HISTORY ON THE RUN

SECRECY, FUGITIVITY, AND HMONG REFUGEE EPISTEMOLOGIES

MA VANG

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For my mother and father,
MAI and VUE,
And my daughters,
KIA and PAKOU

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INTRODUCTION
THE LOST BAG AND THE REFUGEE ARCHIVE

While conducting research at the University of Minnesota's Immigration History and Research Center, I found a half-sheet document tucked into one Hmong family's file. It was between the resettlement application forms that were completed prior to resettlement and the cursory notes that tracked refugees' progress after arrival that was part of a paper trail of their journey to the United States.[1] This document was a lost baggage claim form filled out by (or on behalf of) a Hmong family after their arrival in St. Paul/Minneapolis in January 1980. It reported the loss of one checked bag and its contents en route from Bangkok, Thailand, to Okinawa, San Francisco, and finally the Twin Cities. The contents of the form give shape to the lost bag's narrative about loss and exile.[2]

Losing luggage is undoubtedly a nuisance; yet it is also a normal occurrence in travel and this form shows the effort to recover it. But the estimated

TABLE 1.1. Missing Baggage Claim
Western Airlines Statement of Loss

1. This claim is filed covering loss of: Checked baggage (including contents)

2. Details of loss:
   Trip began at Bangkok, Thailand (Trans Inter Airline) to Okinawa
   then to San Francisco, California
   then to St. Paul & Minneapolis
   When and where last seen? Jan. 28, 1980 Bangkok, Thailand.
   When and where loss first reported? Jan. 29, 1980, St. Paul & Minneapolis
   Does claim check show property was checked to final destination? Yes
   Do you carry insurance against this loss? No

3. Baggage Information:
   Number of pieces of baggage checked: 3

DESCRIPTION OF ARTICLES	WHEN PURCHASED	WHERE PURCHASED	ORIGINAL COST (IN US DOLLARS)
1) 4 Blue Hmong dresses (skirt)	Self made	Thailand	1,000.00
2) 1 chain gold jewelry	1979	Thailand	500.00
3) 2 silver bars	1972	Laos	500.00
4) 1 Necklace jewelry (silver)	1979	Thailand	500.00
5) 1 Headdress	1978	Thailand	25.00
6) 1 Suit men custom dress	1976	Thailand	50.00
7) 1 Baby sling	1980	Thailand	15.00
8) 1 Hat	1980	Thailand	10.00

NOTE: Author representation of a missing baggage claim form from one Hmong refugee family's file as a remnant of their multiple flights from Laos to Thailand to the U.S.
SOURCE: Author duplication, Immigration History and Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Recorded by Ma Vang on March 3, 2010.

$3,000 worth of clothing and jewelry, made and acquired by this family between 1972 and 1980 in Laos and Thailand (shown in table 1.1), not only tells a story about the losses of personal belongings but also the underlying losses of country and of one's *ntsuj plig* (spirit) through a long history of forced displacements—being on the run. The story of loss that haunts this missing baggage claim form emphasizes three Hmong refugee realities. First, it reveals the journey of a Hmong refugee family who were a part of a large wave of Hmong refugees resettled in the U.S. in 1980, after escaping war vio-

lence in Laos to Thailand's refugee camps after the U.S. "secret war." Hmong refugees were dispersed throughout the U.S. under the federal government's refugee resettlement policy to avoid placing an undue burden on any single community.[3] These early groups that arrived in the Midwest, especially the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, were sponsored by charity agencies including the International Institute of Minnesota and by churches.

Second, the missing bag and its contents are artifacts important to and carried by Hmong women. The first item listed is four "self-made" Hmong dresses sewn and worn by the Hmong women in the family for New Year celebrations or other special occasions. The attributed value of $1,000 reveals not just the market price but the un-recuperated labor in making the dresses. The rest of the items shown as purchased—jewelry, the men's custom-made clothing, baby sling, and hat—represent the material cultural wealth accumulated by the family members since their displacement from Laos in 1975. In fact, the silver bars purchased in 1972 were the only items brought from Laos. The items such as the silver necklace and baby sling purchased between 1976 and 1980 would have been replacements for those lost in the escape from Laos across the Mekong River to Thailand. The silver necklace, in particular, would have been a dowry given to the Hmong woman, a treasured item that connected her to her mother.

Finally, this incomplete record of loss and its emphasis on the missing refugee remnants illuminates the spiritual presence of loss. The items lost on the journey to the U.S. were replacements for a previous loss in the flight across the Mekong, yet they also reflect the perpetual state of spiritual loss of Hmong who fled in haste and forgot to call upon their ntsuj plig to also make the journey.[4] In Hmong cosmology, ntsuj plig and the body coexist whereby it provides protection for one's physical and mental health.[5] The body is a host for seven to thirty-one ntsuj pligs, of which three play significant roles to support the life of the body.[6] Of these three ntsuj pligs: the shadow plig remains with the body in life and death until the body decomposes after burial, the reincarnating plig stays with the body until death at which point it leaves to reincarnate, and the dreaming plig (sometimes called the wandering plig) "can move about in the world, unrestricted by land or oceans to visit places and people."[7] The wandering plig returns in death to the spirit world to rejoin the ancestors, and as medical anthropologist Mai See Thao explains, to its origin of the "Hmong kingdom of the dead."[8] But, the wandering plig can become lost through wandering or fright from traumatic events such as displacement or an accident, leaving the body weak and prone to sickness. Indeed, the host/body's health and wellness is linked to maintaining

unity with this ntsuj plig. A soul-calling ceremony is necessary to call the ntsuj plig back to its body.[9] It is a practice rooted in the belief that one's ntsuj plig can flee in the fright and chaos of violence, or might linger at the site of the trauma, which could cause physical illness, depression, and *ceeb* (fright). Hmong refugees believe that the violence and trauma that caused their escape from Laos, along with those they encountered in their flight, disrupted the spirit-body balance. Upon leaving each temporary place of refuge along their escape path, the refugees must remember to not only gather their bags but also gather spiritual strength by calling their ntsuj pligs to follow and ancestral spirits to protect their journey. Indeed, this lost bag carries with it missing things that exceed the record of its loss.

The lost bag has wandered from its charted course and is on the run like the family (and people) it was supposed to accompany. The form's questions about where each item originated, where the luggage was supposed to end up, and where it was last seen reveal how the missing baggage symbolizes that which remains unknowable except through the trace of its having once been there. These unrecoverable remains and the stories one is left to grapple with constitute the histories that run because they are carried by people who are on the run. Being on the run denotes the difficulty of combining the tasks of movement and carrying things and carrying knowledge. History on the run, this book's central concept, names Hmong on the run as an episteme, one that is fugitive because it eludes traditional archiving yet it tracks the presence of Hmong refugee epistemologies in place and time. Refugee epistemologies are ways of knowing embedded in stories and Hmong cosmology that are grounded in place. The concept is a feminist epistemological framework that articulates loss as presence (in place and time) by orienting the refugee within geography and history. Specifically, it articulates Hmong presence beyond the frameworks of soldiering and secrecy composed by U.S. liberal imperialism.

To be sure, the loss that the baggage signified was not the first indication of Hmong refugees and what they had lost in the war years, in the chaos of escape, or even once they had resettled in the U.S. By the time Hmong refugees showed up on the shores of the Mekong River, in the United States, in the historical record, and in ethnohistorical accounts, they were considered out of place and historical time. The first time that U.S. Americans and the Western world encountered Hmong refugees was through the Indochinese refugee resettlement project, in which they were primarily portrayed as a people transplanted from premodernity to modernity.[10] Left among the rent receipts and utility bills that showed refugees' daily struggles, the missing

baggage form represents the problems of knowledge about Hmong refugees and about what became known to the U.S. American public and in academic discourses as the U.S. "secret war" in Laos (1961–75). The arrival of Hmong, Lao, and other refugees from Laos to the Thai side of the Mekong River, televised in news outlets and contested in the State Department's Task Force for Indochinese Refugees,[11] required U.S. Americans to confront the clandestine activities undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) under the direction of presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon as well as the Pentagon.

Between 1961 and 1975, the United States waged a secret, unauthorized war in Laos and conscripted Hmong along with other ethnic and Indigenous groups such as Kha, Khmu, Mien, and Brao as proxy soldiers in order to aid its war efforts in Vietnam. This war for which Hmong fought, along with the soldiers and civilians who were forced to fight and flee, was kept secret because it directly violated the 1954 Geneva Accords that declared Laos along with Cambodia and Vietnam independent from France and stipulated that these former French Indochinese countries would remain neutral, free from foreign military intervention. To maintain this façade of neutrality, U.S. state records relating to the "secret war" were classified. News reports in the 1960s about the conflict in Laos during the Vietnam War began calling it "America's secret war" to emphasize its covert nature. The U.S. government deemed the war a "secret" primarily to conceal the U.S. covert bombing missions in Laos on enemy sites and to disrupt the North Vietnamese Army supply route, Ho Chi Minh Trail, which ran along Laos's eastern border. Flying these bombing missions were U.S. American pilots who were discharged and enrolled as "volunteers," Thai pilots, and Hmong pilots. They dropped more than 270 million bombs, amounting to 2 million tons of ordinance, on the country. The Hmong pilots, under the command of Hmong leader General Vang Pao, were part of the CIA-operated "secret army" in northeastern Laos to combat North Vietnamese troops operating in the region.[12] As one of the largest ever CIA clandestine operations of proxy soldiers, the "secret army" numbered more than thirty thousand soldiers at its peak, recruiting from Hmong, Mien, Khmu, Kha, and Lao groups. The "secret army" provided intelligence, engaged in armed combat, rescued U.S. American pilots, flew bombing missions, and took part in various other military duties.[13] In addition, Hmong participated in various aspects of the "secret war" as nurses, aid workers, U.S. embassy workers, and Royal Lao Police.[14]

Upon discovering the missing baggage declaration form, I immediately realized that this was an inscription of the violence that Hmong refugees

experienced during and after the U.S. "secret war." I had learned through countless stories about how Hmong had run from war, such as the Hmong woman who recounted her leg being injured by "friendly" air fire while fleeing her village and the Hmong veterans who showed me their war wounds sustained from combat. But I had not expected to see the epistemic violence that erased the refugees' and soldiers' stories. I went to other archives—the Vietnam Center and Archive, presidential records of Kennedy and Johnson, CIA documents, and refugee resettlement records—to look for "official" records of the violence. In these records, I encountered the violence of ongoing erasure. When I examined the state archives of diplomatic and military activities and records of refugee resettlement to look for evidence of Hmong-U.S. relations in Southeast Asia, the declassified diplomatic collections revealed very little about Hmong during the war or their refugee experiences. Because these documents are categorized by nation-state, I eventually learned to ask the archivists for materials on Laos-U.S. relations or was directed to these collections when I inquired about Hmong history. At the archives on refugees, on the other hand, the collections focused on Hmong and other Southeast Asian refugees' integration into U.S. society, with minimal attention to the conflicts that had displaced Hmong from their homes in Southeast Asia. What I discovered were declassified U.S. records obscured with massive and countless redactions, and paper trails left by refugees like the missing baggage claim form. Chapter 2 examines these redacted records to demonstrate how the missing things and postcolonial Cold War strategies were manifestations of a specific function of bureaucratic archiving and the ways history is an incomplete project.

