	0	(0.0)	3	(100.0)
Wisconsin Department of Health Services	2	0	(0.0)	2	(100.0)
Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development	4	1	(25.0)	3	(75.0)
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	1	0	(0.0)	1	(100.0)
Total	84	1	(1.2)	83	(98.8)

Source: Publications on websites of individual state departments. All documents filed with author.

Finally, Table 3 shows the number and percentage of White Hmong and Mong Leng translated official documents by select U.S. government departments and agencies.

Table 3: Translated Official Documents by Select U.S. Government Departments by Dialect

Department	Total Translated Documents Sampled	Dialect In Use			
		Documents Using Mong Leng		Documents Using Hmong Der	
		Leng	Percent	Hmong Der	Percent
U.S. Department of Agriculture	26	12	(46.2)	14	(53.8)
U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census	14	0	(0.0)	14	(100.0)
U.S. Department of Education	2	0	(0.0)	2	(100.0)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	49	10	(20.4)	39	(79.6)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security	5	0	(0.0)	5	(100.0)
U.S. Department of Justice	9	0	(0.0)	9	(100.0)
Total	105	22	(21.0)	83	(79.0)

Source: Publications on websites of individual federal departments. All documents filed with author.

Based on the data in tables 1 to 3, it is clear that a great majority of translated official documents at the state and federal levels that have been produced for Hmong Americans during the past decade have been produced in White Hmong dialect rather than in Mong Leng dialect. The answer to the question of why this has been the case is less certain. Nevertheless, my field observations and interviews with translation agencies suggest that this disparity may be due to a complex process of material translation and production. More specifically, at least three factors

related to the process of material translation and production may help account for the disparity in Mong Leng and White Hmong translated materials: (1) The availability, skills and preferences of Hmong translators; (2) translation agencies' preferences; and (3) end-clients' (public or government funded agencies') preferences. How the preference for White Hmong dialect came about, especially among end-clients, is still unclear but their preferences may have been influenced by previously translated official documents produced by the federal government level.

II. Song of Statelessness

Artist: Reflections

Album: *Kwv Tij Hmoob*, Released January 1, 2008

Location: Morganton, North Carolina, US

Source: <http://www.myspace.com/reflectionshmong>

Song: *Kwv Tij Hmoob* [Fellow Hmong], English translation by Yang S. Xiong, December 2010

Hmong	English
Kwv tij Hmoob nej nyob licas?	Fellow Hmong, how are you faring?
Nej paus nco txog peb lub neej qub qab?	Do you still remember our past way of life?
Nej puas nco suab noog suab nas, suab raj, suab ncas, paj kalama	Do you remember the sounds of birds and rodents, melodies of flutes and harps, kalama flowers
tawg puv hav?	blooming [across] entire valleys?
Tos tsis tau tsiab noj pebcaug	Couldn't wait for new year festivals
koom zej koom zos, zom nplej tuav cos.	[to] join villages, grind and pound rice grains.
Tos tsis tau noj ...	Couldn't wait to have [alternative: Waited, but never had]...
Vim tias peb tsis muaj lub tebchaws... Lub tebchaws	Because we don't have a country... a sovereignty
Peb thiaj tuaj nyob li no:	We must settle as such:
Tsis muaj teb chaws.	Without a country.
Kwv tij hmoob, nej nyob licas?	Fellow Hmong, how are you faring?
Nej puas nco txog peb lub kua muag ntshav?	Do you remember our Tear of Blood?
Thaum phom nrov, npoos tawg, ntshav txua laws,	When the shots were heard, bombs exploded, blood spurted,
Peb hmoob khiav mus nyob thoob, peb mus nyob thoob	We Hmong migrated, we became scattered everywhere
Mus nyob thoob lub ntiaj teb.	Throughout the world.
Vim tias peb tsis muaj lub tebchaws, lub tebchaws	Because we don't have a country, a sovereignty
Peb thiaj tuaj nyob li no:	We must settle as such:

Tsis muaj tebchaws.
Tu siab peb tsis muaj lub tebchaws,
nrog luag ua nom ua tswv,
tsis muaj koob nto npe, li luag tej.

Vim tias peb tsis muaj lub tebchaws, lub tebchaws
Peb thiaj tuaj nyob li no.
Tsis muaj tebchaws.
Tu siab peb tsis muaj lub tebchaws,
nrog luag ua nom ua tswv,
tsis muaj koob nto npe, li luag tej.

Without a country.
Sadly we do not have a country,
which would give us sovereignty like others,
[We are] without the status or fame of others.

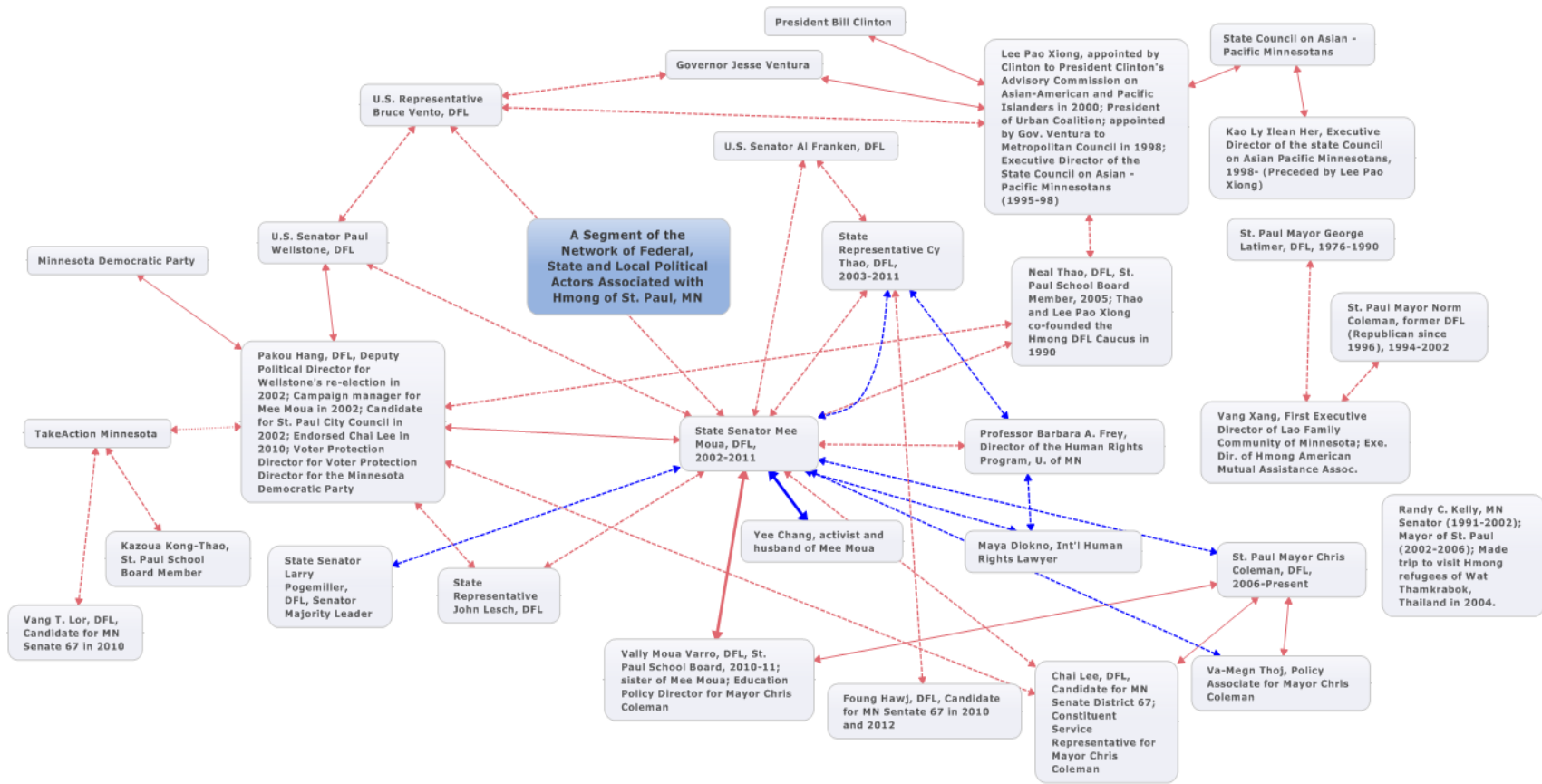
Because we don't have a country, a sovereignty
We must settle as such:
Without a country.
Sadly we do not have a country,
which would give us sovereignty like others,
[We are] without the status or fame of others.

Appendix D: Network Segment of Hmong and Non-Hmong Political Actors in Minnesota

Legend

Dotted line refers to a collaborative or personal tie.
 Solid line refers to an appointment or employment tie.
 Bolded line refers to a family tie.
 Blue line refers to the ties among advocates who organized against an episodic social problem: Hmong Thailand grave desecration.

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