History on the Run: Secrecy, Fugitivity, and Hmong Refugee Epistemologies grapples with the problems with knowing about refugee histories that my encounters with the archives illuminated. Beyond constructions of the "good" or "bad" refugee construed by liberal nation-states and their history, the Hmong refugee emerged as a gendered racial formation composed at the intersections of fugitivity, secrecy, and refugee epistemology. The Hmong refugee is a "compositional subject" whose critical position against the violence of colonialism and war, state governance, and national belonging is configured through these very domains of power.[15] Yet, Hmong on the run as an episteme reveals the contradictory liberal/illiberal and good/bad figurations to orient the subject's ways of knowing as fugitive—constitutive of silences, refusals, and evasions—and imagine ways of being in but not of the nation-state and its "official" history. The lost baggage claim exposes the dilemma of using the archives to find some historical evidence of Hmong

lives in a "secret war." The problems produced by the baggage claim and archives raise an important set of questions about the paper trails: Under what conditions did Hmong families make this journey in the late 1970s through the early 1990s? What about the families that never got to make the journey? But my driving questions for this book are: How do you recount a history that has systematically been kept secret? How would centering the refugee's repertoire of stories and refusals shift the telling beyond masculinized, recuperative narratives? Although the details of loss are clearly written here, the claim form makes legible Hmong refugees' absence and disappearance in the records where stories about how they survived and what they carried do not fit within a narrative about U.S. militarism, postcolonial nation-building, and humanitarianism.

History on the Run argues, first, that the supposed secrets about war institute secrecy as knowledge such that secrecy structures "official" knowledge formation and refugee knowledge-making. The lost bag was not an exception of war, displacement, the archive, and refugee movement, but rather it constituted the very basis of this imperial structure. The refugee as an artifact of U.S. liberal militarized empire and state governance is also a subject of secrecy whose absence in the archives demonstrates record-keeping as one such form of violence. Hence, the violence asserts its presence by virtue of being absented such as the missing baggage claim. The incomplete and missing records' absenting of violence poses a danger for accounts of Hmong refugee migration, as an example, by beginning Hmong refugee histories with the "secret war."[16] Secrecy, as I will theorize in chapter 1, operates in U.S. governance to produce the conditions for material and epistemological violence that occur through the subterfuge of U.S. pilots pretending to be volunteers and frames the redactions of the records about a "secret war" (chapter 2), recognition for the former soldiers (chapter 3), and arraignment of former soldiers as terrorists (chapter 4). The secrecy of U.S. governance produced the conditions for the refugee to emerge as a subject of empire through the soldier and former ally who could turn into a terrorist. These categories, in turn, are conditions of possibility for the refugee to illuminate the contradictions and crises of race-, war- and history-making.

Yet, Hmong refugee constructions of history encompass so much more than the secrecy of state governance. *History on the Run* tells a Hmong refugee story that articulates the loss as not really lost but refused or embodied, yet may evade recovery as knowledge. The book makes a second argument that the refugee is a site of knowledge, an epistemological subject that unravels the secrecy embedded in nation, race, war, and U.S. liberal militarized empire, and

a subject who enacts secrets and silences. The refugee as a knowing subject shifts the frame of reference for understanding refugee histories and experiences from the state, anthropological, sociological, legal, humanitarian logics to that which is grounded in the refugees' fugitive history—that is, how they narrate their stories based on their patterns of movement. That histories are made and move because they are carried by the people who move is the central premise of *History on the Run*.

History on the run is fugitive history whose telling is still unfolding. This history is "fugitive knowledge" that does not remain still and cannot easily be found.[17] This knowledge hovers over geohistories, escaping the closure of being found/archived. History on the run constitutes what Ann Stoler calls "epistemological uncertainty," knowledge that "goes without saying but everyone knows or cannot yet be articulated or said."[18] History on the run suggests a mobility that has no fixed origin or referent (whether in a singular repository or nation-state) except as a way of knowing attached to fugitivity. Histories that run are embedded in stories and embodied practices that drag history as marginalized people are forced to migrate. As a Hmong refugee epistemology, history on the run makes room for refugee secrecy that is not the same kind of secrecy as state governance because its emergence threatens to expose what the state and public are not supposed to know about the violence of state-making. Relatedly, the refugee is a subject whose ways of knowing evade emergence as Truth and whose subjectivity complicates liberal subject formation. History on the run questions historiography as a "tool of and against the state" in which history can still be used to foreclose other stories.[19] In doing so, it links the transition from overt colonial domination, disruption of decolonization, and "secret war" with the postwar period of ongoing circulation of knowledge through state, public, and refugee narratives.

This book constitutes a feminist contribution that delineates the particularities of Hmong soldiering as situated at the imperial intersections of U.S. empire-building and Laos decolonial nation-building with U.S. colonial rescue/civilizing projects. As a people whose sovereignty is not tied to any particular nation-state, Hmong tenuously straddle the categories of stateless and Indigenous, and were seen as a malleable proxy defense force for U.S. militarism. Under the U.S. imperialist purview, Hmong were deemed not-yet-modern subjects who were outside of place and time such that their military service would facilitate their assimilation into the Lao national polity and emergence in imperial historical time. Indeed, clandestine military service has framed Hmong refugee subject formation primarily as

the loyal refugee ally. Hmong soldiering comprised a civilizing and racial project within the moral authority of U.S. liberal militarized empire as an inclusive and liberating project.[20] Soldiering through empire, as historian Simeon Man explains, is an optic to view the imperial and racial politics of war for which Asians and Asian Americans played a central role, and a way for them to negotiate a relationship to the nation and imagine decolonization.[21] Soldiering for Hmong was a way of instituting a people who may not belong to any nation-state as its soldiers and allies, whose displacement as refugees required rescuing, and yet their supposed nonrecognized state status continues to unsettle that rescue because they can become terrorists, as shown in chapter 4 about General Vang Pao. Rather than being an isolated historical nonevent, the "secret war" was a postcolonial Cold War project of U.S. liberal militarized empire, which produced the Hmong refugee figure as a form of colonial baggage that had been "lost" to/in the archive and in transit.

History on the Run establishes that the U.S. "secret war" in Laos is a particular kind of archive different from the declared or overt wars, slavery, or colonialism that also contain missing information about gendered racial lives. The particularity relates to the question of secrecy embedded in the missing, not only in terms of redactions but because the very act(ion) being referenced is itself a secret.[22] Indeed, the lost baggage claim's representation of the war's epistemic violence illuminates how the "secret war" as a historical event is also a project of knowledge production.[23] Although there is no official "secret war" archive, I suggest that this war exists as an archive which produces knowledge through epistemic erasure and violence in its attempts to reproduce the traditional record about the war and refugees. In other words, what circulates as textual evidence signals that no archival evidence should exist because it was supposed to be kept secret. The Hmong refugee figure and the violence it embodies are multiply concealed and secreted because of the nature of this archive.

Instead, I stress that the Hmong repertoire of stories, refusals, and embodied knowledge exists within the purview of a refugee archive. This archive is constitutive of refugee knowledge and fugitivity, and it illuminates the refugee figure as the trace of the collision between refugee histories and archival records about and by refugees. This is a living archive for Hmong to actively negotiate what are considered state secrets as well-known experiences and stories to them. Secrets do not just belong to the state, they are also kept by Hmong who bear witness to the violence and seek to tell a particular version of history and to keep hidden information that is still

sensitive or may be too traumatic to reveal. Rather than a repository, the refugee archive is a key method with which to emphasize the embodied and material aspects of histories that run and the spiritual dimension of forced displacement without recovering the loss.[24] It complements the reading method in the lost bag to look for the missing things in the traditional archive and show how refugee histories are not really lost, they are secreted. As an example, I saw in the missing baggage form a Hmong refugee family, and many more families, who arrived in the United States carrying bags and stories to anchor each other.

My critical task does not aim to rectify the problematic historical notion that Hmong "entered history" when they became involved in the "secret war," but rather to pose a historical critique that makes legible Hmong presence long before and after the event.[25] This undertaking joins the important rethinking of the refugee away from its legal definition and its sociological framing as a subject in need of rescue yet who is unable to adapt to resettlement,[26] toward the refugee as a figure that questions the established principles of citizenship, nation, and the state.[27] Within this framework, the refugee is both a critical idea and a social actor "whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change."[28] The refugee, therefore, is a critical subject for understanding the human impact of our global order of unending wars and ongoing state repression. But the refugee is also an important concept for tracing liberalism and how it operates by bestowing the "gift of freedom" on the grateful refugee and figuring the refugee as a solution to racial politics and poverty in urban America.[29] History on the run, then, is a theory of refugee critique within the interstices of ethnic studies and postcolonial studies—specifically Asian American studies, American studies, and Cold War knowledge formation.

The remainder of this introduction, in three parts, will deepen history on the run as fugitive history that encompasses a longer history of Hmong on the run fleeing persecution in China that links with forced migrations during and after the "secret war." First, I explain how Hmong on the run from Chinese imperialism operate within refugee epistemology as a fugitive history that has eluded archiving and settling. I foreground the concepts of fugitivity and place to show how refugee stories carry the places of migration. Second, I explain history on the run as a spatiotemporal concept that orients Hmong presence against the modern episteme of Hmong as a stateless and timeless people. Third, I show how the refugee archive is constitutive of the fugitive history and presence as a repertoire of Hmong stories that also enact silences and refusals to defer history. The work in this introduction frames

the investigation in chapter 1 to build the secrecy-as-knowledge argument around the particular context of the "secret war."

Fugitive History

HMONG ON THE RUN

Hmong trace their ancestral homeland to China, specifically the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Hunan.[30] They migrated to live in the highlands of Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Burma beginning in the early nineteenth century as they rebelled and fled from Chinese imperial Sinicization of minority kingdoms.[31] The earliest Hmong migration into Laos was in 1820–40 into Nong Het, the northern part of Laos that currently borders Vietnam and China.[32] Hmong oral stories recall this history in China and escaping Imperial Chinese conquests that pushed a large part of the group to Southeast Asia, while also eliminating the Hmong writing system as a method of colonization. Indeed, the loss of a Hmong homeland in China resulted in fleeing and constituted the loss of Hmong literacy and Hmong history. According to historian Mai Na Lee, the story of how Hmong lost their literacy has been passed down in *zaj qeej* (musical rhymes of the qeej, a bamboo instrument) between qeej and ritual practitioners. Lee explains that in a zaj qeej told to Yang Cheng Vang, a ritual master, the Han emperor ordered all the books burned and writing outlawed after the Hmong king was captured and killed. Only one book escaped the carnage with a Hmong scholar. Yet, no matter the hiding places, the ditch behind his house, the threshold of the door, or a wooden trunk, the book would eventually be chewed piece by piece by a pig, a cow, and mice, respectively. What was left was sewn into Hmong women's *paj ntaub* (embroidery) for safekeeping, and it is now transmitted through women's needlework. The characters of the Hmong script are specifically embedded in the embroidered intricate patterns of Hmong funeral clothes.[33] As I have noted elsewhere, carrying the Hmong script has been a Hmong women's rebellion. Yet, the script has become indecipherable. Hmong history on the run from place to place is intertwined with "writing on the run," and both are embedded in oral traditions like the *Qhuab Ke* (funerary ritual ballad), qeej, *kwv txhiaj* (courtship song), and stories.[34] These sources of history and knowledge about Hmong origins and patterns of migration are integral to daily life. Their ongoing use in cultural practice denote Hmong history on the run. The condition of being made landless over and again has rendered their history and writing fugitive. This longer Hmong history of colonialism and war in China appear

intermittently in Chinese records such as a Chinese general's report in 1682 that he had been ambushed by Hmong in southern China.[35] There were few Chinese-produced historical accounts on Hmong, if any. According to Lee, those that exist are pieced together from different records, such as Vwj Zoov Tsheej's *Haiv Hmoob Li Xwm* (The Hmong History).[36]

As a people who were displaced internally and across geopolitical borders, Hmong moved to Southeast Asia as "a people without a country" and "refugees" fleeing from the conflicts with Chinese imperial armies in the mid-nineteenth century to live in the mountainous regions of Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma.[37] The oral traditions that record Hmong forced migrations and also give accounts of the erasure of the historical contexts for leaving underscore the dilemma of producing a history about Hmong refugee displacement. Since they were either latecomers to Southeast Asia or they occupied the nonplace, uninhabitable spaces of the mountainous regions, Hmong were then perceived as not having a connection to land and place. By extension, Hmong were considered to inhabit a different historical time than that of the modern nation-state. In the Asian colonial context, it is difficult to resolve the claim that some groups arrived before others. For groups like Hmong, Lisu, and Akha, relatively recent migration to the area allows national governments to deny their wishes for recognized land rights.[38]

Today, Hmong are one of the many ethnic groups in Southeast Asia that do not dominate any nation-state. As peoples who live across borders, these groups have been subjected to multiple overlapping forms of state governance and colonial administration—including Chinese, French, and U.S. intervention. The assertion that there are no Indigenous peoples in Asia because supposedly there is no ongoing settler colonial structure positions these groups as remote mountain dwellers who create trouble for the nation-state.[39] But as cultural geographer Ian Baird suggests in his essay on the Brao people of northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos, it is important to link Indigenous peoples with colonialism in order to position people in a relationship with others instead of essentializing their place of origin.[40] As a group that does not dominate any particular nation-state, Brao have historically endured and continue to endure various forms of colonialism, which have shaped Brao subject formation.[41] Brao colonial domination by the Khmer, Thai, Lao, French, and U.S., along with the ongoing colonial practices of the current Lao and Cambodian states, blurs the distinction between precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial.[42] For Hmong refugees, overlapping forms of Chinese imperialism, Lao and Vietnamese state governance, French colonialism, and U.S. liberal militarized empire shaped their displacement and emergence

as refugees. Hence, from the perspective of marginalized peoples in Southeast Asia, colonialism and militarism are intertwined and ongoing gendered racial structures of existence.

The "secret war" compounded Hmong life on the run through material and soul loss. Palee Moua explains: "No one tells you that you won't return so you don't think about grabbing the valuable and memorable items that have meaning to you. . . . In the midst of a panic, while running and fearing for your life, you don't have time to call your spirit to go with you. It is not a peaceful way to leave. Barely escaping war and death, your spirit is severely weakened, if not lost."[43] This explanation Moua offers for the spiritual well-being of Hmong refugees after forced migration demonstrates how, in Hmong cosmological view, fugitive acts to escape colonial and militarized violence also disrupt the spiritual balance. Hence, the particular elusiveness for understanding Hmong historiography of movement and fugitivity is structured by the spirit such that histories that run are not lost, they linger and wander. In her work with Hmong American interlocuters with type II diabetes mellitus, Mai See Thao explains how Hmong refugees who experience diabetes seek a cure and healing on return trips to Laos, not in the U.S. The cure they seek is "temporary and place-specific" in the places they once lived, visiting with those left behind and returning to the same lifestyle. Those who have returned to health upon returning from Laos explained to Thao "how their bodies embodied the animacy of the land and weather; that their bodies 'fit' there in Laos while being out-of-place/displaced in the US."[44]

History on the run is a Hmong women's narration of history that explains Hmong lives as constantly being on the run.[45] While running from place to place characterized the Hmong refugees'/veterans' displacement experiences, it specifically captures how Hmong women's narrative patterns of telling their stories about war and its aftermath, as I have argued elsewhere, emphasize a nonlinear path of migration and rechronicle Hmong refugee histories to disrupt the U.S. liberal empire's project of militarism. The war's victims were not just the soldiers and those who supported the "secret army," such as the nurses and other aid workers. Because Hmong villages and farms were the very sites of guerrilla warfare traversed by U.S.-allied and Communist-allied military forces, Hmong civilians—including women, children, and the elderly—became victims of war. They were subjected to military aggression from both the enemy and friendly fire, and forced to flee their villages to stay ahead of the fighting. Escape, concealment, and safety are "geographic options."[46] These patterns of forced migration reflect the longer history of Hmong migratory movements and loss.[47]

History on the run suggests neither that Hmong do not have history nor that their historical knowledges are recent manifestations. Instead, it conveys the difficulties of encapsulating Hmong refugee histories. Hmong histories are still unfolding because they wrestle with how history is a "moveable" referent for Hmong refugees/Americans in which community politics rest on "competing interpretations of a moveable past."[48] Transnational feminist M. Jacqui Alexander calls this unfolding and motion "the movement of history."[49] History on the run constitutes a Hmong "historical geography" of their migration pattern of an unsettled history.[50] The concept asserts the long, deep, continuous, and always emerging Hmong history that challenges modern state knowledge formation and U.S. liberal militarized empire.

FUGITIVE KNOWLEDGE THROUGH PLACE

The movement in Hmong on the run is refugee geography and knowledge. Hmong refugee geography refutes a humanitarian teleological rendering of the refugee and epistemology that almost always assumes "settling" within a nation-state as well as their histories being "settled" within national history. Furthermore, movement constitutes what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten describe as flight, motion, and fugitivity, that can offer a way of being and thinking. Fugitivity, for them, is separate from "settling."[51] Harney and Moten conceptualize fugitivity, which is grounded in the Black radical tradition, to consider learning in but not of the university and its various structures of professionalization, debt, and governance. The university as a site of refuge and enlightened education already produces the fugitive subject whose life cannot be legible to the institution. It is "fugitive enlightenment" enacted in the undercommons, an underground of the university, where learning can occur to rupture the commons.[52] I borrow from their approach to fugitivity as a way of being and thinking within and outside the institutions of the university and archive, just to name a few, to assert a politics of evasion in movement/migration. Hmong fugitivity suggests the permanence of running for the refugee, even in refuge, such that the figure unsettles the nation-state, democracy, and liberal empire as well as knowledge formation. It expands on the pattern of unsettledness to assert that knowledge and history are unfixed and are unsettling for national history and modern state-centered epistemology. Hmong history on the run as an unsettled and elusive history is linked to fugitivity for marginalized peoples.[53]

Unsettling geopolitics and knowledge make up a decolonial feminist praxis to war and displacement. The field of refugee studies broadly has lacked a sustained postcolonial or feminist critique of the "hidden geographies of cultural

politics and social negotiations" as well as the gendered and gendering work of refugee resettlement in the Global North.[54] Feminist refugee geographer Jennifer Hyndman, following Doreen Massey's (1993) theorizing that mobility is subject to power-geometry, makes a distinction between the empirical expression of migration as a "barometer of geopolitics and global economic conditions" and mobility as a "tracing [of] the geopolitical pathways of migrants, shaped by state policies, intra-state conflict, and other geographically inflected political processes." Mobility opens up an understanding of the different meanings of movement.[55] War-based displacement provides a specific "social reproduction" that underscores refugee lives as "radical acts" of life-making for social struggle and freedom.[56] Feminist refugee geopolitics enhance history on the run as theorizing feminist epistemologies that are connected to place.

History on the run carries stories about place in migration. Hmong refugee geopolitical matters are historical matters,[57] whereby Hmong historical patterns of migration complicate the elusive geopolitics of homeland and demarcate the refugee histories that move and are also fugitive. The interventions that Black feminist and Native feminist scholarship have made in the discipline of geography to unsettle "geographic domination"[58] in the structures of slavery and settler colonialism help me theorize history on the run in the context of liberal militarized empire through place and presence rather than through the loss and absence of home. Specifically, the works of Katherine McKittrick and Mishuana Goeman—whose ideas refute enslavement and colonial organizing of land and location, and instead theorize place and space around stories, resistance, and other ways of being—open up the possibilities of history on the run. In *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick conceptualizes Black diasporic subjectivity, which has been rendered "ungeographic" in the displacement and movement across the Middle Passage through the ships of transatlantic slavery, as geographic because the spaces of domination during enslavement and even the very ships of transport expose a "meaningful struggle for freedom in place."[59] Privileging the legacy of Black women's geographies and geographic knowledge, McKittrick explains that the relationship between Black women and geography can be conceptually fruitful to imagine how the alterability of Black geographies makes possible social and cultural transformation.[60] Her theorizing of Black geographies as space, place, and location to assert the inseparability between space and Black women's subjugation and struggle for liberation opens the conceptual space to consider Hmong migration patterns as inseparable from geohistorical concerns and refugee subjectivity.

Histories that run, in addition to being inseparable from geography, carry place as knowledge. In *Mark My Words*, Native feminist scholar Mishuana Goeman theorizes Native women's encounters with space and acts of (re)mapping that acknowledge Native epistemologies to challenge the acceptance of "colonial spatialities" and the urban/reservation Native dichotomy.[61] Hence, she argues for focusing on Native peoples' stories and efforts as alternative spatialities to imagine ways of mapping and seeing the world beyond settler colonial and capitalist structures. Drawing from feminist geographer Doreen Massey, Goeman thinks through space as holding possibilities and comprising the meeting places that are not transparent on a map rather than an empty expanse of surface.[62] Thus, the meanings of place come through the "migratory patterns of movement" where place is more than a mappable point but carries epistemologies of being in the world to help Native peoples "navigate settler terrains" such that one place of belonging is connected to other places of belonging.[63] Goeman's interrogation of spatial decolonization for Native peoples helps consider Hmong migration in a pattern of movement from place to place where refugee geohistorical notions of home, migration, and self are place specific.

Hmong Presence: Rereading Statelessness and Timelessness

The following pages unpack the discussion above about history on the run as fugitive history that carries stories about place to interrogate the imperialist frame that Hmong are an ahistorical (outside-of-time) and nongeographic (out-of-place) people who do not belong anywhere. I suggest that history on the run animates Hmong presence in place and time. I employ Hmong presence to interrogate the particular categorization of Hmong as stateless made by ethnohistorical accounts and the Southeast Asian scholarship. Hmong statelessness signals the condition of not-yet-modern—the predicament of Hmong migration patterns, not having a political state, and living in the suspended sovereignty of Laos as a decolonizing state.[64] The idea that Hmong have not yet been incorporated into historical time and the nation-state precisely points to how they have not yet arrived in modernity. They are perpetually suspended in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the "waiting room of history."[65] As such, the Hmong refugee figure exposes the uneasy relationship between refugee and stateless status and charts the erasure of history and the violence of war and state-making. History on the run does not resolve this crisis for empire but leaves open the condition of possibilities for fugitivity to think across categories of the refugee, people without a country, and Indigenous.

Hmong presence in place and time expounds on how the spatiotemporal is constituted in history on the run. The Hmong collective lament of "Vim peb tsis muaj teb chaws [Because we do not have a country/homeland]," which emphasizes the longer history of migrations and a collective hardship of colonial subjection, articulates a way of being present on the run. As an example, Yawm Xaiv Kuam Thoj (Grandfather Sai Kua Thao) explained in an interview that he became an orphan at a young age, and he linked his life without parents with the Hmong condition as an orphan people without a country. He grew up with older brothers who also stood in as parents to raise him. Even as he lamented not having parents or a country, he talked profusely about surviving and becoming a member of General Vang Pao's judicial council during the "secret war."[66] Yawm Xaiv Kuam's connection of his experiences with the Hmong orientation about historiography and geopolitics asserts Hmong historical presence alongside the time frame of U.S. liberal militarized empire.[67]

That Hmong do not have a country should not be an issue of Hmong ontology but a problem of "modern time consciousness," that is, empty, homogeneous time.[68] Asserting Hmong historical and geographic presence requires investigating how the not-yet-modern subject is viewed as "unfree" in combination with the perceived anachronistic territories it inhabits. Theorizing the refugee figure as a subject of freedom, Mimi Thi Nguyen explains that "imperial time" encompasses the view of both people and territories as belonging to the past and both needing to be liberated so that the "gift of freedom" is a "gift of time: time for the subject of freedom to resemble or 'catch up to' the modern observer, to accomplish what can be anticipated in a preordained future."[69] Time functions as an instrument to "enclose racial, colonial others as *on the outside*."[70] Hmong not-yet-modern as a consignment outside is constituted in "imperial time" to position Hmong as rescuable subjects. Bliss Cua Lim explicates in her work on cinema and the supernatural the possibility of unthinking time as a singular translation of being. There are multiple times which cannot be dissolved into modern time, what she names as "immiscible times," revealing the existence of multiple temporalities that cannot be quantified by the clock and calendar.[71] Homogeneous time is not reality but a translation of what remains untranslatable.[72]

In the context of history on the run, "because we do not have a country" functions as a Hmong reference of place and time, and a position of being present. In *Beyond Settler Time*, Mark Rifkin exposes the problem of translating Indigenous temporal orientations into settler time frames, which are "divergent processes of becoming."[73] Rifkin argues that asserting the shared

presentness of Natives and non-Natives casts Indigenous peoples as "being-in-time."[74] Rifkin, like Lim, understands time as plural because the multiplicity "facilitates Indigenous peoples' expressions of self-determination."[75] This "being-in-time" or presence and temporal orientation is crucial for articulating Hmong historical presence in movement and fugitivity. As such, that "we do not have a country" asserts presence alongside the translation of place as nation-state and time into a singular measurement.

Hmong presence in place and time disrupts the not-yet-modern spatiotemporal representation that Hmong are a stateless people—presuming that they are placeless and timeless subjects even before they became refugees. Statelessness in the context of Hmong history is at times conflated with nomadism in which Hmong are a people who wander and have no permanent home, and, even more insidiously, a primitive people who are a part of an anachronistic territory. For example, Christian Culas and Jean Michaud, scholars of the early Hmong diaspora, explain that Hmong were the most recent migrants to arrive south of the Southeast Asian Massif as early as the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, and moving as far south as the seventeenth parallel in the second half of the nineteenth century.[76] This nomadic migration was explained by the Hmong reliance on swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture that necessitates movement every six or so years. The nomadic frame overwhelmingly focuses on the imperial control over opium as a cash crop that both produced and compounded the political instability underlying the violent revolts and rebellions in the southern part of China in the second half of the nineteenth century as well as forced migration.[77] Even such ethnohistories about Hmong migration patterns are fragmented and fuzzy—on the run, if you will. To be sure, Hmong migrations were informed by their practice of swidden agriculture whereby they rotate between plots of farmable land every few years to allow for the land to regenerate. Historically, seeking new farming land may mean crossing geopolitical borders. Nonetheless, swidden agriculture cannot be simplistically understood as nomadism and premodernity, as anthropologists and historians have noted, or used to justify the unrootedness of Hmong movement patterns.

Hmong elders' stories about the generation who came from China to resettle in the Nong Het, Xieng Khuoang, and Luang Prabang regions of Laos recall conflicts over group sovereignty and a search for home. They also recount the oppressive colonial conditions and internal displacements under French colonialism and the formation of a Laotian geopolitical jurisdiction. A contentious relationship between Hmong and the state has been a part of how Hmong recount history. Hmong history on the run cannot discount

the imperialist forces that pushed their migration or its colonial knowledge formation.[78]

Given the fugitivity of Hmong history, the few accounts about Hmong only began to appear after the group resettled in Southeast Asia and encountered simultaneous territorial/state oppression and French colonialism. These narratives were primarily ethnohistorical descriptions produced by Catholic missionary priests who also advanced the French colonial project. François Marie Savina, a French Catholic priest and anthropologist, published one of the first books on Hmong, entitled *Histoire des Miao*.[79] Savina worked among Hmong (1906–25) in Vietnam, Yunnan, and northern Laos as a missionary priest, learning about Hmong culture and society to spread Christianity. He also worked as an ethnographer for the French colonial project.[80] Father Yves Bertrais, another French Catholic priest anthropologist, continued where Savina left off (1950–2005). Fr. Bertrais arrived in Laos in 1948 and took up residence in a Hmong village called Roob Nyuj Qus (Gaurs Mountain) in Luang Prabang Province where he was said to have preserved Hmong culture, traditions, and history as well as contributed to their economic and social development.[81] He has been accorded a special place in the history of Hmong Christianity and the study of Hmong because he, along with linguistic anthropologists Linwood Barney and William A. Smalley, cocreated the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA) in 1952.[82] This development of a Westernized Hmong writing system gave rise to the oft-repeated assertion that "Hmong writing is a recent emergence." Accounts about Hmong since Savina and Bertrais were as much influenced by authors' encounters with Hmong as they were by the colonial constructions about who Hmong people are. This particular colonial epistemological context frames the knowledge produced about Hmong during the "secret war," I suggest, as a people that needed to be saved and brought into modernity through their recruitment as soldiers.

Asian and Southeast Asian scholarship broadly defines groups such as Hmong, Lisu, and Akha among others as "nonstate" peoples who are unrecognized and denied by the state as legal citizen-subjects.[83] Historian James C. Scott in particular has characterized the groups in the highlands of Southeast Asia based on their nomadic movements, as nonstate peoples who strategically attempt to elude state governance. Peoples who are not "fully incorporated into nation-states" have historically encountered subjugation to different forms of state violence including slavery, taxation, and warfare. In critiquing state-making, Scott affirms these groups' status as "those who got away" or who voluntarily go "over to the barbarians."[84] Scott explains that the central

preoccupation of statecraft in the Southeast Asian region involved "rounding up people and concentrating them in a particular place."[85] Scott makes an important intervention in rethinking the positionality of "ungoverned" peoples as running away from state governance to show their agency in eluding the state's regulatory power. Yet, the idea of choosing barbarism problematically comprehends these groups within a binary context between the modern state and a "state of nature" (primitivism). For instance, their uncategorized position and ability to elude the nation-state's efforts to impose cultural and legal boundaries may suggest that they exist in a state of nature.

What has yet to be fully explored is the question of nonrecognized peoples like Hmong who because of their patterns of migration do not fit within the nation-state paradigm of territoriality and citizenship. Running away from state jurisdiction, from the perspective of Hmong presence, was as much about groups eluding state governance as it was about the colonial violence that pushed them toward border spaces and less fertile land. Nonrecognized status can also operate as a way for peoples without a state to claim connections to land through a distinct history of forced migrations.[86] As Lee argues in her work on the Hmong quest for legitimation in French Indochina, Hmong political leaders have alternately allied with and resisted state power in order to advance their goals of territorial and cultural autonomy.[87] U.S. colonialism and war complicate assumptions of time and space further by producing Hmong as refugees.

Statelessness and the Refugee

To be clear, not all refugees are deemed stateless and not all who are deemed stateless are diasporic. Because Hmong supposed statelessness is a problem of geopolitics and modernity, it does not easily fit into the refugee's statelessness which can be resolved through resettlement or repatriation, or the nonrefugee's nonstate status which may not be about war-based displacement. In political theory, the refugee serves as a limit concept that calls into question the categories of the nation-state, the birth-nation link, and the rights of man and citizen. The refugee as a limit concept reveals how bare life is no longer an exception or separation either in the state order or human rights.[88] In Hannah Arendt's and Giorgio Agamben's works of the same title, "We Refugees," the refugee highlights the nation-state's tenuous relationship with the citizen and territory. Agamben argues that the refugee's status is always considered a temporary condition that should be resolved through either naturalization or repatriation because its permanence unhinges the national order.[89]

The refugee figure's condition of statelessness has been one lens through which to complicate the categories of the nation-state. Among the central dilemmas in the work on the stateless person is the difficulty of distinguishing the stateless from the refugee and the importance of determining how the refugee is stateless. The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was drafted in 1951, the same year the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, but it was not ratified until 1954. It instituted a standard of treatment for stateless peoples similar to that of refugees as a way to provide protection for those who do not "enjoy" the benefits of citizenship in order to reduce future stateless populations.[90] While the significance of the convention on stateless peoples lies in its existence, its attempt to legally define this category within an international human rights regime paradoxically privileges nation-states as protectors of those who pose a threat to the national order.

Arendt asserts that stateless peoples produced through the liquidation of nation-states after World War I were not necessarily refugees. Additionally, refugees are not necessarily stateless because they can be repatriated and accepted by their country of origin; thus statelessness is not the essential quality of a refugee.[91] The dilemma of stateless peoples, for Arendt, is their "undeportability," in which neither the country of origin nor any other would agree to accept these groups.[92] At the same time, she contends that the core of statelessness is identical with the refugee question, and yet statelessness has been largely ignored.[93] This formulation invokes the questions, Are peoples with a "migratory pattern of movement" who make lives across multiple borders stateless? Is there a structure that can account for fugitive lives? A project that pays attention to how these two concepts inform each other is productive in calling into question the legitimacy of the nation-state and citizenship.

Specifically addressing stateless status, however, Arendt underscores its relation to the idea of the "inalienable rights of man," which have become alienable to noncitizens. Statelessness captures a condition of rightlessness wherein the "Rights of Man," defined as "inalienable rights" independent of governments, function only as citizens' rights.[94] Stateless status signifies the "criminal" and the "enemy alien" in times of war so that this figure, which remains undefinable but always already configured as a threat from within, has the potential to incite an ontological rupture.[95] This signification as a threat cannot be "renormalized" as nonthreatening.[96] Statelessness merely remains dormant until the "right" time for it to reemerge as threat. Hence, one can read General Vang Pao's arrest in 2007 on federal charges of attempting

to overthrow the Laotian government (which I discuss in chapter 4) as a terrorist ally assemblage of Cold War strategies with the U.S. global war on terror and a composite for rethinking history, as a configuration of the stateless refugee who is an ally and U.S. citizen, but who can also transform into a criminal and "enemy alien." Perhaps the threat of his condition of statelessness is always already present, even when he becomes a U.S. citizen, because he cannot claim a history from which he soldiered and had been displaced through secrecy's erasure of historical knowledge.

Although helpful for politicizing the refugee figure, the consideration of statelessness within a European context of consolidating nation-states does not interrogate the colonial context that produced racialized others who are displaced and move outside of the normative boundaries of the political and modernity. Specifically, the categorization of Hmong as stateless has written them out of history and geography as not-yet-modern so they cannot be reconsolidated into national subjects. Indeed, how do colonial racialized peoples emerge as a threat to empire rather than its consolidation? History on the run, I suggest, underscores the ungraspability of Hmong statelessness when the group's historical knowledge and presence cannot be comprehended by the state. Furthermore, the erasure of imperial Hmong racial formation is that which posits Hmong as "uncivilized" and a threat to the state.[97]

The Refugee Archive: A Repertoire of Deferred Histories

The refugee archive encompasses how Hmong refugees tell their histories such that it illuminates their construction of history and production of knowledge to bring awareness to historical silencing. It negotiates the tension that Hmong refugee histories contradict the U.S. explanations for its involvement in Laos, yet these histories may also not be outwardly critical of U.S. liberal militarized empire. In fact, the various retellings of the conflict by state records, U.S. personnel, and Hmong refugees reveals the very problems of upholding a singular history about the "secret war." Although the refugee archive may signal a memory repository of "supposedly enduring materials" such as texts, documents, and monuments, I conceive it as a "repertoire" of embodied, living, and ephemeral knowledge and practice.[98] An archive forgets and archiving does not always mean moving "from the secret to the nonsecret."[99] The activity of forgetting is already embedded in the idea of the archive precisely when the erasure involves institutionalization supported by law and rights.[100] "Archival memory," Diana Taylor explains, sustains power

by separating the source of knowledge from the knower.[101] The repertoire is "nonreproducible knowledge" and requires presence for people to "participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission."[102] The refugee archive as repertoire affirms Hmong presence in (re)producing and transmitting knowledge.

The refugee archive allows me to methodologically link two main concepts: the war's secrecy as a problem of knowledge because it structures both official and refugee histories and how refugee stories on the run elude the revelation of secrets. While the repertoire is mediated like the archive, its embodied knowledge exceeds the archive and requires performance as an embodied practice that opens up other ways of knowing, where performances are vital acts of transferring social knowledge, memory, and identity.[103] The refugee archive mediates the refugee's encounters with forgetting in the traditional archive as well as the refugee's repertoire of stories and embodied knowledge that may also enact their own silences, evasions, and refusals about history. While Hmong have insisted on telling their stories through war monuments, legislation for Hmong veterans such as citizenship and burial rights, and the presence of veterans in army fatigue at annual events such as the Hmong New Year celebrations, there are less spectacular everyday practices such as family dinners that transmit memories and knowledge or even the act of not telling. Reading the refugee archive, I show how Hmong disrupt their emergence in suspended historical time, where they are always in danger of not existing in national accounts.

Hmong histories are deferred and disavowed through textual knowledge and language's inability to convey, even when they do emerge through media and cultural representations, as in my discussion in chapter 5 about the Hmong grandmother in the film *Gran Torino* whose lines were unsubtitled and could not be legible as competing war stories to Clint Eastwood's character. These refugee histories complicate knowledge production as nation-based and privileging textual transmission. In her important work on the production of history and the politics of knowledge and community of Tibetan refugees, Carole McGranahan explains that Tibetan histories of resistance are "arrested" and postponed "for future use" because they clash with "official ways of explaining nation, community, and identity."[104] Her description of the process of "historical arrest" to delay a people's histories for future release helps explain how accounts of the Hmong involvement with the U.S. discursively lag in historical time, not only because they are yet to be told or written, but also because they have been forgotten and are left unclaimed. Hmong narratives of war and displacement have continually been

missing from the archive and from national memory, and have been disavowed as not integral to the Vietnam War historiography in order to deny the illicit U.S. activities in Laos. Because of the historical erasure, Hmong refugees/Americans have sought to envision futures as displaced peoples that hinge on embodied knowledge, memory, and attachments to each other.

The refugee archive reckons with the question of how to engage with memory, the politics of our lack of knowledge about history, and the production of such knowledge. Lisa Yoneyama contends that "memory is understood as deeply embedded in and hopelessly complicitous with history in fashioning an official and authoritative account of the past."[105] Employing the concept of memory means that our investigations into the past must have an awareness that historical reality can only be made available to us through mediations in the present.[106] Critical projects that engage in how acts of remembering can fill the void of knowledge must reckon with the question: How can memories, once recuperated, remain self-critically unsettling?"[107] Yoneyama foregrounds the assertion that "the fleeting and fragmentary moments of sympathy for the dead produce coalitional social and cultural practices," suggesting that we remain open to engage in such moments to illuminate critical alliances.[108] My analysis of form and content, the archive and its silences, remains vigilant of the things that become knowable and looks for the not-yet-there possibilities.

Through the refugee archive, I enact a methodology to track a historiography of the "secret war" to interrogate how we come to know something as secret (the lost bag) and an ethnography of Hmong refugee histories that holds the said in tension with what has been silenced (the refugee archive). The book is neither an empirical study of who Hmong are nor does it uncover refugee secrets. It captures my incomplete comprehension and telling of Hmong refugee histories, which I have turned into theorizing a methodology for how to write about things we do not know—the gaps in our knowledge—because they are missing from the "official" archives or delayed in transmission. The book resists positivist research on Hmong refugees that objectifies their experiences and recuperates them as truth at the same time that it wrestles with a critical approach to conceptualize Hmong distinctiveness and the specificity of Hmong refugee epistemologies to offer a broader theory on refugees and peoples without a country. Its theorizing, instead, is grounded in a Hmong refugee/American perspective that is drawn from extensive interviews and archival research yet does not resolve the empirical evidence into secrets. What follows is an attempt to show rather than tell the

presence of the past, the places in migration, and the memories in histories. Each chapter dwells in secrets and maps, an eclectic refugee repertoire of the places and stories that matter to a Hmong refugee sense of belonging. The very writing of this book contends with questions such as: Is it possible to know something that is itself constantly slipping away, fluctuating between history and memory or even imagination? How can you render material the elusive (on-the-run) and secrets as violence, and seek possible forms of justice in epistemic ruptures of the unwritten? And, how do you write so as not to tell everything (because not everything should be revealed)? In wrestling with writing about the presence of Venus, the emblematic figure of the enslaved woman in the Atlantic, in the archive of Atlantic slavery, Saidiya Hartman explains that it is an impossibility to represent the full picture of the captives' lives against the limits of the archive.[109] She has chosen to write "by performing the limits of writing history through the act of narration" and by embracing "the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future."[110] Although the "secret war" archive is different from that of the Atlantic slavery which Hartman investigates because the event itself was subject to secrecy, in these chapters I hope to perform a similar writing about the impossibilities of knowing about the past to imagine a present and future of refuge.

This work is not a general history of Hmong, Laos, and the "secret war." Instead, it charts refugee epistemology and Hmong presence through the refugee archive as a perspective for doing historical analysis to understand the past in relation to the present. Postcolonial scholar Panivong Norindr, in an essay that aims to critically reflect on the history of Laos under French colonialism and U.S. imperialism, uses family and official photographs as points of entry into a "complex and contested 'official' history." Although critical of employing photographs as indisputable testimonials, Norindr contends that photographs "are a pseudo-presence that reveals an absence that can also heighten our sense of loss." In doing so, photographs can help us remember, illuminate the dark corners, give meaning to a life, and point to the presence of the lacunae of our knowledge that can never be filled.[111] Norindr's critical reflections on how to tell a history of Laos during French occupation and U.S. intervention through photographs bring into sharp relief the methodological dilemma of telling a history that was kept secret. These photographs, however, constitute their own archive of knowledge to shed light on histories that have been erased from the official record. In this book, charting refugee histories disrupts the U.S. narrative that it was never present in Laos.

How to Read the Chapters

The book's chapters are organized around "counterintuitive figures" that register the refugee's unraveling of secrecy.[112] This organization sets up an understanding of how secrecy produces the overlap between historical process and our knowledge of it as well as how that knowledge circulates. This introduction and chapter 1, together, unpack secrecy as structuring state- and war-making as well as knowledge circulation. Therefore, secrecy structures the refugee as a subject of colonial excess and subject of knowledge. In doing so, chapter 2 argues that the archive is a site where things are missing rather than a place to retrieve knowledge.

After the first two chapters focus on secrets as structuring of the postcolonial context and the archive, chapters 3 and 4 emphasize how the refugee emerged from these conditions as a political and ethical dilemma as well as a terrorist threat. In other words, as a figure whose emergence has been structured by secrets, the refugee showed up in the U.S. context (through the archives of law and the media) as a shifting "compositional subject" who can simultaneously become a citizen and a foreign threat to national security.[113] Chapters 4 and 5 along with the epilogue fully showcase how history on the run operates in Hmong refugee epistemology as fugitive history and knowledge. History on the run reveals that not everything about Hmong refugee epistemology can be resolved under secrecy.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 The Refugee Studies Center (RSC) holds many reports and studies of refugee resettlement in the U.S. as a part of its service to refugees. The resettlement files belong to the International Institute of Minnesota, an organization that helped resettle Hmong families in the 1980s and early 1990s in the state, and are stored at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. The International Institute of Minnesota collection includes the individual case files of Hmong families who have resettled through the agency. These files record each Hmong family's application for resettlement along with a range of documents from legal records to casual notes: application forms, letters, sponsorship affidavits, agency memorandums, student progress evaluations for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and rent receipts among other miscellaneous items.

2 The International Institute of Minnesota collection placed permanent restrictions on duplication of these private family records to protect the families' identities. This permanent restriction is based on the fact that these files contain sensitive personal information about Hmong families and their descendants still living in Minnesota and other states.

3 I use "community" to refer to the church and charity communities that sponsored Southeast Asian families. But there are other entities that could be burdened such as cities.

4 I use "Hmong" instead of "the Hmong" throughout this book in an effort to de-objectify the group.

5 Personal communication with Yang Cheng Vang, June 17, 2020.

6 Mai See Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations: Type II Diabetes and Healing in the Hmong Diaspora" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2018), 92.

7 M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 93.

8 M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 93.

9 I am referring generally to the soul-calling practice, but there are specific versions of the ceremony depending on the situation. Some common soul-calling ceremonies include

calling the soul of a newborn, someone who is ill, one who has experienced a traumatic event such as an accident (vehicle, falling down in the presence of a deceased person [at funerals], etc.) and may or may not be visibly ill, an encounter with another spirit, and a celebration (birthday, blessing, etc.). My discussion of ntsuj plig in this paragraph and the rest of the book only scratches the surface of the complexities of the Hmong cosmological system and animist beliefs. I use *spirit* and *soul* interchangeably as landing terms to describe the Hmong concept of ntsuj plig depending on the context because neither term encapsulates the multiplicity of ntsuj plig (communication with Palee Moua, June 17, 2020). I follow Mai See Thao's naming of ntsuj plig as spirit wherever possible because it connotes a multiplicity of spirits who are hosted by a person's body yet "may act on their own accord based on their desires and wants" as if it is "independent of the individual who witnesses their plig's return" to Laos (communication with M. Thao, June 15, 2020). Yet, the practice of *hu* (call) plig has been used in research and popular texts, in medical settings, and colloquially as soul-calling. Although I use *soul-calling* (as a recognizable idea) to refer to hu plig, soul as a concept about the essence of one's morality, affect, artistic expression, or individuality may not capture the multiplicity and mobility of ntsuj plig in the same way that spirit does. My point here is that translation is part of the problem because it typically forces the fitting of Hmong concepts into English and Judeo-Christian epistemologies. My consultations with Palee Moua, Mai See Thao, Ya Yang, and Yang Vang show the complexity of understanding ntsuj plig and inform my intention to center this concept on its own terms (using spirit and soul situationally) instead of providing any easy translations. For further reading on Hmong cultural practices, see Chai Charles Moua, *Roars of Traditional Leaders: Mong (Miao) American Cultural Practices in a Conventional Society* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012).

10 "Our Secret Army," narr. Mike Wallace, prod. Barry Lando, *60 Minutes*, CBS, 1975, television; available online at Sheena Kalies, "Hmong Our Secret Army CBS 60 Minutes," August 13, 2015, YouTube video, 16:15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4U2P7tsOAQ.

11 Former State Department employee Lionel Rosenblatt spoke about arguing for Hmong refugees to be included in the Task Force for Indochinese Refugees at the event "The History behind the Hmong Refugee Exodus," Hmongstory 40 Project, August 22, 2015, Fresno City College. In addition, General Vang Pao's CIA handler (case officer) Jerry Daniels testified and pushed the State Department to resettle Hmong refugees.

12 For an in-depth history about the Hmong pilots who were trained and flew T28 planes, see Chia Youyee Vang, *Fly until You Die: An Oral History of Hmong Pilots in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

13 The most famous Hmong pilot was Lue Lee. The veterans I interviewed were lieutenants, colonels, and foot soldiers, and served in the military court.

14 Some of my interviewees were students, U.S. embassy employees, medics, and police officers.

15 Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2. Laura Kang's figuration of the Asian/American woman as a compositional subject of overlapping identity and disciplinarity helps to comprehend the Hmong refugee who is a former soldier ("good"), turned

terrorist ("bad"), and the claims to history. Pivoting the refugee around a compositional framing is not in opposition to the refugee as a paradigm; instead, it provides more specificity to the Hmong refugee.

16 Much of the scholarship produced about Hmong refugees perpetuates this frame of recounting Hmong refugee histories as linked to the war without critically interrogating this history. These monographs on Hmong refugees' experiences introduce the "secret war" as background for Hmong migration to the U.S., without analyzing how that history continues to inform their integration into U.S. society and how they might narrate their stories. See Nancy Donnelly, *Changing Lives of Refugee Hmong Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Lillian Faderman, *I Begin My Life All Over: The Hmong and the American Immigrant Experience* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997); and Wendy Walker-Moffat, *The Other Side of the Asian American Success Story* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

17 I thank Mimi Thi Nguyen for helping with this articulation of the concept (personal correspondence, February 2019). On "fugitive knowledge," see Gesa Mackenthun and Andreas Beer, eds., *Fugitive Knowledge: The Loss and Preservation of Knowledge in Cultural Contact Zones* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2015). "Fugitive knowledge" emphasizes the "loss of knowledge" during colonial and imperial encounters, whereby it gets relegated to the margins, "languishing in a state of dismissal" (7, 10). For Gesa Mackenthun and Andreas Beer, "fugitive knowledge is not gone but absent, meaning that it is still somewhere," and their edited volume demonstrates "how knowledge becomes transient, evanescent, and ephemeral in cultural contact zones" (7). Citing Sebastian Jobs's concept of "uncertain knowledge," they explain that fugitive knowledge resembles more rumor, gossip, denunciation, etc., which are asymmetrical and selective preservations of knowledge. These could be "unofficial, often orally transmitted, and potentially subversive knowledge" that proliferates in situations of war, conflict, or systemic social inequality (Mackenthun and Beer, *Fugitive Knowledge*, 10; paraphrasing the work of Julius Scott, Marcus Rediker, and Peter Linebaugh). While what Mackenthun and Beer discuss is knowledge that may have been written, just excluded by not being in print or circulation, and could be recuperated, their suggestion that fugitive knowledge requires paying attention to the margins of a site's spectacle gets at the point of history on the run as refugee ways of knowing in the spectacle of war, secrecy, and loss (12). History on the run is not recuperative but remains elusive.

18 Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

19 Carol McGranahan, *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 22.

20 Simeon Man, *Soldiering through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 4. I use "U.S. liberal militarized empire" to refer to how U.S. emergence in the post–World War II period constituted an overlap between colonialism and militarism to incorporate the decolonizing nations into its version of democracy (Man describes this as liberating the countries to "make

them function within the global economy" [8]) and to liberate the people as subjects of freedom (Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012]). See also Lisa Yoneyama for discussions of U.S. empire as a militarized liberatory project that extended colonialism (*Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016]).

21 Man, *Soldiering through Empire*, 10, 5.

22 I thank the anonymous reviewer for helping elaborate on the particularities of the "secret war" archive.

23 Roderick Ferguson's definition of epistemology as "an economy of information privileged and information excluded" and giving rise to particular subject formations helps me articulate the historical erasures about the war as epistemic violence. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), ix.

24 I use the terms *material* and *materiality* throughout the book, especially in chapter 5, not to connote the concrete or "real" in the Marxist context, but rather in the transnational feminist idea of possession, knowledge in this case, in all its forms.

25 Historian Mai Na Lee cautions the writing of Hmong into history primarily through the emphasis on General Vang Pao, the "secret war," and Hmong refugees. See *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom: The Quest for Legitimation in French Indochina, 1850–1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 17.

26 The field-defining texts include Yến Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); M. Nguyen, *Gift of Freedom*; Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). Also see the Critical Refugee Studies Collective at https://www.criticalrefugeestudies.com.

27 See Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," *Open* 15 (2008): 90–95; and Y. Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 10.

28 Y. Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 11.

29 See M. Nguyen, *Gift of Freedom*; and Tang, *Unsettled*, respectively, on the refugee as a critique of liberalism.

30 M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 5; and Sucheng Chan, ed., *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

31 M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 5.

32 Martin Stuart-Fox, *A History of Laos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); quoted in M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 5.

33 M. Lee, *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, 25.

34 Ma Vang, "Writing on the Run: Hmong American Literary Formations and the Deterritorialized Subject," in "Refugee Cultures: Forty Years after the Vietnam War," special issue, *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 41, no. 3 (2016): 90, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlw031.

35 M. Lee, *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, 63.

36 Vwj Zoov Tsheej nrog Yaj Ntxoov Yias thiab Txiv Plig Nyiaj Pov, *Haiv Hmoob Li Xwm* (Quezon City, Philippines: Association Patrimoine Cultural Hmong, 1997). Although I translate this title to The Hmong History because it provides Hmong history in China, *xwm* as a concept for *teej tug* (which means ideas, traditions, histories, and things of Hmong origin) does not directly translate to history. For an extended discussion of Hmong historical chronology constructed from Chinese records, see M. Lee, *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, esp. chapter 1, "Hmong Alliance and Rebellion within the State (1850–1900)."

37 Although the term *refugee* was coined a century later in the 1951 Refugee Convention, I use it here to describe early Hmong forced migration to Southeast Asia to challenge the ethnohistorical accounts that Hmong were nomads and to disrupt the convention's legal definition and historical limitation of the term. This does not negate the fact that Hmong refer to themselves as a "people without a country," which has exceeded the time frame, before and after, of their legal refugee status.

38 Danilo Geiger, "Some Thoughts on 'Indigeneity' in the Context of Migration and Conflicts at Contemporary Asian Frontiers," in *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book*, ed. Christian Erni (Copenhagen: IWGIA and AIPP, 2008), 189–90.

39 For a discussion on settler colonialism as a logic of elimination, see Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409. Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angela Morrill, theorizing Native feminisms, assert that settler colonialism is a structure. See "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 8–34. In this context, I will use ethnic and Indigenous together as separate categories throughout this book because in the settler colonial context, Indigenous peoples have a nation-nation relationship with the state and are not the same as ethnic or racial groups. But, as Ian G. Baird and others have noted, Indigeneity is difficult to separate in the Southeast/Asian context, so using them together connotes their indistinguishability in Southeast Asia. See Ian G. Baird, "Colonialism, Indigeneity and the Brao," in *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book*, ed. Christian Erni (Copenhagen: IWGIA and AIPP, 2008), 201–21.

40 Baird, "Colonialism, Indigeneity and the Brao," 203.

41 Baird, "Colonialism, Indigeneity and the Brao," 205.

42 Baird, "Colonialism, Indigeneity and the Brao," 204.

43 Palee Moua, quoted in Sheng Xiong, "Hmong Mental Health Narrative," July 2, 2019, unpublished community organizing document.

44 M. Thao, "Bittersweet Migrations," 3.

45 See Ma Vang, "Rechronicling Histories: Toward a Hmong Feminist Perspective," in *Claiming Place: On the Agency of Hmong Women*, ed. Chia Youyee Vang, Faith Nibbs, and Ma Vang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 28–55.

46 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 40.

47 Yer J. Thao, "Culture and Knowledge of the Sacred Instrument Qeej in the Mong-American Community," *Asian Folklore Studies* 65, no. 2 (2006): 252. "[H]Mong have had a long history of migration far from their homeland."

48 M. Lee, *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, xix.

49 M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 294.

50 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 33.

51 Jack Halberstam, "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons," introduction to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 11.

52 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 28. Aylwyn Walsh borrows from Harney and Moten's thinking about fugitivity as an approach to suggest "fugitive knowledge" in performance theater, which involves shifting the "modes and means of documentation," the archive, from focus groups to a "practitioner's reflexive diary." Aylwyn Walsh, "Fugitive Knowledge: Performance Pedagogies, Legibility and the Undercommons," *Applied Theatre Research* 6, no. 2 (2018): 132.

53 Hmong unsettled history mirrors what Eric Tang describes as a process of being "unsettled" for Cambodian refugees in an "unending state of arrival at liberalism" and in the U.S. Tang, *Unsettled*, 14.

54 Jennifer Hyndman, "Introduction: The Feminist Politics of Refugee Migration," *Gender, Place and Culture* 17, no. 4 (2010): 453–54. In this special issue on the feminist politics of forced migration, feminist refugee geographers deploy a feminist analysis of mobility and displacement. In the special issue's introduction, Hyndman establishes the importance of feminist frameworks to trace power relations that shape gendered displacement.

55 Jennifer Hyndman, "The Geopolitics of Migration and Mobility," *Geopolitics* 17 (2012): 249. Also see Doreen Massey, "Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson, and L. Tickner (New York: Routledge, 1993): 59–69.

56 Hyndman, "Geopolitics of Migration and Mobility," 249.

57 I borrow this phrasing from McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* where she explains that "Black matters are spatial matters" to suggest the inseparability between space and Black women's subjugation and struggles for liberation (xii). I draw from McKittrick's conceptualizing to allow me to say that Hmong refugee histories are inseparable from their migration patterns and geopolitical concerns.

58 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xii.

59 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x.

60 McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xii. Also see Stephanie M. H. Camp, introduction and "A Geography of Containment: The Bondage of Space of Time," in *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1–11, 12–34.

61 Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 4, 6–7.

62 Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 5–6.

63 Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 6, 9–10. The patterns of migration move on and off home bases enacted by her Seneca family and community as they move from "city to city to rural areas, from place to place" for work and survival, reflecting the experiences of Native people who inhabit both urban places and reservations.

64 In theorizing Okinawa's Cold War liminal status as "liberated yet occupied," Lisa Yoneyama explains through a reading of the novel *The Cocktail Party* that the Okinawan protagonist and the Chinese refugee figure share a similar unease of belonging, of "in-between-ness, liminality and survival." These two figures have "no recourse to law" and "no standing in local politics" in Cold War Okinawa. Not only are these figures stateless, they live in a state with a suspended sovereignty. For Hmong refugees, their not-yet-modern status signifies this political predicament of not having a political state and yet living in the suspended, not yet nation-state of Laos. See Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 78.

65 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

66 Sai Kua Thao, interviewed by author, August 2010.

67 I borrow the concept of orientation from Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

68 Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 10.

69 M. Nguyen, *Gift of Freedom*, 17.

70 M. Nguyen, *Gift of Freedom*, 16; italics in original.

71 Lim, *Translating Time*, 26, 12, 2.

72 Lim, *Translating Time*, 26, 12.

73 Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.

74 Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, viii.

75 Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 4.

76 Christian Culas and Jean Michaud, "A Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 153, no. 2 (1997): 223. They establish that for centuries, numerous groups (small societies) have crisscrossed the Southeast Asian Massif—a geographic region of highland plains and mountains inhabiting the northern parts of Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, and Southwest China—fleeing from aggressors or seeking better opportunities, and they currently live all over these remote mountain ranges (211).

77 Alfred McCoy has published several volumes that argued that opium was the chief commodity at the center of the "secret war." He asserted that General Vang Pao was an opium dealer and the CIA used its planes to facilitate the movement of opium. In this way, the "secret war" was itself a cover for an extensive CIA involvement to aid a supposed Hmong trade and to enrich the coffers of General Vang in particular. I reference one of McCoy's works to gesture toward this existing literature. See *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). Alfred McCoy along with Culas and Michaud explain that Hmong, Lolo, and Yao were the chief opium producers in southern China, pressured by Chinese leaders to grow poppies and produce raw opium for sale to compete with European and U.S. trade taking over the Chinese market. See Culas and Michaud, "Contribution to the Study of Hmong (Miao) Migrations and History," 218–19. It is important to note that the Hmong refugee/American

community writ large, and specifically the veterans and refugees, reject this claim that their involvement in the "secret war" was primarily to facilitate the opium trade.

78 Even unsettled is the colonial archiving of the designation for "Hmong" in relation to the group's self-naming. While Hmong were related to Miao—Imperial China's designation which connoted a primitive people to be exterminated/eliminated—the Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese governments used the derogatory term *Maew/Méo*, meaning cat, to distinguish Hmong once they moved to these territories in the mid-nineteenth century. French colonialism and U.S. militarized imperialism took up this designation in their encounters with Hmong. Therefore, Hmong showed up as "Méo" in CIA and other U.S. government militarized and diplomatic archival documents during the war period. As such, the state's militarized knowledge formation views Hmong as a people who have not only been "set outside of human law" but prior to it. The emergence of "Hmong" in the record was produced by state epistemologies of refugee processing as much as it was a project of scholarly knowledge production. Lionel Rosenblatt, a former U.S. State Department employee who helped resettle Hmong refugees, explained during a series of public panels and interviews to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the end of the wars in Southeast Asia for Hmong refugees that the Hmong refugee resettlement process was the defining moment to change the "Méo" to Hmong designation in the record. The refugee task force personnel interviewed Hmong leaders who unequivocally asserted their people's name as Hmong, and wanted it denoted in their resettlement records. In another context toward the end of the "secret war," Dr. Yang Dao, the French-educated first Hmong to earn a doctorate, published a book in which he made the political claim to define Hmong to mean a free people. See Dao Yang and Jeanne L. Blake, *Hmong at the Turning Point* (Minneapolis: Woodbridge, 1993). This meaning was taken up by Sucheng Chan in the title of her book, *Hmong Means Free*. This book comprises Hmong stories based on Chan's Hmong students' writings and their interviews with family about life in Laos and what it means to be Hmong in the U.S. These important moments marked the presence of Hmong in the academic archive.

79 François Marie Savina, *Histoire des Miao* (Paris: Société des missions-étrangères, 1924).

80 While Jean Michaud calls the French Catholic missionaries "incidental ethnographers," it is clear that Catholic missionaries and ethnography were intertwined with the imperialist project in Southeast Asia. See Jean Michaud, *"Incidental" Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880–1930* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); and Patrick J. N. Tuck, *French Catholic Missionaries and the Politics of Imperialism in Vietnam, 1857–1914: A Documentary Survey* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1987).

81 Fr. Yves Bertrais, "About Us," Hmong RPA website, accessed March 15, 2018, http://www.hmongrpa.org/aboutus.html.

82 Philippe Chanson, "Father Yves Bertrais, An Essential Figure in the History of Hmong Christianity," *Exchange* 22, no. 1 (1993): vii–17, https://doi.org/10.1163/157254393X00092. He also published a series of Hmong language/studies books, and because he worked with Hmong refugees after the war (in particular, the Hmong refugees who resettled in French Guiana), he accumulated a sizable collection of diaries, handbooks, photographs, maps, letters, etc. Center for Southeast Asian Studies, "The Father Yves Bertrais

Collection," Hmong Studies Consortium website, accessed September 15, 2017, https://hmongstudies.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/420/2019/02/Bertrais-Collection-Boxes-Guide-Chong.pdf. This collection is on permanent loan from the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

83 See Ian G. Baird, "Indigeneity in Asia: An Emerging but Contested Concept," *Asian Ethnicity* 17, no. 4 (2016): 501–5; Neal B. Keating, "Kuy Alterities: The Struggle to Conceptualize and Claim Indigenous Land Rights in Neoliberal Cambodia," in "Indigeneity and Natural Resources in Cambodia," special issue, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 309–22; and Tanya Murray Li, "Indigeneity, Capitalism, and the Management of Dispossession," *Current Anthropology* 51, no. 3 (2010): 385–414.

84 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

85 James C. Scott, "Hill and Valley in Southeast Asia . . . or Why the State Is the Enemy of People Who Move Around . . . or . . . Why Civilizations Can't Climb Hills," in *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples in Asia: A Resource Book*, ed. Christian Erni (Copenhagen: IWGIA and AIPP, 2008), 166. Relatedly, Jens Dahl characterizes the process of state-making after colonial independence in Asia and Africa as the production of marginalized peoples who "lived in mountainous areas remote from the centers of the new states and other inhabited regions considered marginal to the mainstream economy of the new states, such as desert and semi-desert regions." See Jens Dahl, *The Indigenous Peoples and Marginalized Spaces at the United Nations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 14.

86 I borrow from Bruce Granville Miller's work in *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) to refer to nonrecognized peoples as groups who claim distinct historical and cultural linkages to Indigenous peoples, yet are not legally recognized by the nation-state to claim such rights.

87 M. Lee, *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*, 49.

88 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 134.

89 See Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees," trans. Michel Rocke, *Symposium* 49, no. 2 (1995): 114–19 (paragraph 1), available online at European Graduate School, accessed March 15, 2012, http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-we-refugees.html; and Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *The Jew as Pariah*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, [1943] 1978), 55–66.

90 In comparing the two conventions, Paul Weis observes their distinctions of more favorable and less favorable treatment of refugees and stateless persons, respectively (259). The convention stipulated three standards of treatment for stateless persons: treatment accorded to nationals of the contracting state, the treatment accorded to nationals of the country of habitual residence, and treatment as favorable as possible, and not less favorable than to aliens in the same circumstances (247–48). See Paul Weis, "The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1961): 255–64.

91 Jane Perry Clark Carey, "Some Aspects of Statelessness since World War I," *American Political Science Review* 40, no. 1 (1946): 113.

92 Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1951), 163.

93 Arendt, "Decline of the Nation-State," 159. Arendt contends that the intersection between stateless and displaced persons is a precarious one because the dilemma of statelessness gets ignored through the creation of legal distinctions, de facto and de jure categories.

94 Hannah Arendt, "Statelessness" (lecture, April 22, 1955), 3; available online at Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress, Speeches and Writings File, 1923–1975, accessed March 15, 2012, https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mharendt_pub&fileName=05/052290/052290page.db&recNum=2&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_4O3c&filecode=mharendt&prev_filecode=mharendt&itemnum=2&ndocs=2.

95 Arendt, "Statelessness," 2.

96 David Theo Goldberg suggests that the nation-state's conception as inevitable and permanent narrates statelessness as "irrational" and stateless groups as having neither face nor identity and constituting a threat to the state. See David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 40.

97 Linda Kerber, borrowing from Arendt, historicizes statelessness within a U.S. context and conceptualizes it as a changing practice, not just for refugees but also for those who are denaturalized through various factors including race, gender, economic status, and so forth. Rather than trace defined ethnic groups who have been made stateless, Kerber examines the conditions under which groups become vulnerable to statelessness and inhabit the ambiguous spaces between "the domestic and the foreign, between the national and the international, between sovereignty and subjugation" (735). While statelessness has been most usefully understood as a status or condition, Kerber additionally considers it as a practice that is produced as the citizen's other through (the lack of) documentation, court decisions, border and prison guards (745), along the lines of state security, race and ethnicity, ideal workers, and gender (744). Kerber's analysis, however, is hopeful for an expansive concept of citizenship that does not leave room to account for how a denaturalized status destabilizes the nation-state. See Linda Kerber, "Toward a History of Statelessness in America," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 727–49. The question about the particular process of Hmong racial formation as a people produced outside of history through the state's erasure of historical knowledge remains difficult to explicate within a stateless framework. I hesitate to definitively name what I am describing here as Hmong statelessness because the term still centers the nation-state. Thus, configuring Hmong along with other groups as state*less* negates them as subjects who lack history and nation, which has justified the very projects of U.S. militarism and rescue to incorporate them.

98 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

99 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2–3.

100 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 4. For further discussion of the archive's active work, see Ann Laura Stoler's explanation that colonial archives are "generative substances, as documents with itineraries of their own" (*Along the Archival Grain*, 1).

101 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.
102 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.
103 Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 20–21, 3, 2.
104 McGranahan, *Arrested Histories*, 25, 24.
105 Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 27.
106 Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 27.
107 Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 5.
108 Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 147. I also include in this discussion of the politics of knowledge Lisa Lowe's formulation of the "intimacies of four continents" as an analytical category to illuminate the transatlantic histories of colonialism, labor, race, gender, and sexuality to trace a genealogy about Asian American pasts. Rather than recuperating what has been lost, Lowe urges "a productive attention to the scene of loss." See Lisa Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 208.
109 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 11.
110 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.
111 Panivong Norindr, "On Photography, History, and Affect: Re-Narrating the Political Life of a Laotian Subject," *Historical Reflections* 34, no. 1 (2008): 90.
112 I thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting "counterintuitive figures" to organize the different registers of secrecy and refugee epistemologies throughout this book.
113 Laura Kang, in *Compositional Subjects*, proposes this original methodology to trace the figuring of Asian American women in the U.S. and transnational contexts.

CHAPTER 1

1 Thomas P. Conroy, "Highland Lao Refugees: Repatriation and Resettlement Preferences in Ban Vinai Camp, Thailand" (report, Bridgette Marshall Collection, Southeast Asian Archive Special Collections, Langson Library, University of California, Irvine), 13.
2 Interviews with Xaiv Kuam Thoj, Nyiaj Kuam Vaj, Soua L. Lo, Jesse Fang, Youa Yang, Col. Wangyee Vang, and Yer Vang.
3 Ironically, the small amount of literature that is available about Hmong involvement in the "secret war" exceeds that devoted to the Lao or any other groups from Laos. Consistent with my argument about the deployment of colonial tropes, I attribute the relative abundance of literature on Hmong to the fascination evident in anthropological inquiries and the memoirs of U.S. personnel with the Hmong ability to quickly learn Western combat tactics and weapons operation despite their premodern state. As an example, see Roger Warner, *Shooting at the Moon: The Story of America's Clandestine War in Laos* (South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press, 1998).
4 See John P. Hittinger, "The Soldier and the Citizen: Lessons from Plato and Aristotle," International Society for Military Ethics website, accessed January 10, 2020, http://isme.tamu.edu/JSCOPE95/Hittinger95.html; and Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship during the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).